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Subject **WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT -
THE FINNISH APPROACH**

Finland considers the Rural Development Regulation is a powerful toolbox for implementing the Water Framework Directive. It offers various kinds of possibilities, but at the moment there are also certain limitations to making the best possible use of the Regulation.

The timetables of the rural development programming and implementation of the Water Framework Directive are not linked to each other - they differ especially in the beginning of the new programming period. The Rural Development Programmes for the period 2007-2013 will be completed in the beginning of 2007, while the River Basin Management plans will only be available in 2009. This means that it would be difficult to incorporate the new ideas for better use of the Rural Development Programmes which may arise from the implementation of the Water Framework Directive to the programmes, because there is a danger that all the limited funds will already be committed. One possible solution to this could be a programme modification and the use of modulation funds that will be transferred from the First Pillar of CAP to rural development measures. In Finland we are not planning to use the support under Article 38 "the Water Framework Directive support" at this stage but we will consider using it after the River Basin Management Plans have been completed.

In Finland the non-point source pollution from agriculture is by far the greatest single source of both nitrogen and nutrient loading. Farming accounts for about 51 % of the total nitrogen and 63 % of the phosphorus loading caused by human action. In our view Axis 2, especially the agri-environmental measures together with the environmental cross-compliance as the base level, constitute the main instrument for reducing the nutrient loading from agriculture. Agri-environmental measures include, among other things, reducing the fertilisation level, management of filter strips, reduced tillage, plant cover during winter and establishment of riparian zones.

Because of the climate and soil conditions, most of the Finnish agriculture is located in the southern parts of the country. Agricultural land represents only about 8 % of the total surface area of Finland, but in many regions in southern and south-western Finland with abundant water bodies the share of agricultural land is over 30%. This means that the loading of waters is also very strongly concentrated to these regions. Efficient targeting of water protection measures, taking account of the conditions in each region, is very important to reach the optimal results in terms of the environment. The possibilities for the regional differentiation of agri-environmental support are now taken into consideration in the planning of the next programming period

2007-2013. However, the implementation of such a scheme would lead to a heavier administrative burden due to the bureaucracy needed and more complex control.

We also consider that the new measure relating to non-productive investments may offer us new possibilities in the establishment and restoration of wetlands, but the measures included in the other axes are also important. We believe that advice and training will have a major role to play in the successful implementation of the Water Framework Directive, which means that the possibilities for training and information actions of different stakeholders included in Axes 1 and 3 are highly significant. These should be used for the active involvement of different parties and for enhancing voluntary co-operation between farmers and authorities in the beginning of the process. It is clear that only well-informed farmers will make a useful contribution to the process and ensure its success.

In Finland the national rural network can also contribute to water protection through the organisation of training and exchange of information about best practises, as well as by promoting the networking of different stakeholders.

We have very good experiences from the Leader approach and local action groups (LAGs). In Finland there are altogether 25 LAGs funded under the Leader+ Programme and 33 LAGs funded from other programmes, which means that their work covers the whole country. To ensure the local approach, the membership of the boards of the LAGs is based on the principle of tripartition: a third of the members represent the municipalities, another third the local organisations, and one third consists of individual local residents. When drafting their local development strategies the LAGs, together with the other stakeholders, have concentrated on improving the vitality of rural villages, but they have also introduced several environmental measures, such as the protection and restoration of wetlands and lake restoration projects. Even though the projects are often not so big in scale, the people are strongly committed to them, and thus they can be highly effective in proportion to the amount of euros spent on them.

The Rural Development Regulation offers excellent opportunities, but the strict limitations to the financial resources will make the discussion very difficult. Even the different environmental objectives may compete with each other for funding. We have very challenging objectives for enhancing biodiversity, besides the other, highly important rural development objectives: improving the competitiveness of farming and forestry as well as the quality of life in the countryside, and the diversification of the economic activities in the rural areas.