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Background

Please find attached the document "A Platform for Agri-Environment Cooperation in the BSR" by WWF.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the document.

A Platform for Agri-Environment Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

Background

The Baltic Sea is one of the Worlds most polluted inland seas. Eutrophication is seen as the single biggest threat to the health of the sea and the agriculture sector accounts for around 50 % of the sources of eutrophication. This means that farmers and farming also holds a major part of the solution to the problem.

The agriculture sector has over the last few years had the opportunity to exchange experiences through the Interreg programmes Baltic Compass, Baltic Deal and Baltic Manure as well as through other initiatives, including the WWF Baltic Sea Farmer of the Year Award.

These projects are generally short-lived and the positive networking effects between farmers, advisors and environmental organisations in and between the countries around the Baltic sooner or later come to an end.

Relating to this context, WWF arranged two special seminars in Latvia 2012 and Estonia 2013 with representatives for Baltic Environmental NGOs, specialists, agriculture advisory services and officials from Ministries and Boards of Agriculture. The goal of these two seminars were to exchange experiences, ideas and to discuss issues connected to the development of new Rural Development Programmes (RDP) and particularly Agri-Environment Measures of the Baltic Sea EU Member States.

The two seminars were followed by a larger seminar in Vilnius in November 2013, in connection with the EUSBSR Annual Forum, where participants from the whole region came together “to share and discuss experiences and best environmental practices within the agriculture sector in the Baltic Sea region with the aim to reduce nutrient runoff and other negative impacts from agriculture.” The seminar discussed the need for improved cooperation in the region and agreed the following recommendation:

“That stakeholders work together to create a cross-sectoral, cross-border Platform to act as a democratic forum for stakeholders from the environmental and agricultural sectors in the Baltic Sea Region to share and discuss experiences and best environmental practices with the aim to reduce nutrient runoff from agriculture and to strengthen cooperation between agricultural and environmental sectors in the region through dialogue.”

In early 2014, WWF and a number of partner organizations secured seed funding from the Swedish Institute to cover an initial project to explore ways to establish such a Platform. This document is a status update on the results of this project so far.

Activities so far

Three workshops and one core team meeting have been held to discuss the creation of a Platform for Agri-Environment Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region:

- WS1 in Riga on 17-18 June with stakeholders from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
- WS2 in Stockholm on 29 August with stakeholders from Sweden
- WS3 in Warsaw on 4 September with stakeholders from Poland
- Core team meeting in Warsaw 24 September

The earlier workshops fed into those held later and all centred around three main areas:

- Subject, Goals and Activities of the Platform
- Organization of the Platform
- Timeline and Funding of the Platform

The rest of this document is based on the conclusions from the workshops and the core team meeting.



Subject, Goals and Activities

Over the workshops, there was an overwhelming consensus on the need and usefulness of increased and organized cooperation on agri-environment issues in the region. A Platform along the lines described below was considered a good way to facilitate such cooperation.

The overall subject for the Platform is the impact of agriculture on the Baltic Sea, with a focus on reducing eutrophication.

The goals of the Platform are to:

- Create and facilitate a dialogue between Agri-Environment stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region
- Act as a bridge between completed and existing Agri-Environment projects to maintain knowledge and networks from these
- Share and leverage information from projects, research and meetings – within the Platform but also to the public, decision makers and stakeholders outside the Platform
- Establish best practices and promote technical solutions and innovative measures to address Agri-environment issues in the region

Suggested activities of the Platform are:

- To organize the Greener Agriculture for a Bluer Baltic Sea (GABBS) conference – which could act as a hub for many other suggested activities
- Use website, newsletters, brochures, videos, seminars and other relevant communication tools to share information from projects, research and meetings
- Run the Baltic Sea Farmer of the Year Award as an annual activity
- Facilitate cooperation between model farms
- Coordinate regional skill-sharing and training programs

Two important remarks:

- The Platform should neither be project driving or nor project driven. It needs to be more long-term and should rather be an umbrella for relevant projects in the region; acting as a link between ongoing projects but also pick up where projects end, and ensure that action points and lessons learned from projects are carried forward.
- While it's important that the Platform does not become a political body, it should maintain an open and active link to policy-makers, e.g. through the active participation of ministries and other political bodies. Policy statements or recommendations can be developed by ad-hoc constellations of Platform members, but not by the Platform itself.

Organization

The Platform is being developed by a core group with participants from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden (Annex 1). The Platform should involve all countries around the Baltic Sea, and partner organizations in the countries currently missing in the core group (Denmark, Finland, Germany and Russia) will be approached.

It is recommended that the Platform be formed around a jointly agreed document, a kind of “charter”, that would establish the conditions and basic principles of the Platform.

Hosting mechanism

It would be favourable if the Platform could be “owned” by civil society. A joint ownership of the Platform by a farmers’ organization and an environmental NGO has emerged as the most popular idea for a hosting mechanism. Specifically, the Baltic Sea Farmers for the Environment (BFFE) and WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme (BEP), including their respective partner organizations, were suggested. Such solution would be civil society driven; ensure participation from the whole region; and include stakeholders from both the agriculture and environment side. This option is currently being explored and further developed, to assess its viability.

The Platform will need some sort of board or steering committee, possibly consisting of representatives of the hosting organisations. It will also need a small secretariat. The size and duties of the secretariat need to be further developed.

Members of the Platform

The following should be invited to join the Platform:

- Farming sector (both individual farmers/farms and farmers’ organisations)
- Environmental organisations
- Advisory services
- Scientific institutions
- Ministries, agricultural agencies, regional organisations and institutions
- Agri-business sector (both individual businesses and representative organizations)

All members of the Platform will be free to join and leave as they wish.

Timeline and Funding

The current seed funding from the Swedish Institute (SI) will cover costs for continued development of the Platform until March 2015.

Ideally, the Platform will eventually have a secure and stable long-term funding mechanism, but it's not realistic to expect that it can be established in the short-term. Therefore, the next step is to secure project funding to cover the next steps in the build-up of the Platform. Ideally, this funding should last until a long-term solution has been established. This is expected to take somewhere between three and six years.

Possible funding sources are currently being explored and include the following:

- *EU Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014-2020*
The call for concept notes opens 2 December and closes 2 February. A separate call for clustering of related projects will be announced at the end of 2015.
- *European Commission: Grants for information measures relating to CAP*
The call for applications (for the period May 2015 - 30 April 2016) closes 5 January 2015.
- *Transnational component of the RDP*
- *EU LIFE*
- *Private foundations including Baltic 2020 and Zennström Philanthropies*



Annex 1. Core team and Contact Information

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