



## **Window of opportunity for funding for Natura 2000 from the Structural Funds**

### **Step-by-step guide on how to influence the preparation of National Strategic Reference Frameworks for Cohesion Policy**

The general regulation (governing the structural funds and the cohesion fund) and the implementing regulations (for European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, cohesion Fund and EU cross-border cooperation) have almost been finalised; and the community strategic guidelines are being re-drafted following a public consultation to which BirdLife Partners responded in September. The new Regulations offer limited but potentially very important opportunities for funding for the Natura 2000 network and biodiversity conservation, mostly in the way of infrastructure building, fostering more general sustainable development initiatives around Natura 2000 sites, creation of alternative employment opportunities and training and education programmes. Given the size of this budget and the potentially damaging ways it can be spent, it is very important to secure opportunities in the national strategic reference frameworks (NSRF) and operational programmes (OP) for nature conservation projects.

This briefing suggests how to influence the preparation of NSRFs to benefit Natura 2000<sup>1</sup>.

### **Identifying needs**

As part of your input into the preparation of national development plans under the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development, you may have identified those priority actions and species of importance and interest to you. Where funding gaps have been identified structural funds can help to provide:

- a framework for management and administration
- support for operational measures and monitoring
- infrastructure

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing on the information presented in the WWF handbook *EU funding for environment*, 2005.

Funding will be available from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF); the Cohesion Fund will be much harder to access and is not addressed here.

***Step 1:*** make a list of actions that cannot be financed by EAFRD or LIFE+. Compare your list with the menu of eligible activities in **Appendix 1** and select those which could be financed by structural funds.

### **Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG)**

The CSG are still in draft form. However, the headline objectives to “make Europe and its regions a more attractive place to live and work” and to “strengthen the synergies between environmental protection and growth” are certain to remain. Current recommended guidelines for action that can benefit Natura 2000 are:

- investment in infrastructure (particularly in new Member States) to comply with environmental legislation in the field of nature and species protection
- ensuring attractive conditions for businesses and staff by rehabilitating the physical environment, including natural and cultural assets
- undertaking risk prevention measures through the improved management of natural resources

***Step 2:*** consider the economic and social arguments which could support your choice of investments, for example:

- strengthening institutional capacity – through studies, networking, establishing management bodies
- employment training – training wardens, tourism guides
- the environment as an economic driver – investment in nature and species conservation, restoration and mitigation measures to attract visitors to the region
- attracting highly skilled workers/industries – emphasise the quality of life and health benefits of a high quality environment
- prevent environmental costs to the economy – through fire prevention and measures to prevent desertification

### **Speaking to your Government**

The guidelines and the regulations provide an extensive menu of eligible activities that could benefit the environment, particularly Natura 2000. However, the choice of how to invest the structural funds remains with the Member States. Partners must be prepared to lobby the officials preparing the NSRFs with key priorities and ideas of how these can be implemented as projects.

**Step 3:** get a foot in the door by writing or telephoning your Government (Finance and Environment Ministries) to ask:

- what is the timetable for the preparation NSRF?
- which Government department(s) is writing it and who are the responsible officials?
- what is the scope for public consultation
- how is the environment being taken into account?
- to arrange a meeting!

And, don't forget to find out what your NGO colleagues are doing, working together can cut your workload.

### **Location, location, location**

What you can do will largely depend on your whether your country or region receives funds under the Convergence objective or the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective – see the accompanying map (separate pdf file) which estimates the spread of funds for 2007-2013. The European Territorial Cooperation objective applies across the EU.

Convergence* <i>(whole country except where stated)</i>	Belgium (some regions), Czech Republic, Germany (some regions), Estonia, Greece (some regions), Spain (some regions), Italy (some regions), Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Austria (some regions), Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, UK (some regions)
Regional Competitiveness and Employment**	Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden, UK

\* includes regions being phased out of the Convergence objective

\*\* includes regions being phased into Regional Competitiveness and employment

**Step 4:** use the following sections to cross-check your wish list with the actions eligible under the convergence, competitiveness and cooperation objectives. The following sections help you to identify:

- what you could be doing with the help of the structural funds and
- the relevant articles in the regulations

Now, **SUMMARISE** the actions that need financing under 4-5 key headings and make a link to the economic and social arguments. There is nothing more off-putting to officials than a long wish list!

