

Brussels, December 2017

## The EU LIFE Programme in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF)



*A Rocha, BatLife Europe, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation Europe, CEEweb for Biodiversity, European Natural Heritage Foundation (Euronatur), EUROPARC Federation, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Eurosite, Friends of the Earth Europe, International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG), Rewilding Europe, Societas Europaea Herpetologica, Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), Wetlands International-European Association and WWF European Policy Office (WWF EPO)*

### **The above mentioned members of the European Habitats Forum (EHF) have agreed the following position regarding the EU LIFE Programme:**

LIFE is the only financial instrument under the EU budget wholly dedicated to the environment, nature conservation and climate change. The fund is very small: only 0,3% of the EU budget, with LIFE Nature and Biodiversity Action Grants allocated around 40% of the LIFE budget.

The environment is at the forefront of citizen's concerns in the EU. In the most recent Eurobarometer survey on the environment<sup>i</sup> 94% of the citizens questioned, consider that protecting the environment is important to them personally. There is a clear role to play for the EU in funding environmental activities, with 85% of respondents believing that more EU funding should be allocated to supporting environmentally-friendly activities.

This is even more important, as despite recent improvements, citizens' trust in the EU has taken a severe knock in recent years. Overall, only 42% of Europeans trust the European Union, slightly more than the proportion who trust their national parliaments (36%) and governments (37%). There has been a steady erosion of trust over the past decade, following a high of 57% in 2007. Just over half of Europeans say they are optimistic about the future of the EU, down from 69% in 2007<sup>ii</sup>.

Therefor LIFE plays a unique role in the MFF. Its bottom-up approach brings together stakeholders and authorities in the regions and it has been successful in involving a highly diverse group of people and organisations in nature conservation activities and environmental protection.

The European Commission's mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme for the 2014-2020 funding period<sup>iii</sup> confirmed the LIFE programme is delivering in line with set targets. There is evidence of a positive cost-benefit ratio when comparing funding to societal gains and LIFE appears to cost less to manage than the other EU funded programmes. It is estimated that projects funded in the 2014 call for proposals will produce a benefit to society of approximately €1.7 billion, more than four times the overall LIFE budget for 2014.

### **LIFE in the future EU budget:**

- **The LIFE programme should continue in the next MFF as a standalone funding instrument**  
The European Commission should acknowledge the value for money of the LIFE programme, the high return rates and potential for job creation from green investments and propose a significant increase in the LIFE budget.
- **Funding for LIFE should receive at least 1% of the total EU budget**  
The European Commission should recognise the need for a significant increase in the LIFE budget to help to achieve more for the EU's environment, nature conservation and climate change objectives.
- **At least 50% of the LIFE budget should be dedicated to the LIFE Nature and Biodiversity sub-programme**  
Much of Europe's nature is still in decline and the EU risks missing its 2020 target of halting biodiversity loss. 32% of the bird species are threatened, near threatened, declining or depleted, and 60% of other protected species and 77% of habitat types are in unfavourable conservation status<sup>iv</sup>. The abundance of grassland butterflies has declined by over 30% since 1990. These monitoring results add weight to the critical need for large-scale restoration of habitats, species and natural processes in Europe to not only halt, but also reverse these negative trends, following the 15% restoration target under the CBD. The evidence gathered in the evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives (fitness-check)<sup>v</sup> confirmed the strategic role that the LIFE programme plays in supporting the Directives' implementation. EU leaders have committed themselves to strengthening implementation of the Nature Directives and financing, including through an enhanced LIFE Programme, has a key role to play in this.
- **The general co-financing rate should be increased to 75% to overcome financial constraints of applicants**  
NGOs and public bodies as main applicants of projects may face severe difficulties to mobilise domestic funding. In many countries the uptake of LIFE is at risk if co-financing rates are not increased to 75%, especially in Member States with lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Minimising matching fund obligations for project applicants is essential if the EU wants to increase support for the EU as well as the role of civil society as a whole. **In specific cases, co-financing rates should be increased up to 90%**, for instance for those projects targeting habitats and species that had an "unfavourable-bad" status in the last article 17 reporting.
- **The administrative burden should be reduced and a two-step application procedure introduced**

Submitting a full proposal under LIFE is very time and resource intensive, which can lead to disadvantages for applicants that do not have the resources necessary. To reduce administrative burden it is proposed to introduce a two-step application procedure and to simplify the requests on administration for implementation without losing control over the quality of projects.

