



The 1st meeting of the ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on Water & Soils aimed to bring together TG members, in order to refine the purpose and objectives of the group and consolidate the first results of the scoping work carried out by the ENRD Contact Point. Building upon previous work on [promoting resource efficiency in rural areas](#), the participants discussed the focus of the TG with the aim to contribute to improving the implementation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) with regard to sustainable water and soil management. In this context, the 1st meeting of the TG explored the:

- most relevant sub-themes on which to focus the TG's analytical work;
- working methodology and timeframe of proposed analytical activities and events.

### Event Information

**Date:** 24 October 2017

**Location:** Brussels, Belgium

**Organisers:** ENRD Contact Point

**Chair:** Ben Allen (IEEP / ENRD Contact Point)

**Participants:** 32 - including researchers, Managing Authorities, policy experts, European organisations, European institutions, National Rural Networks.

**Outcomes:** An initial set of sub-themes to inform further analytical work and the work of the TG.

**Web page:** [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/1st-meeting-thematic-group-sustainable-management-water-and-soils\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/1st-meeting-thematic-group-sustainable-management-water-and-soils_en)

## Framing the context for sustainable management of water & soils



### Exploring links with the TG on Resource Efficiency and moving forward

*Ben Allen, Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and ENRD Contact Point*

Ben Allen opened the meeting by presenting the key priority topics that emerged from previous [thematic work on resource efficiency](#), as well as preliminary areas of focus provided by TG members prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. The topics highlighted included: exploring result-based schemes and the extent to which they can contribute to improved water and soil management, monitoring the status of water and soils as well as measuring the results achieved through resource efficient practices; identifying opportunities for effective implementation of nutrient management plans; increasing farmers' awareness; and offering transitional support.

### Setting the objectives of the Thematic Group

*Silvia Nanni, IEEP / ENRD CP*

Sustainable management of water and soils is recognised as a priority at global level by the [UNCCD Land Neutrality initiative](#) and covered by at least [5 UN SDGs](#). At the EU level, the importance of sustainable management of water and soils is embedded in many EU policies, including the CAP, through which RDPs are important delivery mechanisms. Capitalising on the previous work of the TG on Resource Efficiency, the current TG aims to provide concrete recommendations on how to support soil and water management through better design and implementation of RDPs.



### Mainstreaming WFD objectives into sectoral policies – an example of RDPs

*Ana Frelih Larsen, Ecologic Institute, Germany*

The presentation was delivered on behalf of Josselin Rouillard from the Ecologic Institute. A European Commission study on the synergies between RDPs and the [Water Framework Directive \(WFD\)](#) revealed that, compared to the previous programming period, RDPs show an improved level of integration with water management priorities in most Member States. Overall there is a good level of commitment of the RDPs to environmental management, as evidenced by the average RDP budget allocated to environmental priorities linked to water. Challenges identified include limited integration on hydro-morphological pressures and flood management, as well as limited optimisation of measures to contribute to local river basin management plan objectives.

## Assessing soil protection policy instruments in the EU

*Ana Frelih Larsen, Ecologic Institute, Germany*



A [DG ENV study](#) produced an updated inventory and assessment of soil protection policy instruments in the EU. The study examined 35 EU and 671 Member State level soil protection policy instruments. It revealed that overall soil protection emerges as a side effect of other policy priorities given the large number of fragmented instruments, lack of strategic coordination and absence of binding targets to address soils. The role of RDPs and of the agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) in 40 RDPs was emphasized in supporting soil protection. However, lack of targeting and synergies between maintaining good agricultural and environmental conditions, greening practices and RDP measures limits the potential for soil protection.

## Result-based AECM: the Swedish experience

*Emma Svensson, Swedish Board of Agriculture, Sweden*



A pilot study was presented that considers the role of result-based payment schemes relating to water. The aim of the first stage of the pilot was to investigate the opportunities to design result and value-based AECM to reduce the loss of nutrients from arable land. A major challenge for such schemes is the development of a model calculating the nutrient load at different geographical scales and suggesting activities for preventing nutrient loss. Different issues will also need to be addressed in the design phase including defining appropriate indicators and the geographical scale of examination regarding payments, monitoring of and controls of the value based components, etc.



## SWOT of RDP support to conservation agriculture practices

*Daniilo Marandola, Policy & Bioeconomy Centre of CREA, Italy*

The 'PACA' project is run by the Italian National Rural Network (NRN) and supports national and regional authorities in the efficient implementation of the agri-environment-climate measure (measure 10). It focuses on conservation agriculture to limit soil erosion phenomena. Given the significant soil erosion risks in Italy, 3.5 million EUR have been allocated to support targeted actions on 2.5 million ha of agricultural and forest land. Through M10 the Italian NRN is trying to gather interest to promote the use of farming practices such as no till, crop rotation and soil cover. Challenges include ensuring no double funding with Pillar 1 payments and other operations supported by M10, the tendency of farmers to go for "low-risk" type of operations, lack of appropriate equipment, advisory services, training and advice. RDP actions that can contribute to more effective soil conservation include more targeted information and advisory services, tailored AEC payments, as well as strengthening links with research and innovation via measure 16 'cooperation'.

## Key messages from feedback sessions

- Most relevant sub-themes proposed by TG members, on which to focus the TG's analytical activities, included result-based management schemes, collective approaches and targeting agri-environment measures, soil quality and nutrients, water management issues, supporting knowledge and information exchange.
- As soil protection policy is fragmented within the EU, it is vital to involve and bring together all relevant stakeholders, including different Ministries, farmers, National Rural Networks and rural development experts.
- Synchronizing the timing of RDP measures is critical, for instance combining measure 10 support to convert to soil conservation practices with measure 1 (knowledge transfer & information) and measure 2 (advisory services).
- During the transitional phase of converting from conventional agriculture to other management practices, farmers need information, training and advice combined with financial support. The conversion phase may take several years and can lead to significant costs that may impact the farms' financial viability.

## Thematic Group work next steps

- Launch of online exchanges via the VIIMA platform to refine specific areas of thematic work.
- The TG is still open to new members with an emphasis on attracting expertise on water related issues, Managing Authorities, soil and water protection practitioners, etc.
- ENRD CP to assess input from the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and commence research and investigation of interesting examples.
- Next TG meeting envisaged for the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017.