

2nd meeting of the Support Measure Steering Committee

Kuressaare, Estonia

15.04.2025

Minutes

Chaired by Mr Timo Kark

Head of Biodiversity Protection Department

Agenda

08:30 - 08:45 Introduction from Programme Operator, the Ministry of Climate

08:45 - 10:15 Presentation on the progress of “Biodiversity Programme” 2024 and plans for 2025 by Programme Operator and Programme Components

Kairi Toiger, the Ministry of Climate

Lauri Klein, Environmental Agency

Riina Kotter, Environmental Board

10:15 – 11:00 General discussion and questions

Participants

Members of the Steering Committee

- Timo Kark, Programme Operator, the Ministry of Climate
- Tanel Ross, Programme Operator, the Ministry of Climate, through Microsoft Teams
- Christoph Liechti, Swiss Contribution Office
- Ieva Junevičienė, Swiss Contribution Office
- Helena Musthallik, National Coordination Unit (NCU)
- Lauri Klein, Programme Component 1, Environmental Agency
- Riina Kotter, Programme Component 2, Environmental Board

Observer:

- Margit Tennokene, the Ministry of Climate

Steering Committee Secretary

- Kairi Toiger, the Ministry of Climate

The Chair, Mr Timo Kark, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Mr Kark presented the agenda and briefly outlined the main issues to be addressed during the meeting.

Kairi Toiger provided an overview of the 'Biodiversity Programme' on behalf of the Programme Operator, covering the period from May 1 2024 to April 10, 2025

Key highlights:

- The Ministry of Climate organized the opening event which was held in May 2024 at Palmse. Event was successful, with approximately 75 participants.
- The “Terms and Procedure for the Use of Support under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme” was approved in July 2024 and came into force on 6 August 2024.
- The first Steering Committee meeting was held in October 2024. The Steering Committee agreed on the rules of procedure, and the Programme Operator and Programme Component Operators provided an overview of the developments within the „Biodiversity Programme“.
- Support measure implementation agreement between the NCU and the Programme Operator was signed on December 19, 2024.
- The Minister’s directive for the components was signed 28th of February 2025.
- The Annual Support Measure Report was submitted to the NCU on 30 March 2025, including a revised implementation schedule and procurement plan.
- Organization of the second Steering Committee meeting and a monitoring mission in Saaremaa.
- Submission of the Reimbursement Request is planned for September 2025.
- The third Steering Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for September or October 2025.

Presentations and discussions

Budget and expenditure

Kairi Toiger gave overview of the budget and Christoph Liechti asked why there are less spent than planned. Kairi Toiger answered that our salaries are lower than planned and also opening event was cheaper. Christoph Liechti asked why less had been spent than planned. Kairi Toiger explained that this resulted from salaries being lower than anticipated and the opening event being more cost-effective than planned.

Programme Component 1 „Development of Innovative Monitoring Technologies and Improvement of Environmental Databases and Systems“

Component Operator - Environmental Agency

Lauri Klein provided an overview of Programme Component 1, covering the period from 1 May 2024 to 10 April 2025

- Personnel consists of 8 staff members who work directly on the implementation of the component, and 13 or more employees who are partially involved in monitoring methods testing as part of their state-level duties.
- The acquisition of mobile 3D bird radars, as part of Action 2.1 under Component 1, is currently at the stage of finalising procurement documentation. The public procurement is planned to be announced by the end of April 2025, with the expected contracting period between 15 and 30 June 2025. The Terms of Reference and Assessment Methodology documents were presented for discussion at the meeting (see discussion details below).

Procurement feedback:

A discussion was held regarding the procurement of 3D bird radars. The Swiss Contribution Office reviewed the documents and expressed satisfaction that, in addition to price, quality is also being considered in the evaluation process.

Christoph Liechti and Ieva Junevičienė raised the following issues:

- As the amount is smaller than originally planned, a question was raised whether it will cover maintenance until the end of 2027. Lauri Klein confirmed that it will, and added that the remaining funds will be used, for example, to purchase a trailer for transportation and to cover other minor expenses such as insurance and additional security measures.
- A question was raised regarding the maintenance of the radar after the project ends. Lauri Klein responded that the agency will take over responsibility and will be required to continue maintenance using its own budget. He also noted that renting the radar is a possible option. The Committee agreed that Lauri Klein will provide information at the next meeting on how the radar's use will be sustained in the future and how maintenance costs will be covered.
- Lauri Klein needs to clarify whether there is a need for advance payment, as failure to receive interim payments may affect the ability to deliver at a later stage. After the meeting, Lauri Klein confirmed that the draft contract included in the procurement documents contains the following clause (free translation by Lauri Klein): 2.1. The Buyer shall pay for the devices and services based on submitted invoices following the delivery and setup of the devices or the completion of services (including training). If the supply or service is delivered in parts over different periods, the Buyer shall make partial payments accordingly, based on the acceptance certificate for each supply and service. Maintenance services shall be paid for after each instance of service provision, based on the respective acceptance certificate./ This contract form is included in the procurement documentation. If any of the bidders anticipate the need for an advance payment, they may propose relevant modifications during the procurement process.
- As this is an international procurement, it was agreed that all documents will be translated into English.

