



**Guide for the evaluation of  
LIFE Integrated Project proposals 2017  
Environment sub-programme**

This document aims at explaining to the public the criteria and procedures that will be used for the evaluation of LIFE proposals for integrated projects submitted for the 2017 Call under the Environment sub-programme. There is a separate guide for the evaluation of integrated projects under the sub-programme for Climate Action.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The submission and selection process of Integrated Projects (hereinafter ‘IP’) has been designed based on a two stage procedure as foreseen in the LIFE Regulation<sup>1</sup>. The details of this process as well as the specific eligibility and award criteria are defined in the LIFE multiannual work programme for 2014-2017 (MAWP)<sup>2</sup>. The process should facilitate the work of potential applicants and ensure that they receive the best possible guidance from the Commission during the process and thus optimise the quality of the projects that will eventually receive LIFE finance. The workflow is structured in a way to accompany the progressive development and fine tuning of each proposal.

### **Technical methodology for the project submission and selection procedure**

#### *Stage 1:*

- Call for proposals
- Submission of a Concept Note

The applicant submits a short Concept Note outlining the project contents, and the plan or strategy it is intended to implement and a financial plan for the overall implementation of the plan or strategy.

- Concept Note evaluation and question answer phase

On the basis of the Concept Note, the Commission identifies and lists the proposals that comply with the eligibility criteria. Applicants of proposals that comply with these criteria will be invited to participate in a written question and answer phase, during which they can submit questions related to the preparation of a full proposal. During this phase the Commission will render public the questions and answers in an anonymised manner to equally assist all applicants prepare their full proposal. Where appropriate, the Commission will supplement the questions and answers with guidance regarding typical difficulties that applicants might have encountered and that became apparent in the Concept Notes.

#### *Stage 2:*

- Submission of the full proposal:

Applicants of eligible Concept Notes are invited to submit a full proposal.

- Full proposal evaluation

The Commission, following an in-depth evaluation, prepares a "preliminary long-list" of ranked proposals that may be considered for financing. The ranking is

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) 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 (hereinafter “the LIFE Regulation”).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Decision of 19 March 2014 on the adoption of the LIFE multiannual work programme for 2014-17, OJ L116 of 17/04/2014, p. 1

based on merit, and, under the sub-programme for Environment, also in compliance with the rule that 55% of the resources allocated to action grants have to be allocated to nature conservation and biodiversity, and with the geographical distribution criteria as set in Article 19(4) of the LIFE Regulation. In total, the value of the projects included in this list will not be more than 130% of the available budget. The Commission also verifies the financial and technical capacity of the applicants to carry out the project.

- Preparation of the final list of projects to be funded and of the reserve list

After a revision phase successful projects will be proposed for funding, within the available budget. A reserve list will be constituted with the best-ranked projects that cannot be funded in view of the available budget. The reserve list will encompass an additional 20% of the available LIFE budget.

- Signature of the grant agreement

While the two stage approach will be applicable throughout the duration of the MAWP, the Commission may adapt the process described above in view of the experience gained. In ranking IPs, the Commission shall ensure geographical balance by indicatively allocating one to two IPs to each Member State during the duration of the present MAWP in order to ensure that over the entire funding period from 2014-2020 Article 19(4) of the LIFE Regulation is observed.

**Proposals which fail to comply with one or several of the criteria described in this guide will be rejected. Their evaluation will be stopped at the step and stage where failure to comply will be first registered and applicants will be informed as soon as possible.**

**NB: The e-mail address of the coordinating beneficiary contact person indicated in form CNb will be used to send all official correspondence from the Commission. The applicants should ensure that it is an e-mail account which is valid, active and checked (including spam folders) on a daily basis throughout the whole selection period.**

### **Selection and evaluation principles**

The Commission is responsible for the whole evaluation process. External experts will be identified to support the Commission work.

All evaluators must base their assessment of the proposals on the provisions of this evaluation guide and of the application guide, using as a basis the questions established for each criterion. This evaluation guide should be understood to complement the application guide and both documents will be used as reference for the purpose of the evaluation.

Within the limits allowed for by thematic allocation and geographical distribution rules of the LIFE Regulation, the principle of equal treatment between all proposals must be strictly applied throughout all phases of the evaluation process.

Evaluations and scores given to each proposal must be as objective and equitable as possible. Each decision and each score given must be clearly justified by reasoned comments.

Any information or documents not submitted by the applicant, or received after the deadline, will not be taken into account unless explicitly requested by the Commission.

All evaluation comments and the related correspondence will be made in English.

A copy of all formal communication will be sent to the relevant national LIFE contact point indicated on the LIFE website.

## **II. FIRST STAGE: THE CONCEPT NOTE**

### **1. Opening**

Proposals will be checked for compliance with the following criteria:

1. The proposal has reached the Commission by **26 September 2017**,
2. The official LIFE 2017 application forms for Integrated Projects – Concept Note have been used for preparing and submitting the proposal.
3. The related plan or strategy and financial plan have been annexed to the proposal.
4. The proposal has been sent to the European Commission on CD-ROM, DVD or USB stick, in PDF format. The related plan or strategy is also available in one of the following formats: PDF, GIF, WORD (for other formats please contact the Commission prior to submission).

### **2. Admissibility and exclusion**

#### **2.1 Admissibility**

All proposals that were not rejected at the end of the Opening phase are checked for their compliance with the following admissibility and exclusion criteria.

1. The signed declaration CNd is complete and signed (the scanned application forms CNd bear dated signatures with the status and full name of the signatory clearly in evidence on the document).
2. Form CNe (Summary description of the project) is completed in English. Applicants are encouraged to also complete all other forms in English.
3. All relevant forms and fields therein have been completed.
4. The coordinating beneficiary is legally registered in the EU.

**All LIFE proposals that do not comply with criterion 4 are immediately declared not-admissible.**

For proposals not fully complying with criteria 1,2,3 above but otherwise complete, the Commission will send a message to the coordinating beneficiary indicating the missing elements.

The coordinating beneficiary will have **5 working days** to reply and provide the missing/incomplete documents/forms. In exceptional circumstances, the Commission may extend this deadline.

