LIFE funding for Combating Climate Change post 2013
Briefing on the reform of the European Union's financial instrument for the environment
20 May 2011

BirdLife strongly supports the continuation and significant strengthening, of the LIFE funding programme, and urges the European Commission to build on the biodiversity and climate change benefits that have already been delivered through this programme, which has proven to have a very good cost-benefit ratio and which specifically helps empowering local actors and catalysing exchange of best practise across the EU.
Next to an overall increase of LIFE funding to 1% of the EU budget, BirdLife, together with other NGOs[1], is asking for one billion EUR/year to be earmarked directly for supporting the nature and biodiversity policy of the EU, notably the implementation of Natura 2000.
While it is evident that "LIFE nature & biodiversity" projects in many cases are delivering also for EU climate policy objectives (adaptation and mitigation), and while it is also evident that most of the EU climate policy has to be funded through other EU funds, we are suggesting to earmark additional funds for a separate "LIFE climate" budget line. .

FUNDING PRIORITIES FOR A "LIFE-CLIMATE" BUDGET LINE

BirdLife believes that separate LIFE funding to combat climate change should be strategic and build on synergies with wider ecosystem concerns (biodiversity, water, soil, etc.). The current priorities regarding climate change under "LIFE+ environment" mainly support the development of technological and policy-based solutions. It excludes the promotion and implementation of projects combining on the ground environmental protection (such as biodiversity conservation) and climate change. A future "LIFE-Climate" programme should mainly support activities that are bottom-up, innovative and create synergies with wider ecosystem objectives, such as in the following areas:

<u>Climate Change Mitigation Priorities:</u>

- **Restoration/protection of high-carbon stock habitats (e.g. peatlands and natural forest)**

  NB: LIFE-climate funding must not be used to support projects that prioritise carbon

[1] See separate BirdLife, EEB, CI, WWF position paper on LIFE for biodiversity.

sequestration over biodiversity conservation through plantation forests, or the use of fast-growing non- native tree species.

- **Sustainable biomass production through natural habitat management**

  NB: LIFE-climate funding should not be used to fund renewable energy production other than environmentally sustainable biomass production. While government intervention is needed to support sustainable biomass production, inventive measures such as feed-in tariffs and renewable obligations are already in place to support other renewable energy production methods, and research in this area is supported through the EU Framework Programmes. LIFE projects should not duplicate these measures.

- **Support for carbon neutral urban transportation systems (e.g. soft mobility: cycling, urban goods transport system)**

  NB: LIFE-climate funding should be used in the transportation sector where no further infrastructure dedication is needed, and where no other funds (such as Structural Funds) are available. Also, LIFE-climate should focus on projects benefitting local actors, such as NGOs, other stakeholders and local authorities. For example, city planning of transportation is important to organise already built infrastructure to ensure that it's safe and efficient (i.e. for cycling). LIFE-climate funding can also be used as a communication tool to promote certain transport systems, for example promoting park and ride schemes for public transportation or promoting freight consolidation centre, therefore reducing number of journeys and optimising transportation.

<u>Climate Change Adaptation Priorities:</u>

- **Ecosystem-based adaptation**

  NB: LIFE funding should be used to build on the analysis of the European Commission's White Paper on "Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action" of which increasing the resilience of ecosystems is a key priority. LIFE-climate funding should therefore be used for small adaptation projects to deliver clear ecosystem resilience benefits, e.g. through improving habitat connectivity and reducing fragmentation, improving the ecological status of water bodies and soils etc.

ANNEX: PROJECT EXAMPLES IN THE FIELD OF NATURE & BIODIVERSITY

The LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity programme is already in many cases contributing to combating climate change – see some examples for illustration below.
However, as outlined above, these projects are focused on Natura 2000 sites (sites designated as Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive or Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive) and other elements of EU Nature legislation – while a LIFE-Climate fund would incorporate the flexibility to deliver projects both inside and outside Natura 2000 sites, combining its (main) climate change mitigation/adaptation objectives and wider ecosystem considerations.

