

WORKING DRAFT

ENRD Thematic Group on 'Sustainable Management of Water and Soils'

Scoping Paper and Workplan

V1. 19.10.2017

Rationale and scope

Among natural resources, water and soils are the building blocks of ecosystems and of the agriculture and forestry sectors that they support, and underpin the functioning of the global and especially the rural economy¹ and whose status is influenced by these sectors.

A well-integrated and sustainable management of water and soils is key for supporting rural areas. Without action, the pressure on these natural resources is likely to increase as a result of a growing population, evolving demand patterns and the effects of a changing climate.

The importance of improving the efficient use of resources is recognised at the global scale explicitly by the United Nations in the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that form the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, as well as the [Land Degradation Neutrality \(LDN\)](#) initiative.

The EU and all 28 Member States are part of the international agreement on sustainable development and work towards the achievement of the SDGs. Using water and soil in a more resource efficient way will help achieve several of Europe's strategic objectives. These commitments are to be implemented through a variety of EU instruments, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) partly funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

In absence of an integrated EU-wide approach for soil protection, the CAP, particularly cross-compliance standards and Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), remain the critical means of supporting the appropriate use and management of soils in agricultural and forest areas. However, there is room for further improvements in the design of RDPs to deliver a more sustainable management of soils. Additional actions are also needed to improve the relationship between water and agricultural policies and further integrate water policy objectives into RDPs.

In Y4 the ENRD CP is addressing these issues by launching a **new thematic working group on Sustainable Management of Water and Soils** which will complement the [previous work on resource efficient rural economy](#). Y4 TG will build on the outcomes of the prior TG group on Resource Efficiency, with the aim of exploring practical improvements to the design and implementation of RDPs, that could more effectively support sustainable water and soil management.

Aims of the ENRD TG on Sustainable Management of Water and Soils

Many RDP measures are, directly or indirectly, relevant for improving water management (quality and quantity) and the sustainable use of soil resources, within the agricultural and forest sectors as well as in rural areas (as shown in Annex 1). In line with the main ENRD objectives of improving the quality of RDPs and increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development, the **overall objective** of the Thematic Group on Sustainable Management of Water and Soils is:

To provide concrete recommendations on how to more effectively support sustainable soil and water management activities through the better design and implementation of rural development programmes.

¹ COM(2011) 571 - 'Roadmap to a more efficient Europe'

Moving from the findings and recommendations of Y3 thematic work on resource efficiency, the TG will address in more depth the improvements needed to RDP design and delivery. The specific objectives of the TG – subject to further finetuning, following the first explorative meeting of the group members – could be:

1. *To embed water and soil management actions, including nutrients management more centrally within RDPs through the creation of a resource-efficiency proofing tool or checklist.*
2. *To investigate approaches and effective ways to improve the design and rules of existing RDP measures to:*
 - i. increase uptake and implementation by farmers in relation to water and soil management.
 - ii. improve their flexibility to work in different contexts and adapt to changing conditions.
3. *To explore the potential for transitional support schemes, within existing measures, to bring all land managers up to a minimum standard of resource efficiency, above the current mandatory requirements in place, with respect to water and soils.*
4. *To identify opportunities for further progresses in the drafting and enforcement of nutrient management plans to increase the quality of water and soils.*
5. *To provide clear guidance on the potential and flexible options available within RDPs to make a step change in improving the sustainability and efficiency of water and soil management in rural areas.*
6. *To strengthen the coherence between relevant EU policies.*

Methodology, main activities and expected outputs

Building on the findings and recommendations of Y3 TG on resource efficiency

The work of the Thematic Group on Sustainable Management of Water and Soils will build on the recommendations of Y3 ENRD TG on Resource Efficient Rural Economy (see Figure 1). In order to develop more specific recommendations in year 4, the Thematic Group will address in more depth the improvements needed to RDP design and delivery where it can be of most value. A set of questions, developed in response to the findings and recommendation of Y3 TG, could steer the new group work (see Annex 1).













