

D7.3 Report on 2 NGO training sessions and 3 roundtable discussions in countries where “projects of common interest” will be implemented

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Report on training events for NGOs and Roundtable discussions

BirdLife organised two workshops aiming to build capacity among NGOs for constructive engagement with TSOs in grid planning and projects.

Training event for BirdLife Partners (UK, May 14 2015).

Representatives of Partner organisations attended from the following nations: Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany (2), Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, UK (3). In addition three staff attended from the BirdLife Europe Secretariat and one from the BirdLife International Secretariat. BESTGRID representatives from the TSOs National grid and Elia also attended and gave presentation.

Ivan Scrase (RSPB) opened with a presentation on why and how BirdLife works with industry and policy makers to influence European grid policies and plans, and explaining the BESTGRID project's aims to bring NGOs and grid operators together for better practice on the ground. Willem van Den Bossche then provided more detail on the work of the BirdLife Partnership to promote safeguards for nature in grid development, working with industry and with international conventions. Aida Kowalska (BirdLife International) then went into more detail about ways in which BirdLife partners can engage with grid planning and development at various stages in the process, drawing on BirdLife International's work in the Middle East and North Africa as a case study. This began to explain the value of early 'upstream' engagement, for example in developing 'sensitivity maps' that show where vulnerable species are located that might be affected by power line development.

Ali Rood (National Grid) then explained how National Grid have worked with stakeholders in WP6 to develop guidelines for successful public engagement and accelerated permitting in the marine environment. Jeroen Mentens (Elia) then reported on Elia's work in WP3, focusing on the Stevin case study and the process of strategic environmental assessment used in planning the power line route and technology options. Sarah Lee (RSPB casework team) then reported on lessons learned from the RSPB's experience engaging with grid projects in the UK, based on research findings delivered earlier in the BESTGRID project to inform National Grid's work in WP6.

The attention then turned to the contributions BirdLife's partners have made as subcontractors in the BESTGRID project. Eric Neuling (NABU/ BirdLife Germany) reported on their experience working with TenneT and 50 Hertz on impact mitigation and habitat enhancement in Germany. Cristina Sut (SOR/ BirdLife Romania) spoke via Skype about work with grid operators in Romania and the outcomes of the BESTGRID roundtable in Bucharest (see below). Tomaž Jančar (DOPPS/ BirdLife Slovenia) provided a similar account of experiences in Slovenia.

In the final session the participants split into two break out groups, with one discussing the BirdLife BESTGRID 'guidelines' / 'handbook', and the other discussing BirdLife Europe's policy position on 'birds and power lines' dating from 2008. The TSO representatives provided very useful advice on how to make the handbook useful for industry as well as NGO and public audiences. In the other break out group a decision was taken to update the BirdLife policy position to better reflect our growing focus on electricity transmission and the links to renewables delivery (earlier work having mainly focused on the distribution networks, due to the bird electrocution risks in those networks).

The workshop was judged to be very useful for the BirdLife partners present. The BirdLife International representative, in particular, was very positive about the partnership working approach, and has begun promoting the BESTGRID approach in her work programme in the

Mediterranean region. Ali Rood (National Grid) wrote after the workshop: “I thought it was good opportunity to hear from other experiences and I got a lot out of it. I thought it was interesting how the same concerns were being raised.” The decision to review the BirdLife Europe policy position on power line development to better reflect our work in BESTGRID is a significant outcome. A revised policy position is expected to be in place by the end of 2015, and will then guide how Partners in every European country engages in grid-related development drawing on lessons from BESTGRID.

Workshop for environmental/ conservation NGOs (Brussels, 18 June 2015).

This workshop brought together representatives of major Brussels-based environmental NGOs to share experiences working on energy infrastructure policy and with grid operators, and to discuss ‘what more can NGOs do to make grid development work for climate and nature?’ Fourteen people participated, representing Germanwatch, Climate Action Network, European Environment Bureau, E3G, IEW, ABSL Solon, CEE Bankwatch, the RSPB and BirdLife. The format was short presentations by NGO experts followed by action-oriented discussion on how NGOs might develop their engagement more deeply in that area.