## Opportunities under Convergence

Provisionally 77% of the Cohesion Policy budget. Under this objective activities beneficial to the Natura 2000 network could be financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund. The following table lists the types of investments and the relevant articles in the regulations.

**Appendix 2** provides the text of each suggested article.

CONVERGENCE		
Activity	ERDF	ESF
Adaptation of EU environmental legislation		3.2bi
Establishment of management bodies	4.4	3.2bi
Training and capacity building		3.2bi, 3.2bii
Awareness raising activities and environmental education	4.7, 4.10	
Visitor management measures/activities	4.6	
Public participation systems		3.2bii
Networking activities		3.2bi
Preparation and review of management plans for sites or species	4.5	
Measures and activities to carry out appropriate Environmental Impact Assessment Studies		3.2bi
Surveillance, wardening and patrolling activities		3.2bii
Monitoring systems	4.4	
Habitats and species conservation, management and restoration measures	4.4	
Measures to ensure sustainable use of habitats and species	4.4	
Supporting and communicating pilot projects	4.4	
Maintenance of infrastructure	4.4	
New infrastructures specific for the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species	4.4	
Public use infrastructures	4.6	
Buying equipment	4.2	
Precautionary measures in sites still not designated (pSCI)	4.5	
Fire prevention, fire control and fire management measures	4.4	
Mitigation measures for infrastructures affecting Natura 2000	4.8	
Land purchase	**	

\*\* Can be eligible as part of a project as long as it does not exceed 10% of the total project cost.

### **Opportunities under Regional Competitiveness and Employment**

Provisionally 19% of the Cohesion Policy budget. Under this objective activities beneficial to the Natura 2000 network will only be financed by the ERDF.

<b>REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>ERDF</b>
Preparation and review of management plans for sites or species	5.2b
Habitats and species conservation, management and restoration measures	5.2b
Measures to ensure sustainable use of habitats and species	5.2b, 5.2f
Supporting and communicating pilot projects	5.2b
Maintenance of infrastructure	5.2b
New infrastructures specific for the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species	5.2b
Buying equipment	5.2b
Precautionary measures in sites still not designated (pSCI)	5.2e
Fire prevention, fire control and fire management measures	5.2e
Mitigation measures for infrastructures affecting Natura 2000	5.2b
Land purchase	**

\*\* Can be eligible as part of a project as long as it does not exceed 10% of the total project cost.

### **Opportunities under European Territorial Cooperation**

Provisionally 4% of the Cohesion Policy budget. This objective is only financed by ERDF and it applies to all Member States (mainstreamed Interreg).

<b>EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>ERDF</b>
Training and capacity building	6.1b, 6.2b, 6.3
Awareness raising activities and environmental education	6.1b
Networking activities	6.3
Preparation and review of management plans for sites or species	6.2b
Measures and activities to carry out appropriate Environmental Impact Assessment Studies	6.1b
Monitoring systems	6.1b
Habitats and species conservation, management and restoration measures	6.1b
Measures to ensure sustainable use of habitats and species	6.1b

Trans-boundary projects	6.1b, 6.2d, 6.3
Supporting and communicating pilot projects	6.1b, 6.2b
Maintenance of infrastructure	6.1b
New infrastructures specific for the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species	6.1b
Equipment acquisition	6.1b

## Make your proposals

The NSRF will include an analysis of your countries economic strengths and weaknesses, it will set out thematic (eg environment and risk prevention) and territorial (eg city-region) priorities, and it will include a list of operational programmes together with information on funding allocations by fund (ESF, ERDF, CF) by programme. For convergence regions the NSRF will also include information on mechanisms for coordinating with other funds (eg EAFRD and European Fisheries Fund).

You will need to ensure that:

- the analysis of economic strengths and weaknesses includes the environment either as a strength (eg identify need for sensitive development, safeguard tourism interest) or as a weakness (e.g. requiring remedial investment, restoration etc to attract investment, reduce external environmental costs, exploit ecosystem services such as floodplains etc)
- the environment is included as a thematic strategy; it is essential that you have the right headline objectives to enable you (or someone else) to finance the work that needs to be done for Natura 2000
- one or more operational programmes (funded by ESF and ERDF) incorporate the environmental themes set out in the NSRF and that it is complementary to actions financed under rural development.