- **Restoration/protection of high-carbon stock habitats**

According to the World Energy Council, there are about 4 trillion m^3 of peat in the world covering a total of around 2% of global land area (about 3 million km^2), containing about 8 billion terajoules of energy. Peatlands cover an area of approximately 956,949 km^2 in Europe. However, much of the European peat resource has vanished as a result of human miss-management.

Blanket bog, a formation of peatland, is recognised as a priority habitat for nature conservation action under EC Habitats Directive. Blanket bogs are the stronghold for some of the UK's rarest nesting birds, including the black-throated diver, the common scoter, and the hen harrier. The plant life is equally diverse including specialists such as the sundew.

Blanket bogs are also important carbon sinks, and over the years have stored huge quantities of carbon. Estimates of the extent of peat bogs in the UK range from 1.47 to 5.24 million hectares implying minimum carbon storage of 3,121 million tones. Where blanket bogs are healthy, usually capped by a continuous blanket of bog vegetation, they tend to function as a carbon sink, sequestering atmospheric carbon and locking it away

However, damage to blanket bogs can release large quantities of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxides), as well as threatening the protected species that depend on this habitat.

The LIFE Active Blanket Bog in Wales Project aims to bring about an important, significant and sustained improvement in the condition of blanket bog in two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Wales,

Although large areas of blanket bog still occur in Wales, the majority have been seriously degraded through afforestation, encroachment by alien species (such as Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*)), overgrazing, drainage, and either deliberate or accidental burning.

- **Sustainable biomass production through natural habitat management**

LIFE funding used by the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP), BirdLife's polish partner, to protect a key habitat for Europe's rarest songbird, while also delivering climate change benefits through avoided emissions and biomass production. The Globally Threatened Aquatic Warbler has declined significantly in Europe, because of loss of suitable fen mire habitat. Fen mires act as carbon store, but release greenhouse gases if they are drained.

The OTOP project, which is also supported by the RSPB (BirdLife's UK partner), is promoting Aquatic Warbler-friendly active habitat management (mowing, bush removal and grazing) on 42,000 hectares (approximately 160 square miles) of fen and wet meadow, mostly in Poland, but also in a small part of Germany.

In the Polish Biebrza Marshes, machinery has been developed together with a contractor that is able to mow the large expanses of the fen mires without destroying the delicate peat soil. After many years, this means that a method has been found that can replace the traditional hand scything that has ceased over 20 years ago.

In order to support the ongoing habitat management needed to maintain the sites, the hay that is cut is being used to produce carbon-neutral fuels and energy, and OTOP has successfully lobbied for a special agri-environmental programme that rewards farmers who maintain or restore Aquatic Warbler friendly land management.

Monitoring has shown that the Aquatic Warbler has increased its range in the project areas, while the number of Aquatic Warblers in the core area of the Biebrza Marshes increased by 300 between 2007 and 2008 after management measures supported by the LIFE project had taken place.

- **Ecosystem-based adaptation**

The freshwater and brackish habitats at the RSPB's Titchwell Marsh nature reserve are important for several Birds Directive Annex I species, including avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*), and marsh harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*), and as well for other regularly occurring migratory species.

Although Titchwell is currently protected by seawalls, it is expected that these will fail within the next few years as a result of increased coastal erosion and rising sea levels, exacerbated by climate change. The existing wall system is not strong enough to cope with the increasing pressures, and its failure would result in the freshwater and brackish habitats at Titchwell

gradually turning into tidal salt marsh. This would greatly reduce the value of the reserve to many of the birds that currently use it.

The LIFE+ funded Titchwell Marsh Coastal Change Project aims to realign the sea defences around the reserve and allowing the coast to achieve its natural processes. In calculating the losses and gains, the project compensates for the unavoidable loss of the brackish marsh at Titchwell, but conserves the freshwater habitats and the wildlife of the Titchwell Marsh. The project will deliver both biodiversity and climate change adaptation benefits through the managed realignment of the coastline, while maintaining the rich biodiversity found in the reserve, and compensating for those areas of habitat that will be lost.

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