Gerard Jadoul and Simon de Voghel (ABSL Solon) opened with a fascinating and inspiring account of their work with Elia and RTE (TSO in France) in the LIFE Elia project on enhancing biodiversity in power line corridors. Under normal operations where power lines pass through forested areas TSOs destroy all vegetation in a 50 m swathe under the line on a three-yearly cycle to prevent trees growing too tall and to enable access. By growing short trees on either side of the line this swathe was reduced to a width of 10m, creating significant new habitats for native plants and improving habitat connectivity for butterflies and other animals. One important insight from their work was that this approach not only benefits wildlife: it saves grid operators money too. Their calculations suggest corridor management with biodiversity enhancements costs 2-5 times less than the conventional approach over a 30 year period.

Jean-Francois Fauconnier (Climate Action Network – Europe) then introduced the topic of “effective governance for post 2020 grid and renewable energy targets”. The discussion focused on whether the EU’s 10% interconnection target by 2020 (and 15% by 2030) was based on a clear rationale, and how well they serve the aims of renewable integration. Concerns were raised that multiple targets (for renewable, climate, energy efficiency, industry, in addition to interconnection) might conflict with or undermine one another. Participants also considered whether the model for regional cooperation developed under the TEN-E PCI Regulation provided a model for cooperation in the delivery of non-binding renewable targets after 2020.

Manon Dufour (E3G) led a discussion on ‘engagement with ENTSO-E and the EU institutions’ on grid development policy and planning. Her talk developed some useful and interesting insights into the technical yet highly political nature of the policy areas involved, the constraints all parties work within, and how NGOs who engage in this area are perceived by the institutions involved. This was a useful reminder for the participants that NGOs are just one interest group with whom the institutions have to engage, and one with particular behaviours and characteristics that shape how our messages and inputs are received.

Roland Joebstl (European Environment Bureau) then introduced the topic of “PCIs: how can the NGOs have more influence and organise to provide input on projects?”. Every 2 years the Regional groups formed under the TEN-E Regulation consult on a list of candidate projects of common interest (PCIs). NGOs such as BirdLife, EEB, WWF and Bankwatch have attempted to respond to these consultations, to raise concerns about potential environmental risks that certain projects could create. However it has proven very difficult to gather information from our own national partners for a number of reasons, such as their difficulty finding sufficient information about the projects to form a view, and the fact that many projects are at a very early planning stage and therefore Partners may not see the urgency to begin considering impacts on nature and the environment.

However as the BESTGRID project has repeatedly shown, earlier engagement enables more effective participation and reduces the risk of later conflict with environmental objectives. Suggestions for improving NGO engagement on candidate PCIs included requesting more detailed information in the 'project fiches' and implementation reports, and access to maps showing potential coincidence of proposed power lines with protected areas.

Antina Sander (Renewables Grid Initiative) then asked "how can we set up a fund to support NGO engagement with grid projects", i.e. how to continue enabling NGOs to engage in ways pioneered in the BESTGRID project beyond the 2012-2015 funding period. This led into a useful discussion of potential funding sources, the types of TSO-NGO engagement that should be supported, issues of reputational risk and how to approach foundations that might support such a fund.

Alexander Al Alaoui (Germanwatch) presented the main findings and recommendations of the Germanwatch BESTGRID report "Public participation and transparency in power grid planning". This provided insights into the various decision making stages and the kinds of participation that are possible and effective at each. At the level of 'needs assessment', where the case for building or upgrading a power line is made, there is little scope for meaningful public participation. Then later when permits have been granted stakeholders often want to challenge the 'need case' but the opportunity has passed. However there is an under-used window of opportunity between the needs assessment and detailed project planning. This is a phase in which public interest (or awareness) is generally low, but opportunities to influence the project are relatively good as many decisions have yet to be taken. Participants discussed the importance of improving 'upstream' engagement at these earlier planning stages, as a way to improve projects and avoid the risk of conflicts and delays at the point when construction is about to start.