It would also be advisable for you to look at your National Lisbon Reform Programme – at least be familiar with the Executive Summary – for growth and jobs.

Step 5: when you speak with your Government:

- present your 4-5 top investment needs (see action 4)
- make the economic and social case – the evidence is out there; make the link to Lisbon or show how the environment is missing
- Show that you know what could be financed under the relevant ERDF/ESF articles for your country/region
- Demonstrate how your top priorities complement what has already been proposed for rural development
- Propose some headline objectives; this is the first time for the Government as well as for you!

- Ask what operational programmes have already been proposed, discuss scope for investment in Natura 2000 and broader environmental issues (this depends on whether you go as a coalition, but it does no harm to appreciate their efforts on energy efficiency, pollution control etc)
- Ask how you can help them.

### **Act now**

It is essential for NGOs to consider the financing needs of Natura 2000 from the Structural Funds alongside estimated provision from the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development and LIFE+. There is a small window of opportunity to influence the preparation of NSRFs now. By March 2006 it could be too late.

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## Appendix 1: Description of eligible activities

Activity	Description
Adaptation of EU environmental legislation	Studies, coordination between authorities.
Establishment of management bodies	Start-up funding, feasibility studies, management plans
Training and capacity building	Handbooks, seminars, workshops, communication materials
Awareness raising activities and environmental education	Costs incurred for the organisation of meetings and work-shops, the publication of aware-ness and information materials, setting-up and maintenance of internet pages
Visitor management measures/activities	Guides, maps, personnel
Public participation systems	Communication networks, production of newsletters and/or consultation outcomes, communication material, financial support to stakeholders
Networking activities	Travel, meetings, workshops
Preparation and review of management plans for sites or species	Elaboration and/or update of management and action plans, land use plans
Measures and activities to carry out appropriate Environmental Impact Assessment Studies	Costs relevant to coordination between authorities, the assemblage of indices and databases, monitoring activities
Surveillance, wardening and patrolling activities	Personnel, consumables, travel, etc. in order to implement surveillance and guarding activities, including among others surveillance for the control of harmful recreational activities (motorised sports, hunting, etc), the control of harmful economic activities (drilling, building, dredging, fishing, coastal defenses, etc.) and protection against wildfires.
Monitoring systems	Monitoring plans, personnel, travel, consumables, equipment
Habitats and species conservation, management and restoration measures	Restoration work, infrastructure, provision of wildlife passages, management of specific vegetation, plans
Measures to ensure sustainable use of habitats and species	Forest-environmental measures e.g. to control and/or eradicate alien species, afforestation or reforestation activities, management of specific vegetation. Measures to prevent, control and fight desertification

Trans-boundary projects	Entails the financing of cooperation schemes for the protection and management of trans-boundary resources and ecosystems
Supporting and communicating pilot projects	Development of pilot projects demonstrating the positive effects of certain measures, and exemplifying management techniques.
Maintenance of infrastructure	Running costs incurred to meet depreciation of infrastructure.
New infrastructures specific for the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species	Includes an array of measures for the creation of infrastructures specific to the management of the environment, e.g. for water management in peat bogs and mires
Public use infrastructures	Infrastructure for public use that is conducive to environmental protection and management (e.g. infrastructure increasing the amenity value of sites, such as signage, trails, observation platforms and visitor centres
Buying equipment	Includes the acquisition of equipment relevant to the running of protection and management institutions and actions, such as office and IT equipment, monitoring materials, cars, boats, diving equipment, cameras
Precautionary measures in sites still not designated (pSCI)	Potential for preparation of management plans to prevent and cope with natural risks
Fire prevention, fire control and fire management measures	Includes the preparation of wardening and fire-control plans, the development of relevant infrastructures and the acquisition of equipment
Mitigation measures for infrastructures affecting Natura 2000	Includes post-construction management measures, provision of corridors and passages for species and demolition activities where warranted
Land purchase	purchase of land in service of environmental protection and management schemes

## Appendix 2: Relevant Articles

The text provided here has been drawn from recent compromise texts emerging from the Structural Actions Working Party (for the General Affairs Council). These are still subject to negotiation with the European Parliament, but are unlikely to change significantly.