**Those proposals for which all the requested missing/incomplete documents/forms have not been provided by the fixed deadline are declared inadmissible.**

## **2.2 Exclusion**

A proposal will be excluded when the declaration of compliance with the criteria set out in Article 106(1) and 107 of the Financial Regulation of the European Union<sup>3</sup> has not been provided by the applicant. **Applicants must be ready to provide evidence to substantiate the declaration if requested.**

## **3. Selection**

### **3.1 Technical reliability of the project participants**

A proposal can be rejected on the basis of this criterion if:

- there is evidence that the beneficiaries do not have the technical competency to carry out the project
- there is evidence that the coordinating beneficiary has been an unreliable manager in previous LIFE- or other European Union-financed projects and has given no proof that necessary initiatives have been taken to avoid similar problems in the future.

### **3.2 Specific eligibility**

A proposal is rejected, if it does not comply with one or several of the following criteria:

- Large territorial coverage: Implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy will cover a large territorial area, in particular, regional, multi-regional, national or trans-national. A multi-city approach may also be acceptable for IP dealing with air quality management.
- Mobilisation of other funds: Complementary to the IP itself and to the specific co-funding required for it under the LIFE Regulation (Article 20(1)(a) and (c)), at least one other relevant Union, national or private funding source will be mobilised for the implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy.
- Involvement of key stakeholders: key stakeholders will be involved in the implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy.
- The IP must aim at implementing one of the following environmental plans or strategies required by specific environmental Union legislation, developed pursuant to other Union acts or developed by Member States' authorities:
  - a. Prioritised Action Frameworks pursuant to Article 8 of the Habitats Directive;
  - b. Waste Management Plans pursuant to Article 28 of the Waste Framework Directive;

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<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU, EURATOM) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002, OJ L 298 of 26.10.2014, p.1 (hereinafter referred to as “the Financial Regulation”)

- c. River Basin Management Plans pursuant to Annex VII to the Water Framework Directive; or
- d. Air quality plans pursuant to the Air Quality Directive.

Aiming at implementing an environmental plan means that:

- The IP is clearly designed with the aim of creating the conditions for the full implementation of the plan. This does not mean that the IP itself will cover all actions foreseen in the plan or that the plan will be fully implemented during the lifetime of the IP. However, the IP shall include strategic actions to catalyse a process and mobilise supplementary commitments and funding that will lead, in due time, to the full implementation of the plan or strategy. The IP should therefore be designed in a way to address this long term objective.
- The actions included in the IP are clearly linked and identifiable in the plan which the IP targets.
- The application is submitted by an entity with responsibility for the implementation of all or a significant part of the targeted plan.
- The plan or strategy must have been formally adopted by the competent authority by the time of the submission and be considered by the Commission as being of acceptable quality. In case formal adoption has not yet taken place, the applicant has to provide a note informing of the status of adoption, the expected date of adoption. In such cases the adoption must happen before the deadline for the submission of the full Integrated Project proposal. When no formal adoption is foreseen, the applicant should demonstrate that the plan has completed all procedural steps foreseen in the legal base for it to be considered as final. In case of Nature IPs, the PAF officially submitted to the Commission is considered as the relevant plan.

#### **4. List of proposals retained for the second stage**

On the basis of the Concept Note, the Commission identifies and lists the proposals that comply with the eligibility criteria. Applicants of proposals that comply with these criteria will be invited to participate in a written question and answer phase, during which they can submit questions related to the preparation of a full proposal. During this phase, the Commission will render public the questions and answers in an anonymised manner to equally assist all applicants prepare their full proposal. Where appropriate, the Commission will supplement the questions and answers with guidance regarding typical difficulties that applicants might have encountered and that became apparent in the Concept Notes.

Taking note of the provisions of the LIFE Regulation that foresees a total 3 IPs per member States during the 2014-2020 (including also 1 under the Climate Subprogram), and of the MAWP indicating that 1 or 2 IPs can be granted to a Member State during the 2014-2017 period, in case applicable, the applicants from Member States that have already reached the 2 IPs granted after the LIFE14 - LIFE16 calls will be informed about this fact in the invitation to submit a full proposal.

### III. SECOND STAGE - THE FULL PROPOSAL

#### 1. Opening

Proposals will be checked for compliance with the following criteria:

1. The proposal has reached the Commission by the date indicated in the invitation to submit a full proposal.
2. The official LIFE 2017 application forms for Integrated Projects - Full proposal have been used for preparing and submitting the proposal.
3. The proposal has been sent to the European Commission on CD-ROM, DVD or USB stick, in PDF format with the financial forms also in Excel.

#### 2. Admissibility and exclusion

All proposals that were not rejected at the end of the Opening phase are checked for compliance with the following admissibility and exclusion criteria:

##### 2.1 Admissibility

Where relevant, the **signed declarations** listed below are complete and signed. Failure to deliver these declarations may lead to an exclusion of the proposal from all further evaluation.

1. The scanned application forms A3, A3a and A4 bear dated signatures with the status and full name of the signatory.
2. Form B1 (Summary description of the project) is completed in English. Applicants are encouraged to also complete all other forms in English.
3. The three following mandatory financial annexes are provided for coordinating beneficiaries that are **private commercial or private non-commercial organisations.**

**It should be noted that these annexes will be required by the Commission irrespective of whether they are obligatory or not for the particular type of organisation, according to national legislation, in the coordinating beneficiary's Member State:**

- a. The "LIFE Simplified Financial Statement", provided as a separate Excel file with the LIFE Application Package. The financial table in this statement must be completed and annexed to the proposal as an Excel file.
- b. The most recent balance sheet and profit and loss account. This document must be annexed to the LIFE proposal as a scanned pdf file, printable in A4 format. Where the coordinating beneficiary does not yet have an annual balance sheet and profit and loss account, because the organisation has been only recently created, it must provide a management plan (for at least 12 months in the future) with the financial data prepared in accordance with the standard required under national legislation.