Valérie Xhonneux (IEW - Fédération Inter-Environnement Wallonie) spoke on the subject of "cost, nature, health and landscape: communicating and managing trade offs". This drew on her experience working with Elia in WP3, highlighting the challenges of communicating to stakeholders and the public that there are tensions among the goals pursued by the diverse interests involved, namely low cost, reliability, protecting nature, minimising landscape impacts and protecting public health. Participants provided valuable insights from their own work on how to address these trade offs. A key consideration raised was that 'low cost' today may imply externalities that impose costs later, for example as a result of climate change or harm to ecosystem services. Another idea was to try to reframe the choices open to stakeholders from one of "this power line or not" to a focus on the future of their region, the values underlying the need for the power line and how these relate to the stakeholder's values.

Kuba Gogolewski (CEE Bankwatch Network) made the last presentation, on "Energy Union plans - opportunity or threat for climate and nature?". He reviewed the 5 'pillars' of the EU Energy Union strategy, namely energy security, the internal market, energy efficiency, decarbonisation and 'research, innovation and competitiveness'. Taken as a package these objectives add up to a promising new thrust to EU climate and energy policy. However Kuba highlighted that there is insufficient integration across these pillars, for example with fossil energy subsidies (for security) undermining decarbonisation goals, and failure to address what implications serious efforts to save energy would have for the other pillars. This highlighted a valuable area of analysis that the NGOs could collaborate on developing.

The workshop was very stimulating, and succeeded in highlighting a range of areas in which NGOs could do more to engage with grid development and new ways of approaching the issues and actors involved. Simon de Vogel said "It was a very interesting meeting for us!" and Antina Sander said "I wish I could have stayed longer, I found this was really a good round of discussions."

7.3.2 National roundtable discussion in countries where projects of common interest will be implemented

This series of three roundtables aimed to bring together NGOs, grid industry representatives and authorities to raise awareness of EU grid planning and in particular the PCIs, to enable constructive engagement by NGOs and to promote best practices in public engagement and environmental protection.

Lithuania (April 14 2015)

LOD (BirdLife Lithuania) organised a highly successful one day workshop in Vilnius, attended by a good mix of industry, NGO and government representatives. The LitPol Link PCI project provided an in depth case study for the day. Liutauras Radonikis, Director of LOD, opened the day by explaining the aims of BESTGRID and emphasising the importance for NGOs to understand the importance of power line development for society and that delivery without major impacts on nature is possible through constructive engagement by NGOs.

Ivan Scrase (BirdLife) explained the BESTGRID project in detail and reviewed the ways in which grid development can affect nature and how NGOs are working to minimise risks. Antina Sander (RGI) then went into detail about the lessons for stakeholder engagement learned by the Renewable Grid Initiative through BESTGRID and other work. She drew a useful distinction between public acceptance of a decision on grid development (which may not be achievable) and public acceptance of the legitimacy of the process leading to the decision.

Szymon Czernek, a Polish environmental consultant, then gave a very interesting account of his experience as a contractor advising on environmental impact mitigation on the Polish side of the LitPol Link. In the Elk region, where the interconnector starts, the challenge was finding a route through an area of many lakes and forests, avoiding risks to lesser spotted eagles and storks. The line then has to traverse the Rosputa Valley, which is a very important wetland habitat and the site of intense public protest over planned road building 10 years earlier. Finally the routing had to consider avoiding many national parks in the area near to the border with Lithuania. Szymon reported that cooperation between NGOs and the developers was good at all stages, and the data on biodiversity available was good quality. These factors were key to a successful project. Local people and wildlife groups provided valuable local knowledge for the project, for example on the nesting sites of eagles.

However most people who will be affected by the new line remained unaware and unengaged. Szymon recommended that the developer should in future hold local meetings in potentially affected communities before planning commences (at the EIA 'screening' stage) to avoid misunderstandings and protests at a later stage. He also highlighted that protecting nature and engagement with the public would be assisted by the production of good practice guidelines endorsed by well known NGOs such as OTOP (BirdLife Poland). He also argues that planning would be more efficient and more acceptable to the public if grid development was one part of an integrated regional infrastructure plan covering transport and housing too. This could reduce wasted effort replicating EIS studies in the same locations for different sectors, and would help the public to see grid development as part of regional development rather than as a single issue.

