

## Integrated Projects (IP) under LIFE

*Briefing for the meeting of the Council Working Party of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2012*

*30<sup>th</sup> January 2012*

**BirdLife, EEB and WWF welcome that with the introduction of IPs the Commission assigns LIFE a key role for the future financing of Natura 2000, and of other EU environmental priorities – directly, and by catalysing other funds. We also welcome, in principle, higher co-financing rates for IPs and related preparatory projects, in order to encourage take-up of this new project type which is, regrettably, exclusively targeting governments as beneficiaries.**

**While it must be ensured that the budget available for bottom-up projects is increased rather than reduced (as proposed by the Commission), IPs must be opened as much as possible for civil society stakeholders.**

### **Increase budget for bottom-up projects in parallel with introducing IPs**

The European Commission proposes not to specify in the LIFE Regulation the budget share between IPs and bottom-up projects, but announces a significant decrease (almost 50%) of bottom-up projects over the seven years period (from currently 120 million/year to 66 million/year by 2020, corresponding to a decrease from 80 to only 44 projects per year, i.e. per Member State less than two projects per year on average).

BirdLife, EEB and WWF, on the contrary stress that the introduction of IPs should not result in a lower budget available for bottom-up projects compared to current levels. Instead, budget available for those should increase from currently 120 million EUR/annually to 300 million EUR/annually - in the area of biodiversity.

Furthermore, to ensure bottom-up projects and IPs can go hand-in-hand with sufficient funds available, ring-fencing for biodiversity projects within the LIFE Environment sub-programme should be increased to 75%, in combination with an overall increase of the LIFE budget.

- 1) The success of the LIFE programme so far is to a large degree based on its bottom-up nature, enabling local and regional stakeholders, companies, NGOs and authorities to develop and implement innovative projects on the ground, generating and exchanging expertise and best practice across the EU with other projects. That way, LIFE could, through relatively small projects, provide much better value for money than most other EU funds. The future LIFE programme needs to build and expand on this strategy, not to abandon it.

- 2) While uptake of IPs is uncertain due to their large size, there is a significant potential to increase uptake of bottom-up projects: Over the last four years, more than 200 LIFE+ proposals with good overall evaluations, adding up to 300 million Euro, have been blocked due to lack of funds, while other bigger EU funds struggle to spend their allocation. This could mean with the current growing trend that by 2013 half of all viable LIFE+ projects go unsupported.

## **IP must adequately involve civil society and local stakeholders**

With IPs the Commission proposes a new, yet untested, project type, which over time the EC plans to turn into the dominant feature of the programme. From the proposal it seems that IPs will be targeting exclusively public authorities as project managers and lead beneficiaries to be supported in implementing EU environmental policies, through very large projects.

There is a strong case to increase Community support to Member States for the strategic implementation of EU environmental legislation through IPs (while not replacing bottom-up projects). However, it is very important that IPs will be made accessible for civil society and involve local stakeholders at all stages, from project development to implementation and reporting. The current proposed provision (Art. 19) “*involve, where appropriate, stakeholders*” is insufficient in this respect.

- 1) Large government-run projects tend to be less cost-efficient than smaller ones run by civil society or private sector stakeholders. Therefore it should be ensured that integrating expertise of stakeholders is a key criterion for the selection of IPs.
- 2) Experience shows that civil society actors are essential drivers of the implementation of EU environment policy, because of their expertise and commitment, and due to the fact that they do not depend on changing political priorities as is the case with public authorities. Involved firmly in development and implementation of IPs they can play an important role for ensuring continuity and high quality of the projects.
- 3) Without civil society involvement IPs risk a lower level of acceptance on the ground which might hamper implementation.
- 4) Public authorities might lack capacities and expertise to develop, manage and administer such big projects, sometimes civil society actors may be in a better position to do this. Therefore there should be a possibility to let them lead an IP in partnership with public authorities.

<b>Contacts:</b>
------------------

- Konstantin Kreiser, Coordinator of BirdLife's EU Birds and Habitats Directives Task Force  
[konstantin.kreiser@NABU.de](mailto:konstantin.kreiser@NABU.de) /+49-(0)-172-4179730
- Sarolta Tripolszky /EEB Biodiversity, Water and Soil Policy Officer  
[sarolta.tripolszky@eeb.org](mailto:sarolta.tripolszky@eeb.org) /+32-(0)-2289 10 93
- Andreas Baumuller, WWF EPO, Head of Natural Resources and Land Use  
[abaumueller@wwf.eu](mailto:abaumueller@wwf.eu) /+32-(0)-2-740 09 21