Guiding principles

The following guiding principles/methodologies will drive the thematic group work:

Stakeholder-oriented and participative

The thematic work aims to give ownership to the thematic group content and process, i.e. members will strongly contribute to the identification of sub-themes and issues to be addressed, and will be the core targets of the thematic group meetings. One of the main advantages of the thematic group method is that it brings together different types of stakeholders and encourages the exchange of different views among them through networking.

Figure 1: Recommendations to improve the resource efficient management of water and soils through rural development programmes

 <p>Tailored advice packages for resource efficient actions on soils & water including the benefits & risks of implementation on farm businesses.</p>	 <p>Proactive engagement with farmers on the benefits of resource efficiency through peer to peer engagement, demonstration farms, & increasing the ratio of advisors to farmers.</p>
 <p>Compulsory training for advisors through continuous professional development to maintain up-to-date knowledge on best practice.</p>	 <p>Support young & new farmers via better access to financial support & advice, & sharing ideas through cooperation (e.g. Operational Groups).</p>
 <p>Targeted support to areas, groups & issues where improved resource efficiency is a priority. Focus funding towards priority actions.</p>	 <p>Transitional support through financing & capacity building during the implementation of actions & changes to farm structure & practice.</p>
 <p>Good governance frameworks to provide coherence during programming & implementation of environmental, economic & social objectives.</p>	 <p>Multi-stakeholder engagement with farmers and other actors in the rural economy from the start of the RDP design process through to implementation.</p>
 <p>Demonstrate long term impacts of resource efficiency on the environment & farm businesses through case studies & reliable indicators.</p>	 <p>Flexible support systems & measures that allow practices to be adapted to the needs of the farm & outcomes sought, during implementation.</p>
 <p>Piloting new approaches by using opportunities under the Cooperation measure & LIFE funding to test approaches that can be mainstreamed into RDPs.</p>	 <p>Improved accessibility of RDP support to farmers by streamlining scheme and project application procedures.</p>

Focused & Practical

The thematic work will aim to be very focused and practical in terms of the chosen sub-themes and methods. The preliminarily identified challenges will be explored further during the 1st Thematic Group meeting, with the aim to identify specific challenges and themes for further work of the TG.

Complementary & inspiring

The thematic work aims to add value to existing work. The initial analysis and survey will help to identify specific challenges and sub-themes within the wider theme of 'sustainable water and soil management'. One of the main objectives of the thematic work is to inspire people to learn and experiment new ideas, methods and examples in their own working context. Both the working methods of the thematic group, as well as the examples identified and presented will aim to contribute to this.

Relevant to a wider audience

The thematic group will work with a core group of committed stakeholders (as specified above). However, it will also follow a flexible and dynamic approach, adjusting to the needs identified. For instance, the target groups of specific meetings may be wider than the core group depending on the specific issue/sub-theme. Interested stakeholders have the opportunity to get involved at different levels, from actively contributing to the process (core group) to follow closely the work of the group and be informed about main outcomes. Dissemination and communication will be a crucial part of the work of the thematic group. Outcomes will need to be spread further than the core group in an easily accessible form to a wider interested audience.

Main activities and work plan

The TG is stakeholder-driven and its outcomes are expected to be developed based on a participative process. The process includes organising four meetings and a seminar and continuous day to day interactions in order to facilitate exchanges of experience and practices between its members. The regular engagement of TG members will be pursued throughout the year and in between meetings, also by the use of online tools (including VIIMA), to facilitate the interaction in between the meetings and to encourage the exchange of draft documents and case studies, as well as to develop ideas about success factors, and disseminate relevant information, news, documents, etc. The following charts present respectively the core activities of the thematic group (Table 2) and the indicative work plan (Table 3).