Vytautas Belickas was in charge of the 2009-11 EIA process on the Lithuanian side of the LitPol Link PCI project. He explained the three route alternatives that were considered in the EIA: one was a least cost or technically optimal route, the second was designed to fit best with regional development plans, and the third was a compromise between the first two. A sophisticated GIS mapping approach was used to model the entire region for opportunities and constraints. LOD (BirdLife Lithuania) and other NGOs provided ornithological data for the EIA. The EIA incurred a total cost of EUR 0.5 m, which compares with a total project cost for the power line in Lithuania of EUR 120 m. At 0.4% of total project costs the EIA process was very good value, with NGO representatives

expressing satisfaction that routing and technology choices had successfully avoided significant impacts on nature.

However the project has faced a late but sustained campaign by local protesters who have attempted to challenge the project in the local and high courts, and with the Aarhus and Bern Conventions. A representative of this campaign was invited to the workshop, and the final hour of the workshop was spent dealing with his objections. This provided valuable insights into the ways in which citizens action groups operate when trying to obstruct power line development. The basis of the legal challenges were on the grounds of inadequate public participation and inadequate EIA methodology (e.g. failure to survey for pond turtles, which other experts present said was not necessary).

The workshop provided a very useful forum for understanding how NGOs can engage with PCI projects to make sure impacts on nature are minimised, and a reminder that citizens action groups will nonetheless sometimes try to use laws on nature protection and public participation as a 'hook' to obstruct a project. The discussions dealt with the detail of many of the objector's points, but are not likely to have swayed his opinion or to have reduced the chances of further legal efforts. The Director of LOD wrapped up the discussions by appealing to all present to think about societal needs as well as their own interests.

Romania (May 12, 2015)

SOR (BirdLife Romania) organised a very well attended and lively workshop in Bucharest. The total number of participants at the workshop was 29, consisting of 13 from grid operators (including distribution network operators and the TSO, Transelectrica), the Ministry of Environment, the National Environmental Protection Agency and a local environmental protection agency, plus external speakers and SOR staff. The declared reasons for participation were (i) gathering new information; (ii) establishing partnerships for future projects; and (iii) better implementation of the law.

Ciprian Fântână (SOR/BirdLife Romania) reviewed the impacts power lines can have for birds, and gave an overview of work to date in Romania on monitoring and mitigating these risks. SOR has undertaken a survey of electrocution risks for birds in Romania, and have worked with transelectrica and ENEL to insulate 2,200 of the most dangerous power line support structures. Much of the focus was on electrocution risks for birds in the distribution networks. However electrocution can also be a risk in transmission networks for birds that nest on power lines such as storks. Collision risks for birds arise in both networks. Another effect that has received less attention was highlighted in Romania – that of power lines creating a barrier to movement for Red Bustards that keeps an isolated and declining population separated from larger populations. SOR has also worked with the TSO on the creation of safe nests for Saker Falcons, with 127 such nests now installed in the Transelectrica and ENEL networks in Romania. These falcons typically nest on cliffs, but seem to actually prefer nesting on power lines using old nests left by crows. However these are removed by grid operators, and are not safe for the birds. In Hungary, for example, approximately 80% of the Saker Falcon population now lives on power lines! Ciprian highlighted the lack of legal requirements in Romania to make power lines safe for birds, whereas other nations such as Germany and Hungary have good legislation on this.

SOR's presentation was followed by similar ones from BirdLife partners in Hungary (Halmos Gergő) and Bulgaria (Stoycho Stoychev), demonstrating that greater progress has been made in neighbouring countries in understanding and reducing risks to birds. In Hungary 50,000 poles have been insulated to prevent electrocutions, and defectors have been installed at the highest risk locations to prevent bird collisions. However this work covers only a small percentage of the problem, for example only 10% of all potentially dangerous poles have been insulated so far.

Funding for the studies needed and for the insulation work all came from nature conservation funds such as the EU LIFE fund. This necessarily limits what can be achieved.