The Swiss Contribution Office approved the procurement documents.

Progress highlights:

Lauri Klein continued with presentation.

- The wider deployment of REM methodology and training of AI has reached the end of first year of fieldwork and the analysis of photos from that period is also almost done. Fieldwork period for 2025 has just started. Software development for using AI in species detection from trail camera photos is still in testing phase.
- The acquisition and testing of new technologies for wildlife monitoring has progressed to the testing phase for the first set of devices. These include: rugged tablet computers for fieldwork (5 units); bat detectors attachable to mobile phones (11 units); bird sound recorders with integrated GPS (5 units); GPS devices compatible with existing bird sound recorders (10 units); a drone equipped with a thermal camera (1 unit); binoculars with distance meters and altimeters (3 units); binoculars with thermal cameras (1 unit); and fully automated insect monitoring devices (2 units). Testing will be conducted during spring and

summer 2025, after which a new procurement process will be launched to acquire additional units of the devices that prove successful.

- Environmental DNA (eDNA) testing in wildlife monitoring has been resulting to first purchase of method development for usage of eDNA in monitoring of aquatic biodiversity, contract with University of Life Sciences signed in March 2025, results expected by the end of 2025. Next procurement for method elaboration and testing for terrestrial biodiversity is planned to be started in second half of 2025.
- Promoting citizen science and establishing a network of volunteers. The following methods were tested or are planned to be testing:
2024 – otter, diving beetles, wintering bats, amphibians (these campaigns have concluded and the results have been published);
2025 – moose, wintering bats, amphibians, reptiles (snakes and lizards), globeflower, northern birch mouse, diving beetles, geese, pollinators, swans;
2026 – wintering bats, amphibians, reptiles, moths, night-singing birds, cranes, diving beetles, pollinators;
2027 – wintering bats, amphibians, reptiles, otter, dragonflies, swallows, diving beetles, pollinators, ants, white stork.
- Development of IT systems includes the following components: the EELIS–KESE interface, the EELIS–PlutoF interface, a management plans assessment tool, and a fieldwork tool for monitoring and inventories. The year 2024 served as the preparatory phase, during which a framework contract was signed. In 2025, a so-called business analysis will be initiated for all four developments, to be carried out under an internal contract between KAUR and KeMIT. The main development activities are scheduled for 2026, with finalisation planned for 2027
- Budget usage has been modest as first year has been mainly preparatory. 5% of total and 13% of yearly expected budget has been used. Highest amounts of budget are planned to be used in 2026 and 2027, because most of the IT developments will be done during these years and also procurement of 3D radars is expected to reach most payment in 2026.

Programme Component 2 “Implementation of a systematic assessment of the social and conservation outcomes of protected areas”

Component Operator – Environmental Board

Riina Kotter provided an overview (presentation added) of the programme activities of the Component 2 covering the period from May 1, 2024 to April 10, 2025.

- By the end of February 2025, 60% of the planned budget for the first year (till the end of April) is used. The Environmental Board has started two dynamic purchasing systems (habitats, species) for inventories, expert opinions, action plans.
- The project team has been recruited, and the search for experts to carry out inventories has been successful.
- One of the risks associated with conducting inventories is opposition from private landowners. To address this, the Environmental Board will begin issuing notifications to landowners regarding planned inventories on private land. The process of changing of categories of species has been really successful, experts want to participate in the process. The seminar introducing the process took place in January in Tartu, more than 120 people participated in Tartu and there were about 140 participants online.

- In September or October 2025 the Environmental Board is planning a study trip to Switzerland.

Closing Remarks

Mr Timo Kark asked for comments. Mr Timo Kark opened the floor for questions and comments.

The Swiss Contribution Office inquired about potential risks. The following risks were highlighted:

- An increase in VAT – currently not an issue;
- IT developments – risk of not meeting the timeline;
- Opposition from landowners to the project.

All identified risks are being monitored, and any issues that arise will be addressed at the next meeting.

Next Meeting:

The members decided that the time for next meeting will be in October and exact dates will be agreed upon via email.