- c. The most recent balance sheet and profit and loss account must either have an independent audit report certifying that they present a true and fair view of the coordinating beneficiary's financial situation or a certification by an independent auditor that the accounts give a true and fair view of the coordinating beneficiary's financial situation. This document must be annexed to the LIFE proposal as a scanned pdf file, printable in A4 paper format. In the case of a newly created organisation, the auditor's certificate provided is based on the management plan where the financial data are presented in accordance with relevant national provisions.
4. Form A3a titled "Public Body Declaration" is complete and signed if the coordinating beneficiary identifies itself as **public body** either because it is a public body or is equivalent to a "public law body".

For all LIFE proposals that do not fully comply with one or more of the above situations but are otherwise complete, the Commission will send a message to the coordinating beneficiary indicating the annexes that are missing.

The coordinating beneficiary will have **5 working days** to reply and provide the missing/incomplete documents/forms. In exceptional circumstances, the Commission may extend the deadline of 5 working days.

A copy of all formal communication will be sent to the relevant national LIFE contact point indicated on the LIFE website.

**Those proposals for which all the requested missing/incomplete documents/forms have not been provided by the fixed deadline are declared inadmissible.**

## **2.2 Exclusion**

A proposal will be excluded when the declaration of compliance with the criteria set out in Article 106(1) and Articles 107, 108 and 109 of the Financial regulation of the European Union<sup>4</sup> has not been provided by the applicant. **Applicants must be ready to provide evidence to substantiate the declaration if requested.**

## **3. Selection**

### **3.1 Technical reliability of the project participants**

A proposal can be rejected on the basis of this criterion if:

- there is evidence that the beneficiaries do not have the technical competency to carry out the project
- there is evidence that the coordinating beneficiary has been an unreliable manager in previous LIFE- or other European Union-financed projects and has given no proof that necessary initiatives have been taken to avoid similar problems in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EU, EURATOM) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002, OJ L 298 of 26.10.2014, p.1 (hereinafter referred to as "the Financial Regulation")

### 3.2 Financial reliability of the project participants

The purpose of the financial check is to verify the compliance of LIFE proposals with the provisions of Article 202 of the Rules of Application of the Financial Regulation (Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1268/2012 of 29 October 2012). These require that: *"The applicant must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain his activity throughout the period during which the action is being carried out ... and to participate in its funding"*

The Commission will use all the information at its disposal to assess whether the applicant and the associated beneficiaries fulfil the selection and the exclusion criteria. On the basis of Article 202, a proposal will be rejected if the evaluator has evidence showing that it falls into any of the following situations:

- if there is information available to indicate that the coordinating beneficiary and/or one of its associated beneficiaries, contrary to the declaration for exclusion, are in one of the situations referred to in art. 106(1) and 107 of the Financial Regulation n° 966/2012 of 25 October 2012 (JO L 298 of 26/10/2012);
- the results of audits carried out by European Union Institutions in relation to the coordinating beneficiary and/ or one of its associated beneficiaries have clearly shown their inability to comply with the administrative rules regulating European Union grants and in particular those applicable to LIFE.

For private commercial and private non-commercial organisations:

- the auditor's report or auditor-certified balance sheet and profit and loss account provided with the project proposal has not given an "unqualified opinion" about the coordinating beneficiary's financial viability<sup>5</sup>;
- on the basis of the financial viability test, it is concluded that the coordinating beneficiary does not have the financial capacity to cover its share of co-financing within the proposed project period;
- on the basis of the financial viability test, it is concluded that the coordinating beneficiary does not have the capacity to manage the financial amounts provided for in the proposal budget within the proposed project period;

The financial viability of the coordinating beneficiary and its capacity to manage large EU grants are assessed on the basis of the financial information provided with the "simplified financial statement" of the coordinating beneficiary.

The financial viability check will also be used to assess whether a financial guarantee would be required to cover fully or partially the EU pre-financing payment to the project. In particular a financial guarantee will be always requested in the following cases:

1. proposals from **private commercial organisations** if fewer than 2 of the following criteria are respected:

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<sup>5</sup> i.e. a statement that the auditor has carried out the task in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and without restriction as to the scope of the work necessary to express his opinion, that the financial statements audited were drawn up in accordance with appropriate or generally accepted accounting principles, and that they give a true and fair view of the organisation's financial situation and the results of the operation.

- a. the ratio "total grant requested divided by the number of project years" / "shareholders' equity" is lower than 1
  - b. the ratio "current assets" / "current liabilities" is higher than 1
  - c. the ratio "total debts" / "total assets" is lower than 0.8
  - d. there is a positive operational profit
2. proposals from **private non-commercial organisations (NGOs)** if none of the following 3 criteria are respected:
- a. the ratio "total grant requested divided by the number of project years" / "shareholders' equity" is lower than 1
  - b. the ratio "current assets" / "current liabilities" is higher than 1
  - c. the ratio "total debts" / "total assets" is lower than 0.8

Proposals will be rejected when none of the criteria are respected and the ratios diverge significantly from the thresholds indicated above.

When beneficiaries owe to the Commission any overdue debt, this will be carefully evaluated and the Commission will take the necessary precautionary measures including, in extreme cases, refusing the financial support requested if deemed necessary.

### 3.3 Specific eligibility

A proposal is rejected, if it does not comply with one or several of the following criteria:

1. Large territorial coverage: Implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy will cover a large territorial area, in particular, regional, multi-regional, national or trans-national. A multi-city approach may also be acceptable for IP dealing with air quality management.
2. Mobilisation of other funds: Complementary to the IP itself and to the specific co-funding required for it under the LIFE Regulation (Article 20(1)(a) and (c)), at least one other relevant Union, national or private funding source will be mobilised for the implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy.

**N.B. At least one corresponding letter of intent (A8 form) MUST unambiguously confirm the commitment to finance.**

3. Involvement of key stakeholders: The key stakeholders will be involved in the implementation of the targeted Union plan or strategy.
4. The IP must aim at implementing one of the following environmental plans or strategies required by specific environmental Union legislation, developed pursuant to other Union acts or developed by Member States' authorities:
  - a. Prioritised Action Frameworks pursuant to Article 8 of the Habitats Directive;
  - b. Waste Management Plans pursuant to Article 28 of the Waste Framework Directive;
  - c. River basin management plans pursuant to Annex VII to the Water Framework Directive; or
  - d. Air quality plans pursuant to the Air Quality Directive.