BirdLife Bulgaria has worked on bird protection on power lines since the 1980s, again following the model of using nature protection funding sources to survey power networks for risks and to mitigate these through use of insulation and defectors. This sustained effort has paid dividends. The Ministry of Environment in Bulgaria is now considering introducing legislation to eliminate the electrocution problem. Moreover, distribution network operators are beginning to put their own money into reducing electrocution and collision risks, as they have found it reduces power outages effectively so saves money.

Cristina Sut (BirdLife Romania) provided an overview of grid planning procedures in Romania, and how this relates to renewable energy expansion. Ivan Scrase (BirdLife Europe) also covered issues of EU level grid planning and the role of PCIs. These presentations and subsequent discussions definitely helped to increase understanding about the PCI regime and how it can be used to accelerate permitting for important projects while maintaining environmental protection standards.

The formal presentations were followed by a lively discussion on ways NGOs, industry and authorities could work together to improve environmental protection in grid development. This quickly revealed and addressed some basic misunderstandings. For example, both the grid operators and the NGOs believed the other side had maps that they were not sharing with the 'other side', but in fact this was not the case. There was clearly an appetite among the grid operators to do more work in this area with NGOs, and to collaborate with partners from neighbouring countries.

Finally, there was a discussion of practical steps to set up a process towards cooperation, including listing the institutions that will need to be involved. Two of the grid operators (Transelectrica and CEZ) had a very active presence at the workshop and expressed interest in future partnership work with SOR. The National Authority for Energy would have to approve any such collaboration. SOR hopes to begin work with CEZ, and to draft for a Cooperation Memorandum to be circulated between the interested parties and agreed. This is a very good outcome for a very informative day.

Slovenia (May 21, 2015)

DOPPS (BirdLife Slovenia)'s workshop in Ljubljana was a very well attended and high impact event, hosted by the TSO ELES. A representative of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning welcomed the participants, and emphasized the competing demands made on his Department and the importance of collaboration to ensure nature interests are properly addressed alongside other priorities. A representative of ELES then emphasized the scale of the challenge the TSO faces, and made an appeal to environmentalists not to use nature legislation simply to stop power line development.

Dr. Urša Koče (DOPPS) then provided a very detailed scientific overview of power line risks to birds, based on a study commissioned by ELES. This went into details about the risks associated with different birds' behavioural patterns, such as flocking or being startled by hunters, and the effectiveness of mitigation measures such as deflectors. This was followed by Martina Kačičnik from the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation explaining how management plans are developed for the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in Slovenia. She emphasized that having clear boundaries and management plans in place assists grid developers by providing greater planning certainty.

Rotraud Hänlein (Germanwatch) then reviewed the BESTGRID guidelines on *Public Participation and Transparency in Power Grid Planning*. The key message here was the importance of involving local politicians in the 'need debate' when new power lines are considered. This lesson came from

experience during the BESTGRID project in which the German state of Bavaria attempted to block development of the Suedlink project.

Tomaž Jančar (DOPPS) then reported on assessment of the effects of construction of high-voltage power lines on birds in the Ljubljana Marshes near the capital city. This area is home to many vulnerable bird species such as curlew and lapwing. He went into detail about how to estimate what would be an acceptable loss of individual birds before it could have population level effects in combination with other projects.

Aleš Kregar (ELES) then provided a viewpoint on nature protection from the national TSO. He argued that nature conservation NGOs are guilty of having a static view of nature, and of forgetting the needs of people. He argues that application of EU nature protection legislation in Slovenia imposes high costs on industry, and argued for the EU itself rather than Member States to define the boundaries of protected areas and appropriate compensation when protected sites are affected.

The final sessions focused on electrocution risks in the distribution networks, and on the effectiveness of technical options to eliminate this risk. In Slovenia 36 eagle owls are known to have died on power lines since 2006. This is over one fifth of the entire population of this species in Slovenia.

The workshop was a very useful and informative day for all concerned, and all sides were challenged. The case for more work to protect nature was clearly made by DOPPS, but industry and government speakers also gave the NGOs much food for thought.