



RURAL 2020

Letter of intent from the Managing Authority of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in Mainland Finland concerning a closer transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and supportive actions for a stronger social dimension in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

1. We, the Managing Authority of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in Mainland Finland, declare that we will participate in the *Baltic Sea Network* (BSN-EAFRD) during the current programming period of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jaana Husu-Kallio'.

Jaana Husu-Kallio, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
20.3.2017 Helsinki, Finland



1. Background

The Baltic Sea Network - for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (BSN-EAFRD) was initiated as a result of the Baltic Leadership Programme Bioeconomy, funded by the Swedish Institute and implemented in 2016 in the cooperation between the Swedish Institute and the Ministry of Agriculture in Lithuania and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland in their capacity as coordinators of Policy Area Bioeconomy of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

The core members of the Network are officials involved in the implementation of the rural development programmes (Managing Authorities, Implementing and Intermediate Bodies) from the EU Member States in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR): Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, acting also as a coordinator responsible for rural development within EUSBSR Policy Area Bioeconomy, has undertaken the role of a facilitator and promoter of the BSN - EAFRD. Their role will be to coordinate the Network's activities and promote the results at the local, national and EU levels.

2. Objectives for the BSN-EAFRD

In the short-term perspective the Network will:

- enhance the cooperation between the Member States (MS) in the Baltic Sea Region in relation to the EAFRD,
- develop and consolidate the existing network between the Managing Authorities (MA) of the EAFRD programmes, including relevant stakeholders,
- enhance the role of the EAFRD in the implementation of the the relevant areas in the EUSBSR, both with reference to its current Action Plan, and to any future new priorities/measures,
- establish a common understanding of the role of the EAFRD and the bioeconomic approach in relation to the EUSBSR and in the MS,
- facilitate and strengthen the transnational cooperation between projects in the EAFRD in the BSR,
- establish connections and cooperation modalities with the existing rural networks, both at the European and national levels,
- develop further cooperation modalities with relevant Policy Area Coordinators,
- establish cooperation with the relevant networks within the other macro-regional strategies in the EU.

In the long-term perspective the Network will:

- identify policy gaps, exchange good practices and cooperation praxis within the framework of the EAFRD and possible links to the EUSBSR,
- develop and prepare a knowledge base for EAFRD interventions linked to the EUSBSR in the new programming period (post 2020) with the aim of strengthening TNC in the EAFRD as well as promoting the bioeconomic approach in the EUSBSR,
- formulate recommendations to the EUSBSR Action Plan in relevant policy areas,

- agree on joint actions and recommendations to policy/decision makers concerning the use of mainstream funds for TNC in macro-regions.

3. Activities for *the BSN-EAFRD*

- A more formal contact points will be established within the Network in order to safeguard the information and communication flows, based on a Letter of Intent signed by Ministers/Directors in charge of the rural development programmes.
- A coordinated pilot call for proposals will be launched within the Network's members' national rural development programmes promoting the objectives of the EUSBSR. A specific Action Plan will be elaborated specifying the contents and terms of the call.
- The Network will act as a reference group to the EUSBSR Policy Area Coordinator responsible for rural development and review proposals for flagship projects.
- The Network will agree upon selected indicators in order to measure the impact of national rural development programmes on the EUSBSR
- The Network will map and analyse EAFRD projects (incl. LEADER/CLLD) where links to the EUSBSR can be found. The coordinator of the Network will develop a common mapping method for projects relevant to the EUSBSR.
- The Network will develop and agree on special actions in order to assure better follow up and evaluation processes for projects where the Baltic Sea Region perspective is present. Examples of best practice will be identified and disseminated.
- The Network will formulate common statements and recommendations and delivered them to relevant policy makers and decision making bodies at EU, national and regional levels.
- The Network will consider additional funding possibilities (e.g. through the Swedish Institute) in order to finance some selected activities within the Network, for example the formulation of policy recommendations to the programmes after 2020 or the organisation of partner search fora targeting rural development actors.

4. How we work:

- The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania will coordinate activities within the BSN - EAFRD.
- The Network will meet face-to-face twice a year, once in connection to the EUSBSR Annual Forum. Other relevant events organised by the members of the BSN - EAFRD can also be linked to the Network meetings.
- The coordinator will chair the meetings, when appropriate in cooperation with the hosting MS. Before each meeting all members are allowed to submit written suggestions to its agenda. The agenda is then compiled and distributed by the coordinator.
- All costs related to the participation in the Network will, when needed, be covered by the Technical Assistance budget in the MSs concerned.
- The participating MSs in the network and potential other stakeholders may be, when possible and appropriate, asked to make a contribution to the development and strengthening of TNC in the EAFRD in the BSR. A rationale for such requests will consider common challenges faced by the rural areas in the BSR, the implementation premises of the EAFRD programmes, the objectives of the EUSBSR as well as the principles of the bioeconomic approach.

- MSs participating in the BSN - EAFRD are encouraged to include Network members in other relevant meetings or events arranged with respect to the EUSBSR.
- The communication with relevant European actors (EC, European Parliament, PACs, Interract, European Rural Development Network) will be the responsibility of the BSN - EAFRD while contact with national actors (relevant ministries and agencies, national parliaments and rural development networks) will lie within the authority of each MS.
- The membership in the Network implies a commitment and a positive attitude among members to contribute and share the work burden to maintain the vital spirit of the Network.
- The Network members use digital technology such as Google docs, e-mails, video conferences and interactive websites whenever relevant and conducive to the work.

5. Work and time plan, evaluation:

- An evaluation will be carried out of the activities within the Network. Its structure and funding will be agreed by the Network.
- A more detailed work and time plan will be agreed upon and presented following more discussions among the participating MAs.