Aiming at implementing an environmental plan means that:

- The IP is clearly designed with the aim of creating the conditions for the full implementation of the plan. This does not mean that the IP itself will cover all actions foreseen in the plan or that the plan will be fully implemented during the lifetime of the IP. However, the IP shall include strategic actions to catalyse a process and mobilise supplementary commitments and funding that will lead, in due time, to the full implementation of the plan or strategy. The IP should therefore be designed in a way to address this long term objective.
- The actions included in the IP are clearly linked and identifiable in the plan which the IP targets.
- The application is submitted by an entity with responsibility for the implementation of all or a significant part of the targeted plan.
- The plan or strategy must have been formally adopted by the competent authority by the time of the submission of the full proposal and be considered by the Commission as being of acceptable quality. When no formal adoption is foreseen, the applicant should demonstrate that the plan has completed all procedural steps foreseen in the legal base for it to be considered as final. In case of Nature IPs, the PAF officially submitted to the Commission is considered as the relevant plan.

#### 4. Award

All proposals that were not rejected by the end of the previous phases are admitted to an in-depth evaluation of their quality in the Award phase. A proposal admitted to this phase will be given scores on the basis of the following award criteria:

<b>Award criteria</b>	<b>Minimum pass score*</b>	<b>Maximum score</b>
1. Technical coherence and quality	10	20
2. Financial coherence and quality	10	20
3. EU added value: extent and quality of the contribution to the objectives	15	20
4. EU added value: extent and quality of mobilisation of other funds, in particular Union funds	-	10
5. EU added value: quality of multipurpose, synergies and integration	7	15
6. EU added value: replicability and transferability	5	10
7. EU added value: transnational, green procurement, uptake	-	5
<b>Pass scores (criteria 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6)</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Total score</b>		<b>100</b>

\*A project proposal has to reach at least the minimum pass score for each award criterion and also the sum of scores for criteria for which a minimum score has been fixed has to be equivalent to 55 points or more.

#### **Criterion 1 - Technical coherence and quality**

A proposal should be clear, coherent, realistic and feasible in terms of actions and timetable. The proposal should be carefully structured in relation to the pre-operational context, the problems and threats and the priorities as described in the related plan or strategy. Should additional information be required to complement the description given in the related plan or strategy these should be made available in the proposal. A clear link

should exist between the elements listed above and the objectives, actions and expected results in the proposal.

The global project plan covering the whole duration of the integrated project should be sufficiently detailed and identify the key actions foreseen and provide sufficient elements to explain how project goals will be achieved.

The detailed project plan for the first implementation period (normally the first 2.5 years) should include a clear description of all actions foreseen during that period including how, where, when and by whom each action in the proposal will be undertaken and the detailed budgetary allocation.

The proposal must be drafted so as to allow the evaluators to assess to what extent the technical means involved are adequate for implementing the project.

The time planning must be realistic and any potential difficulties must have been correctly assessed in the relevant forms.

When evaluating these elements due consideration will be given to the fact that the description for the first implementation period will be more detailed than for the overall project.

Actions in the IP may be inter-related or dependent on actions outside the IP but necessary for the implementation of the plan and financed with other means. The design of the IP should be done in a way as to minimize the risk that this interdependence might jeopardize the IP implementation if the actions outside the IP are not feasible anymore. This aspect will be considered under this criterion.

The involvement of stakeholders is a key element for integrated projects. This aspect will be considered in the evaluation to assess if and how the stakeholders involved will contribute to the project implementation and their added value.

Integrated projects are aimed at creating the long term capacity to implement the plan or strategy they address. A proposal should provide sufficient details and evidence to show that the necessary capacity building activities are foreseen and that all measures will be in place before the end of the IP to guarantee that the responsible authorities and stakeholders will be able to continue implementing the plan or strategy after the end of the IP.

## **Criterion 2 - Financial coherence and quality**

The provisional budget must be consistent with the actions described in the technical part of the proposal. Sufficient details should be available to understand how the provisional budget was built. This applies both to the first implementation period as well as for the remaining project duration.

When evaluating these elements due consideration will be given to the fact that the description for the first implementation period will be more detailed than for the overall project.

The budget must be transparent, coherent and cost-efficient, including for the management of the project.

The financial contributions of the beneficiaries/co-financers, the proposed budget and the proposed project expenditures must comply with the rules and principles foreseen in the LIFE guidelines for applicants, the model Grant Agreement for LIFE Integrated Projects and the LIFE Regulation.

The value for money of the proposal will be evaluated by analysing the cost of key actions and of the overall project in view of the expected results. This will also be further checked against the expected level of implementation of the related plan or strategy by the end of the IP.

### **Criterion 3 - EU added value: extent and quality of the contribution to the objectives**

The extent to which each proposal contributes to one or several of the general and specific objectives of LIFE as set out in articles 3, 10, 11 and 12 of the LIFE Regulation will be evaluated.

The following specific aspects will be checked depending on the priority areas within which the project falls:

#### IP dealing with the implementation of Prioritized Framework Programmes (PAF) for NATURA 2000:

The EU added value will have to be argued with regard to the project's contribution towards achieving target 1 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the general objectives of the Habitats and Birds Directives, and in particular with respect to the contribution towards improving the conservation status of species and habitat types of Community Interest (Habitats Directive) and/or the status of bird species (Birds Directive).

This will be measured by evaluating the following aspects:

- the expected level of implementation of the PAF as a direct consequence of the actions foreseen in the IP or through the complementary actions financed by other means mobilized in parallel to the IP,
- the area covered by measures, the number of sites, the relevance of these sites in terms of species and habitat types within their bio-geographical regions,
- the expected improvement of the conservation status of species and habitats with particular attention to those habitats and species that are considered as priority and/or those that have been reported as being in unfavorable conservation status,
- the expected improvement on the long term capacity to monitor and assess the status of species and habitats of EU importance (art 11 and 17 of the Habitats Directive).

