

LIFE III, financial instrument for environment: actions after 31.12.1999 (repeal. Regulation (EEC) No 1973/92)

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This report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council deals with the mid-term review of Regulation 1655/2000/EC (LIFE). 2001 and 2002 were dedicated to improving the management of LIFE by establishing mechanisms and adopting working methods which reduced a significant burden from the past (reduced the number of projects which were finished but not closed and the amount of outstanding commitments) and helped improve the implementation of ongoing projects. The financial implementation of the instrument was improved at the same time. At the end of 2002, after the reorganisation, management capacities were freed up to strengthen the policy on communicating and using the results as it was first necessary to ensure the best possible management procedure for selecting and implementing projects. The LIFE III programme is now well underway. According to the results of the external evaluation, it is a useful programme for implementing Community environment policy. It would be desirable to continue with a specific instrument for the environment, but several adjustments should be made in order to: simplify its management; improve its focus on the priorities of the sixth environment action programme and improve the use and dissemination of the results. This evaluation relates to the administrative operation of the instrument and its contribution to Community environment policy. It is based on the Commission's presentation of the statistical information available and on the concrete results of ongoing projects. This evaluation is backed up by an evaluation carried out by an external consultant in July 2003. More specifically, these conclusions were drawn from the internal evaluation and analysis as well as from the recommendations of the external study. - The management of LIFE should be simplified, in particular the selection procedure which is still very laborious. The monitoring of projects also creates a very heavy administrative burden. The human resources employed by the Commission for these operations would be better used if they spent more time disseminating and using the results to improve the environment in the European Union. - It therefore seems appropriate to review the existing selection and management procedures and examine ways of simplifying them without reducing their reliability or efficiency. - The number of innovative projects should be limited (favouring programmes which bring together several national or transnational projects thus ensuring the creation of networks from the design stage). This option would combine the advantages of more decentralised management with better dissemination and use of results. - For LIFE-Environment, launching preparatory actions (see above) could also contribute to strengthening the programme approach and simplifying central administrative management. - LIFE-Nature has still only covered a small part of the network to introduce the Natura 2000 management approach. The positive evaluation of the programme suggests that it should be continued on the same lines. During a short transition period, it is not necessary to amend the Regulation. However: - the criteria for selecting projects should be adapted, without requiring a revision of Article 2 of the LIFE Regulation, in order to promote projects which have: - the greatest knock-on effect and a wide geographical coverage (launch of regional or international management plans), - an increased training capacity in order to ensure subsequent monitoring, and - a network effect (strengthening of Coop projects). Finally the dissemination and use of results should be improved. _ The potential of LIFE-Environment has not yet been fully utilised. The current Regulation could be better used by promoting programmes which are preparatory to the development of new Community actions and instruments in accordance with the priorities defined in the sixth environment action programme. The current demonstration projects concern too many issues, which complicates the task of selection and does not make it easy to evaluate or make rational use of the results. - It is important to limit the field of eligible projects to issues where the need is greatest by launching calls for proposals which are more targeted in terms of current political priorities. This possibility is already offered under the guidelines but has not been used until now. - The innovation criterion should be better defined and concern only

innovative technologies and not the transfer of existing technologies which should be covered by other financial instruments which are more suitable than LIFE. - LIFE-Third Countries can also be continued in its current form whilst strengthening action to support the preparation of projects. - For the three thematic areas of LIFE, more use should be made of the results, particularly by increasing communication and networking. Increased financial resources and possibly the help of external experts should be foreseen. The Commission's conclusion, supported by the external evaluation, is that: - LIFE is a useful instrument and continuing it is justified; - Efforts relating to the organisation and management of the programme undertaken since the start of LIFE III should be continued; - The potential of LIFE-Environment should be fully exploited in the context of the sixth environment action programme; - More use should be made of the results to further sustainable development. It is therefore proposed to renew the Regulation for a period of three years, taking account of the improvements identified during the evaluation. The renewal should take account of the need for continuity and also establish the transition to the new Financial Perspective after 2006.