



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

Potential LIFE+ Applicants Could Face Exclusion Under Commission Implementation Proposals

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Just as the way has finally been cleared for the much-delayed LIFE+ programme to be launched this summer, the Commission has rolled yet more boulders in the path of would-be applicants. Under Commission proposals, project promoters would need to find as much as £1 million (€1.5 million) in match funding by November this year for their applications even to pass the first hurdle.

LIFE+ is now expected formally to enter into force in June following the deal hammered out between the European Parliament and the Council in a conciliation meeting at the end of March¹. It will have a budget of €1.9 billion over the period 2007-2013.

MEPs succeeded in blocking the decentralisation of most of the programme to the Member States, ensuring that the Commission will continue to have the final say (as now) in selecting successful projects. They also ensured that at least 50 per cent of the LIFE+ budget will be ring-fenced for the Nature and Biodiversity component of the programme, and that at least 15 per cent should be set aside for transnational, rather than purely national, projects.

DG Environment originally proposed the decentralisation of the programme to escape the administrative burden of selecting and monitoring hundreds of individual LIFE projects. One major consequence of the conciliation agreement is that the Commission is now proposing to support only a small number of very large projects to minimise these administration costs. At a recent meeting of Eurosite in Poland, the head of DG Environment's LIFE Unit, Philip Owen, was insistent that the minimum EU contribution to LIFE+ projects should be set at €1.5 million. With most projects receiving only up to 50 per cent of eligible costs from the EU, this means that total project costs will need to be at least €3 million, with up to €1.5 million (£1 million) having to be found from other sources.

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The first annual call for proposals is expected to be issued on 15 September 2007, with a 1 December deadline for their submission to the Member States for subsequent transmission to the Commission by the end of the year (see Table 1). Even with a smaller number of large-scale projects, resource constraints in DG Environment mean that the first grant agreements are unlikely to be signed before December 2008, almost two years after LIFE+ should have begun.

The application timetable means that organisations wishing to apply for LIFE+ money under this first call will have about six months from now to design a sizeable project, and to secure very substantial match funding. This is likely to prove difficult, if not impossible, for many organisations.

The Commission's proposals for implementing LIFE+ are expected to be sent to the Member States this month, with bilateral meetings scheduled for June and July. The details of the Commission's implementation package will then have to be agreed by the LIFE+ Regulatory Committee comprising Member State representatives. This will meet formally for the first time probably in July. Participants at the Eurosite meeting have already proposed a joint approach to DG Environment to press for a lower minimum project size, and the meeting in July is likely to be a major focus of their efforts.

Table 1: LIFE+ 2007 Call for Proposals Timetable

Start	End	Activity
	May 07	Despatch of Commission's implementation 'package' to MSs
June 07	July 07	Bilateral meetings on package
June		Entry into force of LIFE+ Regulation
15.09.07		Publication of Call for Proposals
1.12.07		Deadline for submission of project proposals to Member States
	31.12.07	Deadline for MS to send proposals to Commission
1.12.07	15.02.08	MS may comment on proposals
1.01.08	31.07.08	Eligibility, evaluation and revision of proposals
15.08.08	31.08.08	Committee (management) meeting
1.12.08	31.12.08	Commission signs grant agreements

Reference

1. The unofficial text of the conciliation agreement on LIFE+ can be found at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplusunofficial.pdf>

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