#### IP implementing river basin management plans:

The EU added value will have to be argued with regard to their contribution towards achieving WFD objectives. Proposed actions should target significant pressures affecting the environment's capacity for water retention and the use of low impact measures (e.g. green infrastructure) for depollution. Such pressures should have been identified in the assessments carried out by MS for the preparation of implementation plans for relevant EU legislation and policies (e.g. WFD, MSFD, UWWTD, DWD, Bathing Water Directive, Flood directive and/or Drought plans).

The projects should focus on large scale (e.g. sub-catchment or river basin) planning and establishment of measures to increase water retention in urban and rural areas, enhance infiltration, increase water storage capacity and remove pollutants through natural or "natural-like" processes. They should seek synergies to implement actions that will redress existing hydro morphological pressures and improve biodiversity and amenity value.

This will be measured by evaluating the following aspects:

- the expected level of implementation of the target RBMP as a direct consequence of the actions foreseen in the IP or through the complementary actions financed by other means mobilized in parallel to the IP,
- the impact of the project in terms of addressing significant unaddressed pressures and or improvement towards WFD good status/potential objectives,
- the use of the ecosystems approach as a framework to define the actions aimed at delivering EU water policy objectives,
- the tools proposed to ensure joint planning exercises for the implementation of different EU water legal instruments.

#### IP dealing with implementation of waste management plans:

The IP is designed to support the implementation of the Waste Management Plans (WMP) as required by article 28 of the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98 (WFD) and/or Waste Prevention Programmes (WPP) as requested by article 29 of the WFD.

Its EU added value will be assessed with regard to their contribution to the implementation of the waste hierarchy (art 4 of the WFD), the achievement of the recycling targets as foreseen in article 11 of the WFD and additional targets included in the EU waste legislation, as well as the implementation of necessary measures to support those objectives.

This will be measured by evaluating the following aspects:

- the expected level of implementation of the WMPs/WPPs as a direct consequence of the actions foreseen in the IP or through the complementary actions financed by other means mobilized in parallel to the IP in particular for investments for collection and treatment of waste;
- the impact on the reduction of waste generation, the re-use of products and preparing for re-use activities, increase in separate collection (in particular for paper, glass, metal, plastic and bio-waste), recycling, phasing out landfilling, reduction of littering and reduction or adequate treatment of hazardous waste;
- the implementation of specific waste streams directives, like the WEEE Directive, Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive, Landfill Directive;
- the implementation of economic instruments in support of sustainable waste management (extended producer responsibility, Pay-As-You-Throw schemes, landfill/incineration taxes);
- the development of communication and awareness-raising actions in support of the above mentioned objectives;

- the expected improvement on the long term capacity to monitor and assess the generation of municipal waste, its composition, its treatment according to the waste hierarchy, as well as the reinforcement of controls on movements (shipments) of waste.
- where applicable, the contribution to the implementation of the recommendations to the Member States included in the Roadmap elaborated under the compliance-promotion exercises in support of the implementation of the European waste legislation  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/framework/support\\_implementation.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/framework/support_implementation.htm)

#### IP dealing with the implementation of air quality plans and programs:

The IP is designed to support the implementation and monitoring of local and regional air quality plans as defined by Directive 2008/50/EC with the ultimate goal of contributing to National Air Pollution Reduction Programmes. If based on local Air Quality plans, projects should include coordination and cooperation between at least five cities with such plans; if based on a regional Air Quality Plan, projects should include coordination and cooperation between all local administrations and the regional administration. Large scale projects will be favoured.

This will be measured by evaluating the following aspects:

- the expected level of implementation and associated air quality improvements of the Air Quality Plan as a direct consequence of the actions foreseen in the IP or through the complementary actions financed by other means mobilized in parallel to the IP (in particular the contribution towards compliance with EU air quality legislation (existing limit and target values for ambient air quality and, where possible, levels recommended by the WHO), as well as with the National Emission Ceilings and national emission reduction commitments),
- the attention given to the chain of actions required to develop, implement and evaluate an Air Quality Plan: monitoring and modelling, establishing emission inventories and source attributions, policy development and implementation, public information and participation,
- the contribution to strengthening the air quality management and governance, including the level of involvement and commitment of the relevant competent authorities at local, regional and national level,
- the geographic area and the number of people that would benefit from better levels of air quality, taking into account any challenging geographical, meteorological and socio-economic conditions.

#### **Criterion 4 - EU added value: Extent and quality of the mobilisation of other funds, in particular Union funds:**

The quality of the coordination with other funding mechanism(s) and the level of mobilisation of other funds complementary to the foreseen LIFE contribution (beyond the minimum necessary for eligibility) as well as the likelihood of their actual mobilisation and their functional link to the plan to be implemented will determine, whether an IP receives additional points under this criterion. IPs which are likely to mobilise Union funds with a functional link to the plan to be implemented and which foresee a satisfactory coordination mechanism will receive a higher score. The proposal



should not only identify the funds that will be mobilised, but should also provide a summary description of all complementary actions that will be carried out during the project time by using these additional funding sources.

**Criterion 5 - EU added value: Quality of multi-purpose mechanism, synergies and integration:**

IP proposals should present high quality multi-purpose delivery mechanisms (e.g. aiming at environmental and climate benefits and capacity-building) that make it possible to achieve results in other policy areas<sup>6</sup>, to create synergies with these policies and to integrate environmental and climate action objectives in them.

