

Conference on the participation of landowners in management of Natura 2000 areas

On the 9th November 2011, the ELO organised a conference on the participation of private landowners in the management of Natura 2000 areas. The conference which took place in Brussels was held with in the context of the LIFE + project 3WATER.

The ELO is the Coordinating Beneficiary of this project and prepared this conference in close cooperation with its partners. The conference which attracted more than 150 attendees focused on opportunities and bottlenecks for the cooperation between the public sector and private landowners in the management of nature values.

The Conference was opened by Vesna VALANT, Member of the Cabinet of the EU Environment Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK, who underlined that the successful implementation of Natura 2000 remains the main pillar of the EU Biodiversity strategy. She added that the LIFE+ project 3WATER was in a way a pilot one, on one hand in terms of putting the involvement of private landowners at the heart of this project and on the other hand, in terms of integrating their economic interests as private landowners with public interests for the conservation of biodiversity. She added that: "The farmers, foresters, fishermen and many other owners, users and managers of Natura 2000 areas provide an essential public good with a high socio-economic value for its users. And it will be important to create adequate incentives for ensuring continued delivery of these public goods."

This was followed by a speed-dating session in which each partner explored on the added value of the project, expectations and replicability. Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Secretary General, European



Landowners' opened the session and presented the project. The overall objective of the LIFE+ 3WATER project is to restore and conserve specific habitats and species of Community importance, notably Bittern (*Botaurus Stellaris*) and Tree frog (*Hyla arborea*) in the Natura 2000 area in Midden Limburg, Belgium. The project goes through unique partnership between private landowners and a public sector. Such a partnership enables a strong participation of all involved stakeholders to establish a sustainable basis for the conservation of the targeted species and habitats on the long term. A special attention is given to the synergy between Ecology, Education and Economy.

Michiel LIEFSOENS, Counsellor for Environment, Housing, Animal welfare, Energy and Church affairs, City of Hasselt; explained that the LIFE+ project enhanced awareness about the Natura 2000 network in the city of Hasselt. He concluded that nature knew no boundaries and this project enabled to liaise communication between land managers of both private and public domains and contribute to their mutual understanding.

Kristien SMETS, Counsellor for Environ-

ment and Tourism, Town of Zonhoven, explored on the fishfarming in the project area. She added that thank to the LIFE+ project 3WATER the attractiveness of the area for tourists would be enhanced.

Ilse IDELER, Director, Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen, explained that the project brought more understanding among stakeholders in the project area.

Bert VANHOLEN, Provincial Director in Limburg, Agency for Nature and Forest said that the added value of the collaboration between the private and the public sector is their complementarity. The public actors know their way around with the administrative processes and private actors have a network oriented at the private sector.

Claude de VILLENFAGNE, vzw Ontwikkeling Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg, concluded that sustainable management and biodiversity concerns everyone and therefore successful collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial. The session was moderated by Jan BOUCKAERT, attorney at STIBBE, who managed to provoke a lively debate between the speakers and the audience.



The first panel was followed by the presentation of the study on the participation of private landowners by Thierry de l'ESCAILLE. This study was prepared by the ELO and its aim was to investigate and discuss the socio-economic measures and conditions which can stimulate private landowners in conserving and managing habitats and species. The study was made of two parts. The first part was an analysis of the questionnaire which was distributed among European stakeholders. The other was a quantitative review of a large number of case studies on the same topic (e.g. private stakeholder involvement in successful examples of Life-Nature projects). This analysis not only intended to summarise research findings on a selected issue but to detect patterns among otherwise conflicting results. Frank VASSEN, Policy Officer, Nature Unit, DG Environment, concluded the morning session.

In the afternoon, three Life+ Nature projects were presented. Herbert TIEFENBACHER, Forstverwaltung Grafenegg, Austria explored on the LIFE + project Living space in the estuary stretch of the river Traisen. Oliver SCHMIDT-FORMANN, Environmental Office, City of Hamm, Germany presented the LIFE + Lippe flood plain. Maura WALSH, CEO, I.R.D. Duhallow, Ireland, presented the LIFE+ project Restoration of the Upper River Blackwater SAC for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Atlantic Salmon, European Otter and Kingfisher. The panel was moderated by Marc GOVAERT, Laureate of the SBNL Award for the Environment, Farm Engelendaël.

The last panel was a fiery discussion between the audience, Angelo SALSI, Head of Unit, LIFE – Nature Unit, DG Environment, and Jurgen TACK, Director, Research Institute for Nature and Forest. Seger van VOORST tot VOORST, Director, Hoge Veluwe moderated the last session and raised thought-provoking questions on how could landowners be motivated to participate in the management of Natura 2000. The conference was closed

by Jos RUTTEN, General Director, Agency for Nature and Forest.

The general message from the conference was that land managers are the best custodians of high nature values. It is crucial to involve them in the management of Natura 2000 areas. In order to ensure their active participation and a sustainable and viable project, the opinion of landowners and land managers must be taken into account. The participation of all involved stakeholders both private and public ensures long term sustainability of a project.

The conference was followed by a field visit in the project area on the 10th of November 2011.

Barbora BUCKOVA, ELO

*All the presentations are available on www.3WATER.eu
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UN climate conference in Durban

The European Union welcomes the agreement reached at the UN climate conference in Durban as a historic breakthrough in the fight against climate change. After two weeks of negotiations, the 195 Parties to the UN climate change convention agreed on a roadmap, proposed by the EU, for drawing up a legal framework by 2015 for climate action by all countries. The Durban conference also agreed that, there will be a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, the new Green Climate Fund for developing countries would be made operational and a series of measures which build on the progress made at last year's Cancun conference would be approved.

More information: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/hedegaard/headlines/news/2011-12-11_01_en.htm

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