Table 2: Main activities of Y4 TG
















Background research	Background research on specific subjects of interest with regard to water and soil management;
 Four TG meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 1st TG meeting (24 October 2017) • The 2nd TG meeting (15 December 2017) • The 3rd TG meeting (February 2018 – date to be confirmed) • The 4th TG meeting (May 2018 – date to be confirmed)
Comparative regional analysis	The TG will explore the different approaches to the management of water and soils in different EU MSs (to be selected) and will identify relevant case studies that will be assessed through a comparative analysis.
ENRD Workshop	A workshop focusing on conservation agriculture techniques might be organised (to be confirmed) aiming at promoting a more effective use of Rural Development Programmes to support agricultural practices beneficial to the environment and in particular to water and soils.
Good practice examples	An in-depth analysis of specific aspects of Rural Development Programmes, including measures and calls for projects (RDP screening) will be performed to identify existing good examples of projects promoting a sustainable management of water and soils.
ENRD Seminar	A Seminar will be organised in June with the aim of disseminating the outcomes of the TG work and the lessons learned.

Table 3: Indicative Thematic Group work plan

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Draft Scoping paper & Workplan circulated to the Group										
1 st Meeting: Refine scope & research questions	 (24/10)									
Finalisation of scoping paper & workplan										
Research & analysis										
Preliminary findings circulated to the Group										
2 nd Meeting: Discuss first results & agree next steps			 (15/12 tbc)							
Preliminary findings circulated to the Group										
3 rd Meeting: Discuss results & frame TG recommendations					 (20-22/02 tbc)					
Recommendations developed into final report and products										
Draft final report & products circulated to the Group										
4 th Meeting: Refine TG recommendations & validation / Discuss Seminar preparations								 (8-10/05 tbc)		
TG recommendations finalised & Seminar preparation										
Seminar on Sustainable Water & Soil Management									 (12-14/06 tbc)	
On line exchanges between TG members										

Expected Outcomes

The Thematic Group will identify good practices examples, resulting from the screening of RDPs and from case study analysis and will formulate concrete recommendations on how to improve the design and the implementation of EAFRD supported operations, to allow for a more effective use of Rural Development Programmes in supporting sustainable water and soil management practices, both under the current programming period 2014-2020 and in future.

The outputs will be disseminated through factsheets and other publications and are intended to be of help, not just to TG members but to all those who seek to improve the way in which RDPs can be used to deliver environmental benefits.

An indicative list of outcomes to be produced is presented in the following chart (Table 4):

Table 4: Indicative list of expected outcomes:

Final report	Presenting the work of TG and key findings.
Thematic Group Factsheets	Presenting highlights in a visual and reader friendly way for broader dissemination.
Toolkit/checklist	Based on the TG's recommendations targeted at RDP implementing bodies.
Set(s) of slides	Presenting in brief the different work strands (e.g. case studies, projects, schemes examined, etc).
Publications	Including a Rural Review and a Project Brochure on 'water and soils in the rural economy') and other communication products.

Annex 1: Proposed focus of the TG on sustainable management of water and soils, building on the findings from Year 3

Year 3 findings and recommendations	Potential Year 4 questions to address through the TG
<p>Put in place resource efficiency proofing of RDPs using sustainability criteria during ex-ante assessments and RDP implementation.</p> <p>This could also have the benefit of enabling RDPs to be better aligned with objectives for soils and water set out in national strategies and plans.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating a resource-efficiency proofing tool / checklist: what criteria could be developed to help resource efficiency proof a RDP or measure selection during the approvals process? 2. If this kind of tool is developed, how could it be used as an optional means to help improve the implementation of existing measures, particularly to align them with national water and soil strategies and plans (e.g. as is the case for EU biofuel support schemes?)
<p>Design measures specifically to address soil and water resource efficiency objectives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What are the areas relating to the sustainable management of soil and water that currently are not covered by RDPs currently but should be, or are insufficiently supported? 4. What issues are faced by Managing Authorities when seeking to use RDP measures for soil and water management? 5. How could existing measures be improved to address soils and water issues, for example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. what are the specific changes that are required within individual measures (including supporting measures such as advice) and the rules associated with them either at National or EU level to enable greater use of measures for these purposes? b. Are the safeguards in place within the EAFRD relating to what it is permissible to fund (e.g. for irrigation) and the way these are applied suitable and sufficient? c. How can the process and practicalities of using measures in combination be improved for this purpose? A) within the EAFRD; and b) between the EAFRD and other EU funding instruments; d. What would encourage more Member States to pilot new approaches – is there an issue with the EAFRD cooperation measure and its associated rules, or should more be done to show how the measure can be used in practice? 6. Are there lessons on the types of monitoring that works well to inform improvements in measure design and implementation?
<p>Improving the flexibility of schemes to be tailored and work within the context of a specific farm.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. How can schemes (e.g. AECM) be developed to allow the flexibility to tailor activities, timings and level of support to individual farm contexts whilst remaining administratively simple to control?
<p>Provide financial support and advice on a transitional basis to enable land managers to reach a basic level of resource efficiency.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What sort of time-limited transitional payments and support might be required (e.g. for capital investments or area payments) to allow farmers to upgrade their machinery, infrastructure and management practices to reach a certain standard of management for soils and water?