For example the following aspects may be relevant:

- for IPs dealing with the implementation of PAFs for NATURA 2000, their contribution to other targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy as well as the achievement of ‘good environmental status’ under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and for achieving Water Framework Directive objectives, such as:
  - evaluation, assessment and restoration of ecosystems and their services,
  - increase the contribution of agriculture and forestry to biodiversity,
  - improve the impact of fisheries and of other uses of marine and coastal natural resources on biodiversity,
  - monitor, prevent, eradicate and control Invasive Alien Species
- for IPs dealing with the implementation of River Basin Management Plans, the actions proposed such as targeted afforestation, wetland creation, re-instatement of floodplains will deliver towards good status of inland waters, sequester carbon, reduce nutrient flows to marine waters, reduce flood risk and support improvements in terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.
- for IPs dealing with the implementation of waste management plans and/or waste prevention programmes, their contribution to the objectives set in the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe (COM(2011) 571), the Communication on the Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan (COM/2008/0397) and the Communication on the European Innovation Partnership on Raw Materials (COM(2012) 82) and its Strategic Implementation Plan adopted on 25/09/2013 (1). Where relevant, specific attention to the issue of marine litter is also to be considered.
- for IPs dealing with the implementation of air quality plans their contribution to multiple requirements of the EU Air Quality strategy (including contributions to National Air Pollution Reduction Programmes), to the urban dimension, to energy consumption, transport and to agricultural practice through e.g.:
  - contribution to decreasing concentrations of multiple pollutants (PM10, NO2, O3) at the same time,

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<sup>6</sup> in particular the marine environment in accordance with the objectives of Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19.

- contribution to reaching limit values in regional air quality plans as well as to reaching compliance with the new National Emission reduction commitments at national level at the same time,
- reducing also noise problems by being linked to or integrated in a Sustainable Urban Mobility strategy and/or noise plan,
- encouraging innovative local and regional energy projects addressing air quality PM hotspots in areas with continued high use of coal and biomass burning heating applications,
- promoting innovative and high quality biomass burning applications and their proper use, especially in mountainous regions,
- reducing energy consumption by being linked to or integrated in the national Energy Efficiency Action Plans mentioned in Directive 2012/27/EU,
- supporting the implementation of the UNECE code of Good Practice for reducing emissions from agriculture which should also contribute to minimising the losses of agricultural emissions to water.

Also projects showing synergies with actions financed or submitted for financing under the sub-programme for Climate Actions will be considered for higher scoring, particularly if these synergies are expected to have a positive effect on biodiversity protection.

On the other hand, projects financed under one priority area that might undermine environmental or climate objectives in another priority area will likely receive a lower score unless this impact is clearly explained and justified in the proposal and the possible alternatives and mitigation measures have been correctly foreseen.

Furthermore, all projects will also be evaluated insofar as their contribution to economic and social objectives as well as any other environmental objective beyond those directly targeted by the plan.

#### **Criterion 6 - EU added value: replicability and transferability:**

Replicability and transferability is the potential of the project to be replicated and transferred during and after its implementation. Successful replication and transferability require a strategy including tasks to multiply the impacts of the projects' solutions and mobilise a wider uptake, reaching a critical mass during the project and/or in a short and medium term perspective after the end of the LIFE project. This goes beyond transfer of knowledge and networking, and involves putting the techniques, methods or strategies developed or applied in the project into practice elsewhere.

#### **Criterion 7 - EU added value: other aspects**

- Transnational: Transnational proposals shall be favoured, if transnational cooperation is essential to guarantee the achievement of the project's objectives. On the basis of this criterion, additional points may only be given to a proposal if there is sufficient evidence for an added value of the transnational approach.
- Green procurement: Proposals that foresee a clear delivery mechanism to ensure an extensive application of green procurement concepts will receive a higher scoring.

- Uptake of the results of EU Research and Innovation Programmes: Proposals that foresee to take up the results of environmental and climate-related research and innovation projects financed by Horizon 2020 or by preceding Framework Programmes will receive a higher scoring, if there is sufficient evidence for the added value of this uptake for the project.

### **Conclusion of the Award phase**

For each proposal, the above award criteria will be assessed and scored by two evaluators. On the basis of these two independent assessments a synthesis report will be prepared.

On the basis of the synthesis reports and scores, the final decision on the scores to be awarded to each proposal will be taken during a meeting ("Award Panel") chaired by the Commission and attended by its expert evaluators.

Any proposal receiving a final score below the pass score for any of the Award criteria or a total pass score (for criteria 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) below 55 points will be declared "rejected at the Award phase".

## 5. Set up of the "Preliminary Long List"

The Commission will establish the "**Preliminary Long List**" of proposals to be admitted to revision once the final approval of the scores to be awarded to each proposal in the Award phase has taken place. Besides being based on the scores given to each proposal, this list must take into account the three following conditions set out in the LIFE Regulation:

- *"At least 55% of the budgetary resources allocated to projects supported by way of action grants under the sub-programme for Environment shall be dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity." (Article 9.2)*
- *"The Commission shall ensure geographical balance for IPs by indicatively allocating at least three IP to each Member State, ensuring at least one IP under the sub-programme for environment during the programming period" (Article 19.4)*

For setting up a "**Preliminary Long List**" of LIFE proposals, the following rules will be applied:

- The budget available for IPs for the Environment sub-programme will be allocated taking into account the ratio 55% for Nature and Biodiversity and 45% for the other areas foreseen in the Regulation. Only proposals for IPs for NATURA 2000 will be taken into account for the 55% threshold for "Nature and Biodiversity". In case if it will not be possible to fulfil the 55% rule (e.g. because of lack of eligible proposals) or in case this will be exceeded (e.g. because of lack of eligible or lower quality proposals in areas other than Natura 2000) this will be reflected in the parallel evaluation exercise for the other types of action grants in order to ensure that overall the 55-45% balance will be respected.
- In order to ensure a transparent and simple system to apply the geographical balance system, transnational proposals for IPs will be attributed to the Member State where the coordinating beneficiary is legally registered.
- In the process described hereafter, the EU financial contribution for a given proposal would normally be based on the EU co-financing amount requested for the project. However if the requested EU co-financing rate (in %) is higher than the allowed maximum rate according to the rules set in the LIFE Regulation and in the LIFE guidelines for applicants, the EU financial contribution to the project will be re-calculated on the basis of the maximum allowed EU co-financing rate.

The mechanism will work as follows:

1. Proposals ranked by quality (i.e. their Award score) in support of the conservation of nature and biodiversity will be first listed. This process continues until approximately 55% of the total budget for IPs is consumed.
2. Proposals (in any area) are then listed based on the sub-programme geographical distribution approach, i.e. proposals coming from Member States that have not yet received any financing for IPs under the sub-programme for Environment listing them in order of quality.

