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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

**Report on the Mid-term Evaluation of the Programme for Environment and Climate
Action (LIFE)**

{COM(2017) 642 final} - {SWD(2017) 355 final}

Launched in 1992, LIFE is the only EU programme exclusively dedicated to the environment, nature conservation and climate action, all areas of growing public concern.

For the current 2014-2020 funding period, the LIFE Regulation¹ will make available approximately EUR 3.4 billion.

During its 25 years of existence, the LIFE programme has been evaluated a number of times. The current programme is the result of these evaluations and has been shaped by the lessons learnt from the programme's implementation over the years.

The mid-term evaluation

As required by the LIFE Regulation, the mid-term evaluation builds on the external study 'Mid-term analysis of the LIFE Regulation', carried out by independent contractors.

This mid-term evaluation has been carried out at an early stage of the programme's implementation. This means that most projects have not started yet, and few projects have been completed (the average duration of a LIFE project is 4 to 5 years).

For these reasons the mid-term evaluation has focused mainly on the processes put in place (launch of calls, signing of contracts, funding of projects, etc.) to reach the LIFE programme's objectives. Where relevant, the evaluation has looked at their expected results more than the results achieved. Moreover a comparison is done with the previous programme (its outputs are used as a reference) because most of the activities and the related procedures (traditional projects, operating grants and procurement) continue to be as they were under the LIFE+ programme.

Main findings

Overall, the mid-term evaluation provides reasonable assurance that the LIFE programme is on track to be:

- **effective**, because it is well placed to meet its targets and deliver on environmental and climate objectives and contribute to the pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Ongoing projects from the 2014 calls for proposals are expecting to reach 70% of each milestone envisaged for 2017, for example, by targeting better conservation of 114 species, 59 habitats and 85 Natura 2000 sites.

Activities are in place to fulfil all the general objectives and to contribute to resource-efficiency, innovative technologies and, in a limited way, employment.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007, OJ L 347 of 20.12.2013, p. 185.

Some of the most recent policy developments have been financed by LIFE - namely the circular economy package adopted in 2015 and the 2030 climate and energy framework adopted in 2014, the implementation of the Paris Agreement ratified in 2016 as well as the EU's adaptation strategy -.

- **efficient**, because the projects are expected to provide value for money. It is estimated that the benefit to society of some of the projects from the 2014 call for proposals will amount to EUR 1.7 billion. This figure alone represents four times the cost of the overall LIFE budget for 2014.

The transfer of most of the grant management from the Commission to the executive agency EASME is well on track and it is expected to produce an overall gain in efficiency, above the EUR 8.2 million gains initially planned for 2014-2020.

- **relevant**, because the ongoing projects are addressing some crucial challenges such as halting the loss of biodiversity, deriving savings from the circular economy, reducing the costs of inaction related to the consequences and effects of climate change.
- **complementary** to and works in combination with other programmes (thus producing synergies). As confirmed by the analysis of areas with similar objectives, the fact that the different programmes do not have the same primary focus means that there is little possibility of overlapping. Initial findings also show that the LIFE programme has encouraged using the results of the projects financed by research programmes. It has also encouraged taking advantage of the European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular through the integrated projects.

Moreover, the LIFE programme shows a substantial and unanimously recognised **EU added value**, because it helps to make the application of EU environmental and climate legislation and policies consistent across the EU. It allows a better sharing of responsibility and promotes solidarity for the management/conservation of EU environmental assets. Some evidence also confirms that the programme is successfully playing its role as catalyst, promoting activities to exchange best practice and knowledge and to improve the utilisation of project results as well as transfer of know-how.

The evaluation also highlights aspects which need to be improved. This involves:

- simplifying grant management procedures, in particular the application and reporting processes;
- increasing the strategic focus of the demand-driven part of the programme, e.g. by targeting topics not covered by the projects funded in previous years;
- doing more to reproduce the projects and transfer their results, e.g. by developing the capacity to plan and implement investments and addressing the lack of financial resources;

- improving the communication strategy to better target audiences, deliver more objective-specific and target-specific key messages and ensure more structured coordination between players.

The results of the LIFE mid-term evaluation exercise will help to improve these aspects under the next multiannual work programme (2018-2020) and in the next multiannual financial framework.