### **Why LIFE is important:**

#### **LIFE promotes the EU and European integration**

- Many projects have a cross-border dimension within the EU and with accession and neighbouring countries. The most visible is the European Solidarity Corps, which will be essential in fostering integration by the international exchange of young volunteers. Many other projects include beneficiaries from three or four countries, and some projects even involve cooperation across more than 10 countries, including Albania, Serbia, Belarus and Ukraine.

#### **LIFE promotes the values of the EU**

- By providing a funding source independent of national governments, LIFE promotes environmental democracy and civil society through the work of NGOs. This is of particular importance in countries where democracy is under pressure, as NGOs are an independent source of information and independent actors that can scrutinize and challenge government decisions.

#### **LIFE saves species from extinction**

- The Spanish Imperial Eagle, a very rare eagle only found in Spain and Portugal, which had a small population left in the early 90's is, due to a series of LIFE Projects, a species no longer listed as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species<sup>vi</sup>.
- The Iberian Lynx, also found in Spain and Portugal, has been saved from extinction due to reintroduction, protection and restoration of its habitat as part of LIFE Projects.
- LIFE has been instrumental in the reintroduction of species in parts of their former range. Examples are the La Gomera Giant Lizard, the Bearded Vulture and the Adriatic Sturgeon<sup>vii</sup>.
- In general, LIFE supports species and habitats that often are not covered through other funds or programmes (such as potential spending within the CAP for biodiversity, as CAP money only relates to farmland habitats and species).

#### **LIFE is value for money**

- The LIFE funds bring jobs and growth. A study estimated that over its seven year duration the LIFE Programme creates 74 500 jobs (FTE), an economic growth of 9,3 billion EUR and the value of the results achieved through Nature projects alone is estimated to be 43 billion EUR<sup>viii</sup>. This means that the LIFE Programme pays back its initial investment at least four times in economic growth and at least twenty times in value generated.

#### **LIFE has lasting results**

- In many cases, LIFE projects result in lasting change, though the projects only last for 4 years. Examples are new nature reserves established by the designation of protected sites or the

restoration of populations of threatened species and habitat types that continue to expand by themselves<sup>ix</sup>.

- Also projects resulted in a better environment for nature conservation overall, by building of trust and cooperation between the people involved, by developing guidance and gathering expertise, and through the creation of volunteering networks.

### **LIFE brings people together**

- Any organisation can apply to the LIFE fund. Over the years, projects have been run by SMEs, large enterprises, national, regional and local governments, universities, reserve managers and NGOs. In addition, an even more diverse group of people have been involved in the implementation of projects as associated beneficiaries.
- According to the European Commission's mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme<sup>x</sup>, 44% of the LIFE funding goes to private enterprises, 24% to non-commercial organisations and 32% to public authorities. The demand for funding traditional projects is also extremely high. The average ratio between proposals submitted and projects awarded is 9 to 1.

### **LIFE innovates**

- A key aspect of the LIFE Programme is the focus on new ways of doing conservation. Prime examples include the use of sustainable biomass from wetlands to restore habitat, generate energy and fund further conservation and the use of forensic techniques to tackle wildlife crime<sup>xi</sup>.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2156>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/79565>

<sup>iii</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/newsarchive2017/documents/swd\\_mid\\_term\\_evaluation2017\\_.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/newsarchive2017/documents/swd_mid_term_evaluation2017_.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> EEA (2015) State of Nature in the EU [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/pdf/state\\_of\\_nature\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/pdf/state_of_nature_en.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness\\_check/docs/nature\\_fitness\\_check.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/docs/nature_fitness_check.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.zsl.org/sites/default/files/media/2014-02/wildlife-comeback-in-europe.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/documents/reintroduction.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/generalpublications/documents/jobs\\_growth\\_study.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/generalpublications/documents/jobs_growth_study.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/generalpublications/documents/lifeafterlife.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/newsarchive2017/documents/swd\\_mid\\_term\\_evaluation2017\\_.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/newsarchive2017/documents/swd_mid_term_evaluation2017_.pdf)

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.venenono.org/>