3. Proposals (in any area) are then listed based on the overall geographical distribution approach, i.e. proposals coming from Member States that have not yet received two IPs under the sub-programme for Environment listing them in order of quality; nor three IPs under the whole LIFE programme listing them in order of quality.
4. Further proposals (in any area) are then added to the list ranked by quality. This process stops when 130% of the available budget has been used.

Only the projects on this preliminary longlist representing up to 130% of the available budget will enter the revision phase.

In cases of proposals with equal scores and priority in the list, priority will be given to proposals targeting the thematic area with the lowest number of financed IPs (this verification will also consider the proposals retained in the preliminary long-list).

## **6. Revision**

The aim of the revision phase is to clarify, for all proposals listed on the preliminary long list, all open questions regarding feasibility, cost-effectiveness and eligibility of individual actions, compliance with the LIFE Regulation and the conditions set in the Grant Agreement, etc.

During the revision phase, the Commission may ask the applicant to provide further details about particular aspects of the proposal and/or to introduce modifications or improvements to the original proposal. The coordinating beneficiary may also be asked to delete certain actions and/or to reduce the project budget, the EU financial contribution and/or the EU co-financing rate to the project.

The Commission will send a letter to the coordinating beneficiary with all revision questions and inviting him to a revision meeting.

The scope of the revision meeting are the following:

- Discussing with the applicant every question or suggested change raised by the Commission in its letter.
- Agreeing with the applicant on the changes necessary to the proposal.
- Explaining to the applicant the following steps of the process
- Replying to any question the applicant may wish to raise

The following shall attend the meeting:

- Applicant - The representative of the coordinating beneficiary, the person who has drafted the full proposal and the person who will be responsible for the overall project supervision and the person who will be responsible for the administration and finance (if already identified). One representative for each associated beneficiary (associated beneficiary may decide to delegate the coordinating beneficiary to represent them). The travel and subsistence costs for 5 participants will be considered eligible as part of the project budget in case the proposal is financed. If the proposal is not financed the corresponding costs will be covered by the applicant and/or the other beneficiaries. The applicant may

decide to include more than five people in their delegation, but the additional cost shall be covered by own means.

- Commission - The technical desk officer responsible for the evaluation and revision of the proposal; the policy officer from the relevant policy unit; a financial desk officer.

Other participants that may attend:

- The national contact point delegated for this purpose by the LIFE committee member. The cost for the participation shall be covered by own means,
- The management of the LIFE units,
- Any additional participants the Commission may deem necessary for advisory or support purpose.

Revision meetings will always be held in Brussels at the Commission premises and a session will usually last one day.

The Commission will prepare minutes of the session and a copy will be sent to the applicant for comments and approval.

At the end of each session, the applicants who confirmed their intention to submit a revised full proposal will be invited to do so by way of a formal invitation to submit the revised full proposal by a fixed deadline. This invitation will include the full set of instructions concerning all modifications agreed.

Applicants should not introduce any modifications to their proposal other than those agreed and requested by the Commission.

It should be noted here that a revision letter sent out to an applicant with questions or requests for modifying the proposal does not entail, on behalf of the European Commission, any commitment to a definitive funding of the proposal. Furthermore, on the basis of the replies received, the Commission may still decide to reduce the proposed budget or even exclude a proposal from financing.

By the end of the revision phase, all projects retained are expected to be fully coherent with all technical and financial requirements of the LIFE Regulation and the conditions set in the Model Grant Agreement for LIFE Integrated Projects.

The applicants of the revised proposals will then be informed about the outcome of the revision phase.

## **7. Set up of the "Final Short and Reserve Lists"**

Once the revision of proposals has been concluded, a **"final short list"** of LIFE proposals for IPs to be funded and a **"final reserve list"** of proposals will be set up.

These short and reserve lists will take into account possible budget reductions and/or the removal of proposals from the previous long and reserve lists as a result of the revision. It is therefore possible that one or more projects that were previously in the bottom 30% of the preliminary shortlist might be taken on board in the final short list.

The procedure applied is identical to the steps (1) to (4) described in chapter 5, except that the shortlist encompasses 100% and the reserve list an additional 20% of the available budget for IPs.

The applicants on the "**final short list**" falling within 100% of the available budget will be asked to provide 3 identical paper copies of the final revised proposals. Applicants should not introduce any unilateral modifications at all to the revised proposal after the conclusion of the revision phase. At this stage, all commitments from associated beneficiaries/co-financers must be fully confirmed in the revised forms.

Proposals that were eventually not listed or are listed in the final reserve list will be informed at this stage.

## **8. Grant attribution**

Based on the final short-list, grants will be awarded following the procedures established in the Financial Regulation and budgetary and legal commitments will be established for each project.

Each successful applicant will then receive the grant agreement for signature. Once the grant is signed by both parties it may be considered as legally valid and the first pre-financing payment can be released.

Projects on the reserve list may only be retained for co-financing if there is an unexpected withdrawal of a shortlisted proposal or in case the Commission decides to exclude a short-listed proposal for valid reasons. This will only be possible if the withdrawal or cancellation of the grant takes place at least one month before the end of the year in which the award attribution was taken.

