



Wetlands International - European Association

Annual Report and Accounts

2024



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Wetlands
INTERNATIONAL

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1. About Wetlands International Europe

Wetlands International Europe is a non-profit association founded in 2013 that brings together member NGOs based in 10 European countries. We inspire and mobilise society to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature. Working as a network, we advocate for ambitious EU and global policy and enable action on the ground in Europe and beyond.

By connecting science, policy, and practice, we, together with our members focus on specific wetland types and their biodiversity. We address key threats, develop and test practical solutions, and contribute to shaping effective policies across Europe.

Wetlands International Europe is part of the global Wetlands International network—the only worldwide non-profit organisation dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wetlands.

Together with 18 offices around the world, we work as one network with shared goals and a common Global Strategy. We collaborate with partners and experts to protect and restore wetlands for people and nature everywhere.

Our vision is a world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support and the resources they provide.

Our mission is to inspire and mobilise society to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature.

Our ambition for 2020- 2030 is to upscale action to safeguard and restore wetlands, collaborating with multiple partners and mobilising a wide range of actors to transform whole landscapes and sectors.

Wetlands International Europe's work is organised around four interconnected streams that reflect the ecological importance of wetlands and their role in addressing today's most pressing environmental challenges. Our work in Europe is fully aligned with—and contributes to—the Wetlands International Global Strategic Intent 2020–2030.

Wetland **biodiversity** is at the heart of our mission. From the wild rivers of the Balkans to Arctic tundra and peat swamps teeming with life, wetlands host some of the richest and most unique ecosystems in Europe and globally. We work to ensure these habitats are protected and restored, integrating them into biodiversity and nature conservation and other related policies.

Our **Rivers and Lakes** stream addresses the growing risks of droughts, floods, and water scarcity by focusing on the protection and restoration of freshwater wetlands. These ecosystems—rivers, lakes, streams, and floodplains—not only support wildlife but are essential for regulating water flow, improving water quality, and enhancing resilience to climate impacts. Signature themes include wetland sponge landscapes, free-flowing rivers and lake restoration.

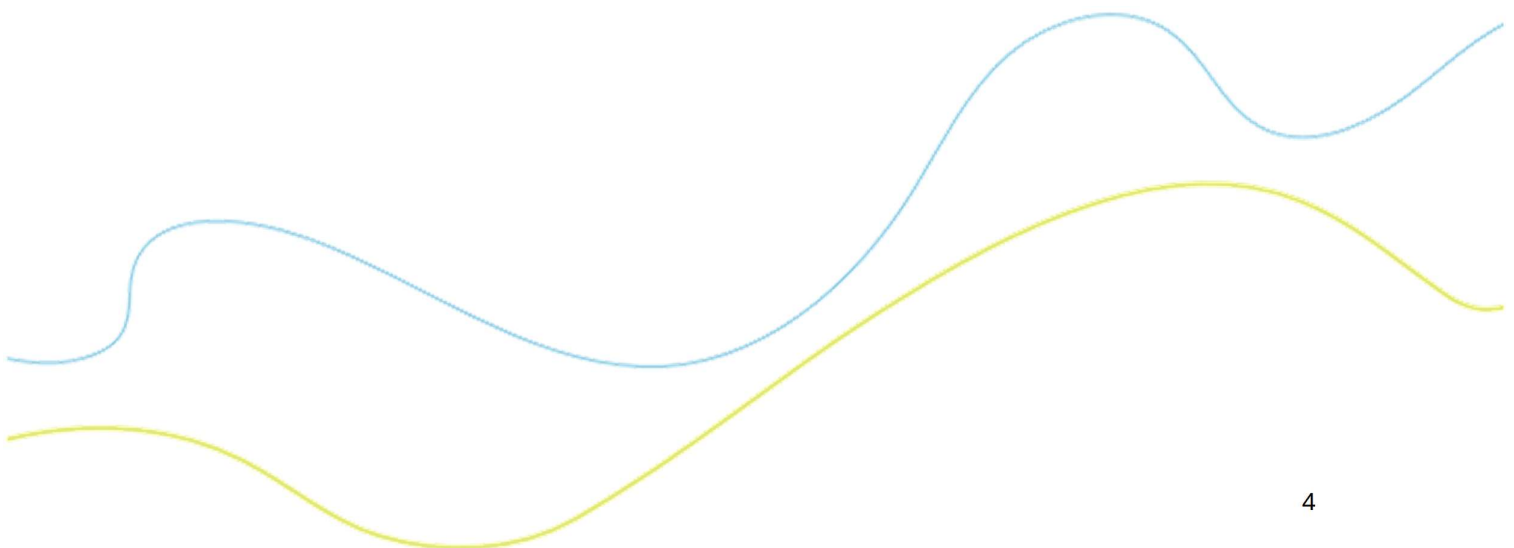
Coasts and Deltas are critical breeding habitats for fish and other marine fauna, serve as vital ecological corridors, linking marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems and as important carbon sinks. While we do not yet have dedicated programmes under this stream, we actively support this strategic area through our biodiversity work and the Mediterranean sub-programme, ensuring meaningful progress and tangible impact.

