

Regional Cooperation Project – *Local Deals for Better Water Management*

In 2000, the EU developed the Water Framework Directive to address water quality and usage across Europe. The aim of the directive was to achieve ‘a *good ecological status of Europe’s waters by 2015*’. This directive, combined with the cross compliance regime within the CAP, has to date proved largely ineffective in achieving a satisfactory improvement in water quality and use.

Although public policy instruments have their place in improving the situation, they do not seem to be sufficient in motivating private actors to bear the necessary costs and actions for the implementation of the WFD. Furthermore, financial means of support are not increasing while the demands on water users, such as farmers, are growing.

If the WFD objectives are to be met, there needs to be close cooperation and participation of all major stakeholders in a water catchment area. It is essential that the stakeholders who have the specific applied knowledge of the situation are fully involved in determining the best way to address water quality. Secondly, the lack of financial resources needs to be addressed if clear progress is to be made.

With this in mind, local partnerships or collaborations among water users has been identified as having the potential to play an important role in providing the necessary incentives for good water management. Indeed, local partnerships can motivate the necessary stakeholders to work together and engage in sustainable water management while bridging the funding gap (e.g. a water company that remunerates a farmer for ensuring good water quality provides a mutual benefit).

EWS and RISE see these local partnerships as the possible solution to the lack of progress in improving Europe’s water and have launched a project entitled, ‘Local deals for better water management’. **Local deals are when water users in a river basin come together to find mutually beneficial solutions to sustainable water management.**

Over the past few years, these kinds of deals have begun to develop in isolated cases across Europe (i.e. in the form of contracts for services, or public-private initiatives). However, so far there has been no systematic approach and data is currently sparse. If we are to be able to promote the successful take up of local deals to contribute to the WFD’s goal, we need to be able to catalogue the learning and best practise of ongoing projects.

Together with EWS, RISE has launched the first stage of the local deals project. In the initial phase the focus will be on identifying on-going local partnership projects and liaising with the managers and stakeholders to identify the key elements which have led to their success or failure. A focus will be on the primary challenges they have faced and how they were overcome. The information will be collated into a best practise document which will be part of an information dissemination package that will be rolled out to current and potential local deal project managers.

Both RISE and EWS envisage the need for local deals that will:

- Bring together individual water users;
- Improve water management at the catchment level;
- Create *win-win* situations with clear benefits for **all** water users (whether it is lowering costs or creating other direct knock-on advantages), whilst at the same time offering public goods benefits in the long term;
- Unite existing regulatory frameworks (top-down) with voluntary initiatives (bottom-up) such as certification (e.g. EWS);
- Combine the best elements of existing contracts for services or other best practice partnerships.
- Contain extension services including education and training, knowledge sharing and information provision to the public.

The project is estimated to run for three-four years and will include three phases. The information collection phase identified here (phase 1) will be completed in the first year with elements of the information dissemination extending over years 2 and 3.

The timing for changing governance and getting farmers in the spotlight is optimal: The CAP reform calls for the clear convergence of the WFD objectives with those of the CAP and for gradual inclusion of the WFD objectives which create specific obligations at farm level in the cross compliance regime.

Therefore RISE and the EWP are working together to identify and develop learning from current local deals to support and encourage their uptake across Europe.

If you are involved in this type of project, or would like to know more about our work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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