#### IV. DETAILED EVALUATION FORMS

<i>Opening (for Stage 1 and 2)</i>	
<b>Opening criteria</b>	
1. The proposal reached the Commission by the set deadline?	<i>Yes/No</i>
2. The relevant LIFE application forms been used?	<i>Yes/No</i>
3. The relevant plan and financial plan have been annexed	<i>Yes/No</i>
4. The proposal has been sent in PDF format using the appropriate support (together with the financial forms in Excel for Stage 2.)	<i>Yes/No</i>
<b>Admissibility and exclusion (for Stage 1 and 2)</b>	
<b>Admissibility criteria</b>	
1. The signed declaration forms are completed and signed	<i>Yes/No</i>
2. The summary in English has been provided	<i>Yes/No</i>
3. All relevant forms and fields have been completed	<i>Yes/No</i>
4. The coordinating beneficiary is legally registered in the EU	<i>Yes/No</i>
5. The mandatory financial annexes have been provided if required (only applicable to Stage 2)	<i>Yes/No</i>
6. The mandatory "Public body declaration" has been provided if required (only applicable to Stage 2)	<i>Yes/No</i>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	
7. All beneficiaries completed the declaration of compliance concerning the exclusion criteria	<i>Yes/No</i>
<b>Technical selection (for Stage 1 and 2)</b>	
<b>Technical reliability of the project participants</b>	
1. Are the beneficiaries technically reliable?	<i>Yes / No</i>
<b>Financial selection (for Stage 2 only)</b>	
<b>Financial reliability of the project participants</b>	
1. Are the beneficiaries financially reliable?	<i>Yes / No</i>
<b>Eligibility (for Stage 1 and 2)</b>	
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	
1. The IP covers a large territorial area (including multi-city for IP on air quality)	<i>Yes/No</i>
2. The IP mobilises at least one other fund for complementary activities	<i>Yes/No</i>
3. The IP involves the key stakeholders	<i>Yes/No</i>
4. The IP aims at the implementation of one of the listed and adopted environmental plans	<i>Yes/No</i>



<b><i>Award phase</i></b>
<b><i>1. Technical coherence and quality</i></b>
In evaluating this criterion, the following points will be considered:
1. Is the pre-operational context well described (problems and threats, status of preparatory activities, authorisations, permits, etc.)?
2. Is there a clear logical link between threats and problems, objectives, actions and expected results?
3. Do the actions clearly state how, where, when and by whom they will be undertaken? Are they properly described and quantified, and is there sufficient information to assess their eligibility? Are adequate maps provided, if relevant?
4. Are the expected results of the project properly described and quantified?
5. Are the project operational and management structures well organised and controlled by the beneficiary? Are the necessary means proposed (equipment, personnel, etc.) for a correct implementation? Is the partnership appropriate / sufficient / competent / coherent for the objectives and actions of the project?
6. Are the lists of deliverable products and milestones comprehensive and coherent with the expected results?
7. Is the time planning realistic (duration of preparatory actions and permit procedures; unfavourable weather conditions, etc.)?
8. Are potential difficulties correctly assessed (feasibility of the actions, potential risks, etc.) and has sufficient preparation been undertaken to pre-empt these, for example through prior stakeholder consultation, a contingency plan, etc.?
9. Are the key stakeholders involved?
10. To what extent are continuity and permanence of the project results ensured in the long term?
11. Will the IP have a long lasting capacity building effect?
<b><i>2. Financial coherence and quality</i></b>
In evaluating this criterion, the following points will be considered:
1. Is the budget consistent with the actions foreseen?
2. Is the budget sufficiently detailed?
3. Is the beneficiaries contribution adequate and in compliance with the applicable rules?
4. Are the personnel costs reasonable and sufficiently detailed?
5. Are the travel and subsistence costs reasonable, sufficiently detailed and correctly allocated?
6. Are the costs for external assistance sufficiently detailed and correctly allocated? If relevant, is the information provided consistent with rules for public tendering?
7. Where costs for external assistance exceed 35% of the total project budget, has a coherent explanation been provided to justify this high level of sub-contracting?
8. Are the costs for durable goods reasonable, sufficiently detailed and correctly allocated? If relevant, are the depreciation rules correctly applied?
9. Are the costs for land purchase, lease and one off compensation payments reasonable and sufficiently detailed? In case of land purchase, has a letter been added from the competent authority or from a registered notary, confirming that the price per hectare is not above the average for this type of land and location? (if not, such a document needs to be provided during revision)
10. Are the costs for Consumables reasonable, sufficiently detailed and correctly allocated?
11. Are the "other costs" reasonable, sufficiently detailed and correctly allocated?
12. Are the overhead costs consistent with the maximum threshold of 7% of total eligible direct costs (excluding land purchase costs) per beneficiary?

13. Does the proposed budget exclude ineligible costs?
14. In cases of civil servant salary costs, has the "+2%" rule been taken into account?
15. Does the project represent good value for money also considering the expected level of implementation of the related plan or strategy?

<b>3. EU added value: Extent and quality of the contribution to the objectives of LIFE</b> In evaluating this criterion, the following points should be taken into account:
1. To what extent does the proposal contribute to one or several general and specific objectives of LIFE? NB This will be measured using the specific aspects applicable to each type of IP.

<b>4. EU added value: Extent and quality of the mobilisation of other funds</b> In evaluating this criterion, the following points should be taken into account:
1. Is a coordination mechanism with other relevant funding mechanisms foreseen/described in the proposal? Is it convincingly explained and likely to deliver effective results?
2. To what extent are other EU (and non-EU) funds mobilised beyond the minimum level for eligibility?
3. Is the functional link between these complementary funds and the IP clear and logical?
4. How sure is it that these complementary funds will be made available, when and to which extent?

<b>5. EU added value: Quality of multi-purpose mechanism, synergies and integration</b> In evaluating this criterion, the following point should be taken into account::
1. Does the proposal foresee a multi-purpose delivery mechanism?
2. Is this mechanism well described and likely to achieve results, create synergies and integration with and into other policy areas? NB This will be measured using the specific aspects applicable to each type of IP.

<b>6. EU added value: Replicability and transferability</b> In evaluating this criterion, the following points should be taken into account:
1. Does the proposal foresee a strategy to ensure that actions and results could be replicated and/or transferred to similar situations?
2. How likely is it that project results may be transferred and replicated during and after the project time?

<b>7. EU added value: Other aspects</b> In evaluating this criterion, the following points should be taken into account:
1. <u>Transnational</u> : does the proposal foresee and clearly justify a transnational cooperation that is essential to guarantee the achievement of project's objectives?
2. <u>Green procurement</u> : does the proposal foresee a clear delivery mechanism to ensure an extensive application of green procurement?
3. <u>Uptake of results of EU Research and Innovation Programmes</u> : does the proposal foresee taking up results from projects financed by Horizon 2020 or preceding Framework Programmes in a way that this would represent an added value for the project?