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Presentation in Session 3: Structural Funds and the Environment

This presentation is based on the case studies in the BirdLife report "An analysis of the effects of Structural Fund spending on the environment", prepared for the mid-term evaluation and review of Structural interventions 2000-2006.

See below the executive summary of the report.



An analysis of the effects of Structural Fund spending on the environment: for the mid-term evaluation and review of Structural Fund interventions 2000-2006

Executive summary

Nov.

2003

This BirdLife International report is timed to coincide with the 2004 mid-term evaluation and review of Structural Fund plans and programmes. It provides on the ground, in-depth analysis of seven case studies of Structural Fund spending in Italy, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom. The case studies represent a variety of projects and funding sources, either in preparation or carried out in the current programming period (2000-2006). The focus of the analysis is the interpretation and implementation of the cross-cutting environment and sustainable development themes in Member States' Structural Fund programmes. Special attention is paid to the conservation, protection and management/sustainable development of the Natura 2000 Network – a European Union-wide network of protected sites, for threatened species and habitats, established under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

Each case study considers the individual project's contribution to environmental, social and economic development, the programming strategy and factors affecting implementation, and sets out recommendations for the Commission and for the Member States. These recommendations are consolidated in section 3 of the report (page 59) and are relevant to:

- the revised Commission guidelines COM(2003) 499 Final
- the mid-term review and suggested programme adjustments
- the allocation of 4% of Member States' Structural Fund allocation (the 'performance reserve')

and

- the reform of the general regulations governing Structural Funds for the next programming period, 2007–2013.

The report contains a mix of case studies showing examples, both positive and negative, of the effects of Structural Fund spending on the environment. The positive case studies demonstrate that where Structural Fund programmes have an explicit purpose for protection and/or enhancement of the environment, managing authorities have made the effort to promote environmentally responsible projects. Successful environmental projects are often based on successful partnerships (between responsible authorities, private sector, community groups, the general public and NGOs).

Unfortunately, there are still serious problems concerning the environmental performance of Structural Fund programmes; in the current programming period Natura 2000 sites are under threat and/or have deteriorated. Factors contributing to this situation include:

- Conflicts of interest: the promoter of the environmentally damaging project and the environmental authority are the same institution.
- Poor communication between responsible authorities, for example, the project promoter, environmental authority and managing authority.
- Poor communication and consultation, externally, between the managing authority and NGOs/general public.
- Programme management is reactive instead of pro-active towards the environment. For instance, in several case studies environmental impact assessments or assessment required under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (hereafter referred to as 'Article 6

assessments’) were carried out after a problem was identified and a complaint had been made, not before.

In order to safeguard Europe’s environment, the programme adjustments resulting from the mid-term review (and the new Structural Fund regulations) must ensure tighter compliance with the existing environmental *acquis*¹. These requirements should be facilitated by setting minimum standards for the strategic involvement of environmental authorities in the management and monitoring of funds.

BirdLife International believes that Structural Funds should also co-finance nature conservation and the enhancement of biodiversity in the EU25, wherever and whenever appropriate – including the protection and management of the Natura 2000 network. This will enhance, as well as protect the environment, and help to achieve sustainable development throughout our Community

Summary of recommendations

- 1 The Commission must ensure that the Structural Funds work fully within the framework of and promote the objectives of, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.
- 2 The Commission must ensure that Structural Funds do not co-finance projects which lead to the damage or deterioration of Natura 2000 sites.
- 3 The Commission must increase pressure on Member States to use existing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) guidelines and to introduce formal provisions for the review of the environmental information supplied by project promoters in order to ensure strict compliance with the EIA Directive.
- 4 The Commission must ensure that Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) are carried out for all Structural Fund plans and programmes developed in future programming periods. The Commission should produce guidance on how to undertake SEA of Structural Fund plans and programmes in accordance with the requirements of the SEA Directive.
- 5 The Commission must set minimum standards to ensure that the integration of environmental concerns is coherent and continuous from the point of policy conception, through project delivery, to post project monitoring.
- 6 The Commission and Member States must ensure that the measurement of environmental performance is at the heart of the management of Structural Fund

¹ The complete body of EU environmental policy and legislation.

programmes. Strategic environmental skills and experience are essential in order for the managing authorities and monitoring committees to make sound decisions.

- 7 The Commission and Member States must improve accessibility to the Structural Funds for projects which make a positive contribution to the protection and enhancement of the environment.
- 8 The Commission must ensure that the Structural Funds play a part in co-financing the conservation, management and sustainable development of EU regions of high biodiversity value, especially the Natura 2000 network.
- 9 Structural Fund plans and programmes must follow and develop established good practice. The Commission should draw together existing and future examples of good environmental practice from Member States and make these available on a database.
10. The Commission should ensure that the new regulations earmark 25% of the performance reserve at the mid-term review to reward excellent environmental performance.