

Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe

Wildlife and Countryside Link contribution to the European Commission's Public Consultation Paper in view of the 2008/2009 Budget Review

Introduction

1. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and food production and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together, our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 476,000 hectares of land. This submission is supported by:
 - Association of Rivers Trusts
 - Bat Conservation Trust
 - Buglife - the Invertebrate Conservation Trust
 - Butterfly Conservation
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England
 - Council for British Archaeology
 - Grasslands Trust
 - Herpetological Conservation Trust
 - Plantlife
 - The Ramblers Association
 - Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 - The Wildlife Trusts
 - Woodland Trust
 - World Society for the Protection of Animals
2. Link welcomes the opportunity offered to the people of Europe by this consultation to contribute to the debate on the priorities for the European Union's budget after 2013.
3. Over the course of the past decade we have seen the emergence of new economic and environmental challenges which now include changes to our climate, forcing a re-examination of future pressures on the environment and a re-assessment of how our land needs to be managed. Link anticipates that the environmental challenges of the 21st century will require radical changes to the way our land is managed. The review of the EU Budget provides an important opportunity to debate the future direction of land management policy, ahead of decisions on the 2014-2020 EU Financial Perspective to ensure that the right policies and resources are put into place to meet the challenges of the decades ahead.

Beyond the Pillars – Link's policy perspective on the future of the CAP

4. Link has recently published '*Beyond the Pillars*', its policy perspective on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In our paper, which we submit as our contribution to this consultation, we set out why Link believes the European Union's environmental and agricultural policies will need to become more closely integrated to deliver both the food and other commodities we require, as well as the ecosystem services on which both people and nature rely. The reality of climate change means that this will become increasingly important. Our land will need to

not only continue to provide the environmental functions of the present but increasingly provide additional functions to mitigate the effects of climate change. These will include carbon storage and the capacity to store water both in times of shortage, to alleviate drought, and in times of excess to alleviate flood. In combination the requirements of present and future will require moving towards delivering policies at landscape and river catchment scales.

5. The CAP is the major policy driver behind land use across the EU. Recently, much progress has been made in reforming the CAP. It has been decoupled from food production and its focus has widened to delivering environmental outcomes.
6. Even with these changes we now need a more radical re-orientation of land management policies to:
 - protect and conserve our wildlife and habitats;
 - protect and enhance our historic environment, woodlands and our landscapes and their character;
 - ensure the sustainable use of our limited water and soil resources;
 - help mitigate and adapt to the challenges arising from climate change; and,
 - ensure the secure and sustainable production of animal welfare friendly food and other commodities.
7. Link proposes moving beyond the current two pillar mechanism of the CAP, split between a decoupled farm payment and rural development support, and in its place establishing a single **European Sustainable Land Management Policy**.
8. This would be used to support positive land management activities that deliver sustainable land management and could in turn underpin profitable farm businesses and prosperous rural communities. Rather than most of the money in the CAP being paid in the form of decoupled production payments attached to legal compliance, in future payments would be targeted to those undertaking positive actions that deliver sustainable land management.
9. The European Sustainable Land Management Policy that we propose is in some ways a simple concept, but Link believes it has the potential to deliver an integrated and radical approach that will ensure that our land is sustainably managed in order to address the environmental challenges we face. It also seeks to end the damaging division that has existed between the European Union's agricultural and environmental policies reflected in the allocation of financial resources, and instead focuses on the common issue of good land management. This will require us to answer fundamental questions about the values we place on the environmental assets that we all share and for which we are all responsible, the costs of allowing their degradation and the funding needed to ensure they continue to be provided in the future.

Funding sustainable land management after 2013

10. The CAP may only be one component of a matrix of policies and funding streams that affect how our land is managed, but its major influence on Europe's landscapes and environment over the last 50 years is undeniable. The way support is provided by the CAP for farming, with its ensuing effects on the environment and land management, needs further change – but with careful consideration of the consequences.

11. Currently much the greatest proportion of CAP funding is allocated through the Single Payment Scheme for minimum standards of environmental management through cross compliance measures. A much smaller budget is available for those participating in specific environmental management undertaken through agri-environment schemes. This shortage of resources has resulted in a need to target funding at land managers who manage particularly rare and important habitats, species, landscapes or other features. More resources are needed to achieve this limited amount of targeting alone. Land managers who perform high levels of environmental management should receive a higher proportion of public funding. Those who undertake lower level environmental management should receive a smaller proportion of funding for the basic but widespread management they undertake.
12. Delivering the public goods society needs and expects from sustainable land management has a value. Realising this value will come at a considerable cost. Therefore we do not necessarily envisage a saving on the current CAP budget, although there are likely to be both direct and indirect economic benefits from the reform of agricultural policy. Furthermore, choices need to be made about the way the policy objectives are delivered, not just through providing financial incentives, but also through a combination of regulation and other economic and social policies targeted at rural areas.
13. The decoupling of farm payments from production is having a profound impact on the profitability of businesses engaged in farming and land management. Link is concerned that the abolition of direct CAP payments will mean some agricultural systems that contribute significantly to achieving sustainable land management, and which as a result provide environmental public goods, will become less profitable and could cease to be undertaken altogether in some areas. There could be declines or losses of important habitats, rare species and culturally significant landscapes. The next European Union budget must ensure that adequate funding is allocated to support sustainable land management activities to ensure that the delivery of a wide range of environmental public goods can continue.
14. An assessment of the value of the public goods will be required to ensure that payments (and therefore the total level of resource required) are matched to the value of the public goods that are provided. This will become even more important if the prices paid for agricultural commodities on the global market rise to levels that put pressure on farmers to choose intensive commodity production over a commitment to environmental management.

Conclusion

15. Meeting the environmental challenges of the 21st Century and delivering the environmental public goods Europe's citizens require will need all those with an interest in sustainable land management including the public, national and European Governments and their agencies, farming and environmental groups to work together. Now is the time for bold and imaginative thinking by all those with an interest in the forthcoming debate.
16. Wildlife and Countryside Link commends our policy perspective on the future of the CAP as a valuable contribution to the debate on the future priorities of the European Union's budget and its support for sustainable land management in the decades ahead.