Development of advice and guidance on the potential of the EAFRD and RDPs for addressing soil and water issues.

Are there good examples of EU or Member State advice and support packages available that could be developed by the ENRD TG and made available across the EU?

Annex 2: EAFRD measures relevant for delivering water and soil priorities

Measure	Sub-measure	Soils	Water
M1 Knowledge transfer and information actions	M1.1 Support for vocational training and skills acquisition actions	X	X
	M1.2 Support for demonstration activities and information actions	X	X
	M1.3 Support for short-term farm and forest management exchange as well as farm and forest visits	X	X
M2 Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services	M2.1 support to help benefiting from the use of advisory services	X	X
	M2.2 support for the setting up of farm management, farm relief and farm advisory services as well as forestry advisory services	X	X
	M2.3 support for training of advisors	X	X
M4 Investments in physical assets	M4.1 Support for investments in agricultural holdings		X
	M4.2 Support for investments in processing/marketing and/or development of agricultural products		X
	M4.3 Support for investments in infrastructure related to development, modernisation or adaptation of agriculture and forestry	X	X
	M4.4 Support for non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives	X	X
M07 Basic services and village renewal in rural areas	M7.1 Support for drawing up and updating of plans for the development of municipalities and villages in rural areas and their basic services and of protection and management plans relating to Natura 2000 sites and other areas of high nature value	X	X
	M7.2 Support for investments in the creation, improvement or expansion of all types of small scale infrastructure, including investments in renewable energy and energy saving		X
	M7.4 Support for investments in the setting-up, improvement or expansion of local basic services for the rural population including leisure and culture, and the related infrastructure		X
M08 Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests	M8.1 Support for afforestation/creation of woodland	X	X
	M8.2 Support for establishment and maintenance of agro- forestry systems	X	X
	M8.3 Support for prevention of damage to forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events	X	X
	M8.5 Support for investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems	X	X
	M8.6 Support for investments in forestry technologies and in processing, mobilising and marketing of forest products		X
M10 Agri-environment-climate	M10.1 Payment for agri-environment-climate commitments	X	X
M11 Organic farming	M11.1 Payment to convert to organic farming practices and methods	X	X
	M11.2 Payment to maintain organic farming practices and methods	X	X



M12 Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive payments	Compensation payment for Natura 2000 agricultural areas	X	X
	Compensation payment for Natura 2000 forest areas	X	X
	M12.3 Compensation payment for agricultural areas included in river basin management plans		X
M13 Payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints	M13.1 Compensation payment in mountain areas	X	X
	M13.2 Compensation payment for other areas facing significant natural constraints	X	X
	M13.3 Compensation payment to other areas affected by specific constraints	X	X
M15 Forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation	M15.1 Payment for forest-environmental and climate commitments	X	X
M16 Cooperation	M16.1 Support for the establishment and operation of operational groups of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability	X	X
	M16.2 Support for pilot projects and for the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies	X	X
	M16.5 Support for joint action undertaken with a view to mitigating or adapting to climate change and for joint approaches to environmental projects and ongoing environmental practices	X	X
	M16.6 Support for cooperation among supply chain actors for sustainable provision of biomass for use in food and energy production and industrial processes	X	X
	M16.8 Support for drawing up of forest management plans or equivalent instruments	X	X
	M16.9 Support for diversification of farming activities into activities concerning health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and education about the environment and food	X	X

Key: Blue – key measure / Grey – supporting measure