

European Court of Auditors Special Report No 11/2009



The sustainability and the Commission's management of the LIFE-Nature projects

The Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE)

LIFE:

- is an EU funding instrument for environment projects,
- included in the Natural Resources part of the budget

It is the most important European funding that is specially dedicated to the environment and is managed directly by the Commission.

The present LIFE+ phase allocates 2 143 million euro for the period from 2007 to 2013.

- it comprises three components:

- Nature and Biodiversity
- Environment Policy and Governance
- Information and Communication



LIFE-Nature

- 50 % of LIFE funds for grants are allocated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity.
- LIFE-Nature finances projects for the management and conservation of Europe's fauna and flora species and habitats:
 - within the Natura 2000 network
 - based on the Birds and Habitats Directives

to assess

the effectiveness of the Commission's management of the LIFE-Nature grants during the different phases of the project cycle

in respect of the sustainability of the project results

Sustainability

In the absence of a definition, for the purpose of the audit we defined sustainability as:

The assurance which can be obtained (project quality, management structures, financial guarantees, etc.) that the investments financed and their effects will be sustained after the project ends and its results are disseminated.

Audit questions

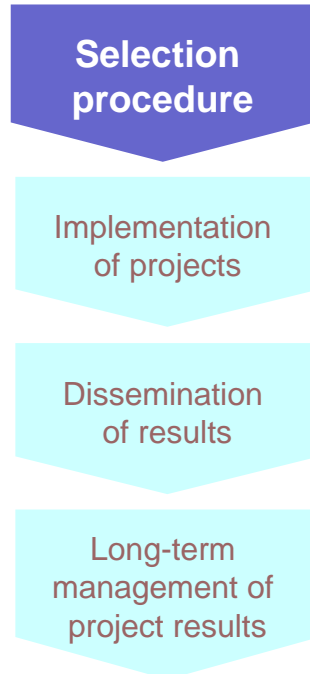
- Does the project **selection procedure** provide reasonable assurance on the sustainability of their results?
- Does the Commission's **management and monitoring** ensure that the projects meet their objectives?
- Has the Commission assured that the project results and lessons learnt are appropriately **disseminated**?
- Has the Commission taken the necessary steps to ensure that the financed **project results** are durable?

Audit scope

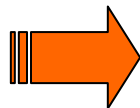
- focussed on LIFE III - LIFE+ (2000 to 2008)
- On-the-spot audit in 6 Member States (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and UK)
- Sample of 35 projects of LIFE III - Nature

Who?





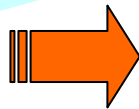
- **Imprecise weight given to sustainability in the selection procedures**
- **Long selection process**



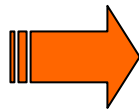
the selection procedure should be shortened and improved to target projects which can give assurance of their sustainability



- Weaknesses in monitoring project outputs and long-term results
- Outcome indicators not yet developed



-the Commission should improve project monitoring in respect of the results achieved



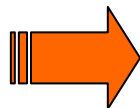
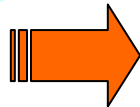
-the grant agreements should define measurable indicators that can be monitored

Selection
procedure

Implementation
of projects

Dissemination
of results

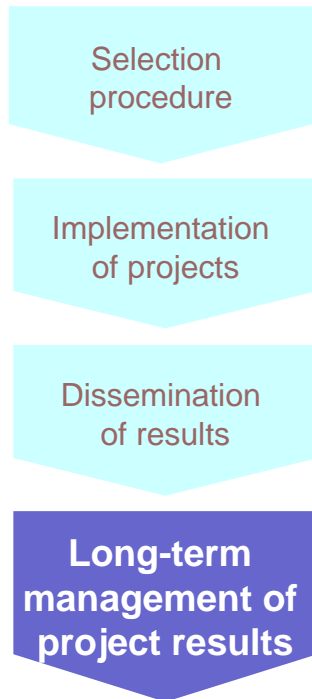
Long-term
management of
project results



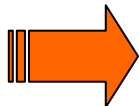
- **Need for improved minimum quality standards for the project websites**
- **Lessons learnt,**
 - **best practices identified but detailed technical/scientific information acquired not systematically made available**

-the Commission should further develop its communication activities and tools

- the beneficiaries should be required to provide and disseminate more technical details



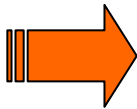
- **No After-LIFE follow-up, no technical ex-post checks take place**
- **Conservation measures not safeguarded beyond project end**



The grant agreement should commit the competent national authorities and the beneficiaries to assure the long-term management of the projects financed

Conclusion

- Significant progress has been made since the introduction of LIFE in 1992, and LIFE-Nature grants contribute to the biodiversity conservation effort.
- However, measures financed are not yet sufficiently safeguarded beyond project completion.



It is recommended that the Commission should give further consideration to the various factors relevant to the sustainability of the project results, improve the dissemination of the acquired knowledge and set up a systematic follow-up of the projects after the final payment has been made.

Thank you!

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