### European Social Fund – Article 3

Within the framework of the “Convergence” objective the ESF shall also support...

3.2: strengthening institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level and, where relevant, the social partners and non-governmental organisations with a view to reforms, good governance, and better regulation, especially in the economic, employment, social, environmental and judicial fields...

3.2i	mechanisms to improve good policy and programme design, monitoring and evaluation, through studies, statistics and expert advice, support to interdepartmental coordination and dialogue between relevant public and private bodies
3.2ii	capacity building in the delivery of policies and programmes in the relevant fields, including with regard to the enforcement of legislation, especially through continuous managerial and staff training and specific support to key services, inspectorates and socio-economic actors including social partners, relevant non-governmental organisations and representative professional organisations.

### European Regional Development Fund – Article 4:

Under the “Convergence” objective, the ERDF shall focus its assistance on supporting sustainable integrated regional and local economic development and employment by mobilising and strengthening endogenous capacity through operational programmes aimed at the modernisation and diversification of regional and local economic structures, and the creation of sustainable jobs, primarily through the following priorities

4.4	Environment, including investments connected with water supply and water and waste management; waste-water treatment and air quality; the prevention, control and fight against desertification; integrated pollution prevention and control; aid to mitigate the effects of climate change; rehabilitation of the physical environment, including contaminated sites and land and brownfield redevelopment; promotion of biodiversity and nature protection, including investments in NATURA 2000 sites; aid to SMEs to promote sustainable production patterns through the introduction of cost-
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	effective environmental management systems and the adoption and use of pollution-prevention technologies
4.5	Prevention of risks, including development and implementation of plans to prevent and cope with natural and technological risks
4.6	Tourism, including promotion of natural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism; protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in support of socio-economic development; aid to improve the supply of tourism services through new higher value-added services and to encourage new, more sustainable patterns of tourism
4.7	Investments in culture, including protection, promotion and preservation of cultural heritage; development of cultural infrastructure in support of socio-economic development, sustainable tourism and improved regional attractiveness; and aid to improve the supply of cultural services through new higher added value services
4.8	Transport investments, including improvement of trans-European networks links to the TEN-T network; integrated strategies for clean transport which contribute to improving the access to and quality of passenger and goods services, to achieving a more balanced modal split, to promoting intermodal systems and reducing environmental impacts
4.10	Education investments, including in vocational training, which contribute to increasing attractiveness and quality of life

#### **European Regional Development Fund – Article 5**

Under the “Regional competitiveness and employment” objective, the ERDF shall focus its assistance, while promoting employment, in the context of sustainable development strategies...

#### 5.2: environment and risk prevention

5.2b	promoting the development of infrastructure linked to biodiversity and investments in NATURA 2000 sites, where this contributes to sustainable economic development and/or diversification of rural areas
5.2e	developing plans and measures to prevent and cope with natural and technological risks.
5.2f	protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in support of socio-economic development and the promotion of natural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism

## European Regional Development Fund – Article 6

Under the “European territorial cooperation” objective, the ERDF shall focus its assistance on:

6.1: the development of cross-border economic, social and environmental activities through joint strategies for sustainable territorial development

6.1b by encouraging and improving the joint protection and management of the environment as well as the prevention of natural and technological risks

6.2: the establishment and development of trans-national cooperation, including bilateral cooperation between maritime regions... through the financing of networks and of actions conducive to integrated territorial development

6.2b environment: water management, energy efficiency, risk prevention and environmental protection activities with a clear trans-national dimension. Actions may include: protection and management of river basins, coastal zones, marine resources, water services and wetlands; flood prevention; the promotion of maritime security and protection against natural and technological risks; and protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in support of socio-economic development and sustainable tourism

6.3: reinforcement of the effectiveness of regional policy by promoting inter-regional co-operation

6.3a one or several operational programmes focusing on innovation and the knowledge economy and environment and risk prevention in the sense of Article 5 (1) and (2)

6.3b operational programmes focusing on:

- i) exchanges of experience concerning the identification, transfer and dissemination of best practice including on sustainable urban development as referred to in Article 8; and
- ii) actions involving studies, data collection, and the observation and analysis of development trends in the Community