



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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"I/A" ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: European Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 15/2013 "Has the Environment component of the LIFE programme been effective?"
- Adoption of Council conclusions

1. On 21 January 2014, the Council received the Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 15/2013 on "Has the Environment component of the LIFE programme been effective?" (6091/14). The Committee of the Permanent Representatives instructed the Working Party on Environment (WPE) to examine the report in accordance with the Council conclusions on this matter (7515/00 + COR 1).
2. At its meeting on 11 March 2014 the WPE examined the report after a presentation of its main findings by the representatives of the Court of Auditors. On 31 March 2014, WPE considered the draft Council conclusions prepared by the Presidency (8026/2/14 REV 2). A revised draft of the Council Conclusions was later circulated in the light of the discussion and further comments received, and eventually agreed by all delegations, through an informal silence procedure. The text as agreed is set out in the Annex to this note.

3. The Committee of the Permanent Representatives is therefore invited to submit to the Council the draft conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note for adoption as an "A" item on the agenda of one of its next meetings.
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**European Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 15/2013
"Has the Environment component of the LIFE programme been effective?"**

- draft Council conclusions -

THE COUNCIL

1. WELCOMES the Court of Auditors' Special Report No 15/2013 on the effectiveness of the environment component of the LIFE programme;
2. UNDERLINES that LIFE has played an important role in the Union's environment policy and provided added value by supporting its implementation; in this context, also STRESSES that LIFE remains the only Union's financial instrument dedicated to this policy;
3. NOTES that the Court's audit focused on projects funded between 2005 and 2010 and was based on, amongst others, on-the-spot visits to twenty-five selected projects in five Member States among the largest beneficiaries of the LIFE programme;
4. FURTHER NOTES the Court's main recommendations that:
 - a) the Multiannual work programmes, foreseen in the new LIFE programme (2014-2020), should restrict eligible applications to limited strategic priorities and fixed for a number of years;
 - b) indicative national allocations for traditional projects should be ended while keeping a geographical balance for integrated projects;
 - c) there is a need to improve the quality and transparency of the selection process by the Commission, more specifically, to improve the project selection evaluation forms and to provide separate assessments and scores for key aspects of projects such as their innovative and demonstrative character, the dissemination of results and potential for replication;

- d) the Commission should improve its programme management tools and introduce adequate, relevant, accepted, credible, easy and robust common output and result indicators as well as follow-up information at project level;
 - e) the Commission should make better use of information collected during the monitoring phase in order to improve its assessment of the reasonableness of claimed personnel costs; and
 - f) focus on the dissemination, sustainability and replication of LIFE projects should be increased.
5. CONSIDERS that most of the Court's recommendations have been largely addressed, from a legislative perspective, in the new LIFE Programme for 2014 - 2020 ¹;
6. ACKNOWLEDGES the need to prioritise the available funds under the LIFE programme, but also UNDERLINES the need to provide the necessary flexibility to support the key priorities of all Member States and to take into account the wide range of environmental issues;
7. CALLS UPON the Commission to take into account the Court of Auditors' recommendations in its future management and implementation of the LIFE programme, and in particular to:
- a) improve the quality and transparency of the selection process;
 - b) provide better feedback to applicants on significant shortcomings in their project application which led to an insufficient score and on the key project aspects identified in the Court's Special report, such as dissemination, sustainability and replication, so as to contribute to the enhanced effectiveness of the overall programme; and
 - c) enhance the opportunity for the applicants of eligible projects to respond.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1293/13 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/07.

8. CONSIDERS important that in future audits the Court takes into account a wider choice of Member States to gain a more representative understanding of the geographical and administrative diversity of the systems and approaches, including their strengths and weaknesses, applied throughout the Union; ALSO ENCOURAGES the Court to carry out future audits before key stages in the implementation of the programme.