Peatlands are among the most carbon-rich and biodiverse wetlands on Earth. By safeguarding and restoring peatlands, we help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prevent flooding, and maintain unique natural habitats. Our work spans from northern boreal peatlands to those in temperate and Mediterranean regions. Signature themes include restoration and paludiculture.

Wetland **Biodiversity** is unique but the headlines show that is under more pressure than in any other ecosystem type. We support regional monitoring and species lead conservation action. For 60 years we have been at the heart of the International Water Census, instigating annual waterbird counts that underpin pan European and African policy formulation, monitoring and the mobilisation of conservation action. Signature themes are waterbird and migratory fish conservation.

Through our **External Dimension (Global Europe)** stream, we strengthen the EU's role in championing wetlands in its external action and international environmental agenda. We advocate for the inclusion of wetlands in global biodiversity, climate, and development strategies, promoting their recognition as critical ecosystems for a sustainable and resilient future. Signature themes include wetlands, peace and security, the impact of commodity production of wetlands and encouraging European financing of wetlands.

Together, these streams form the framework of our strategy and a comprehensive approach to wetland conservation that supports biodiversity, climate action, water security, and sustainable development both within and beyond Europe. We deliver our work through a series of programmes that align to this.



2. Foreword

In autumn 2024 the EU elections brought a right-wing shift in the political landscape and with it a pivot towards increasing polarisation in the political debate and pressure on environmental policymaking at all levels. The space for long-term, science-based, and inclusive policy has become more contested and scrutiny of the role of civil society organisations' in Brussels has grown. This is not only playing out in Brussels but increasingly at national level. This means new and growing challenges although many positive opportunities remain. The implications are clear though: we must be both steadfast, strategic and rooted in our mission whilst looking for innovative and creative ways to bring our message over that create a positive narrative for wetlands.

In 2024 we continued to work at multiple levels to drive the conservation and restoration of wetlands in Europe and to influence the EU's footprint internationally. The adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation stands out as a landmark achievement —albeit hard-won through the persistent advocacy and coalition-building of many organisations. Wetlands International Europe played a key role, bringing the voice of wetland ecosystems and biodiversity into the heart of the debate and ultimately the regulation. It was a moment where science, policy, and public concern aligned just enough to bring the legislation over the line. Sadly a lot of opposition remains and we'll need to strongly defend and help implement this and other important regulations in the years ahead. Together with our members and partners we are well positioned to do so.

Convening and enabling cooperation with members and partners around key wetlands issues to drive innovation and impact is a key part of what the Association does. This year for the first time we started as lead of two new large multi-partner large initiatives. The Horizon "EUROLakes" and LIFE "Aquatic warbler on the Move" projects promise to deliver innovation but also real conservation and restoration on the ground that will improve biodiversity and benefits to people. The Association's leadership role is something we look forward to developing further in the years ahead as our capacity, membership and influence grows.

2024 a milestone year for the Association itself. During a dedicated event in Brussels we celebrated 10 years since we were established with our members, partners and network. We looked back at all we have achieved since we started whilst casting forward to where the Association plans to go. It was a great thrill to see many of our colleagues past and present there and gave us an exciting glimpse of where we can go in the future. The Association has continued to grow throughout the year. We welcome Blue Rivers Foundation as our newest member to the Association 'family', and we now have 20 staff working in the Secretariat across the Belgian and Dutch office locations, including new policy and communications colleagues as well as the project managers leading our new projects. They are supported by numerous hard-working interns and volunteers! Finally the Belgian office is now legally established as a branch organisation to the Dutch foundation meaning we can more easily engage with Belgian donors and volunteers.

On behalf of Wetlands International - European Association



Jan Peters, Chair of the Board



Chris Baker, Director

3. Highlight of key outcomes during 2024

In 2024, we advanced our mission to safeguard and restore wetlands by achieving meaningful policy impact, expanding partnerships, and strengthening our organisational foundations. Through coordinated advocacy, science-based input, and targeted engagement at both EU and international levels, we successfully positioned wetlands as critical to climate, biodiversity, and water resilience goals. This chapter highlights the year's key achievements, reflecting our growing influence and operational maturity.

- **Influenced major EU and international policies:** We played a central role in shaping the EU Nature Restoration Law and advancing key elements in EU climate, biodiversity, and freshwater policies. We successfully secured the inclusion of wetland, river, and peatland restoration targets in legislative frameworks such as the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and Carbon Removal Certification Framework (CRCF).
- **Strengthened advocacy impact through strategic alliances and campaigns:** We elevated wetland issues within EU and global policy agendas through targeted advocacy, public campaigns like #NatureRestore, and active participation in high-level dialogues. We built influence across sectors—from horticulture to youth networks—and secured commitments for international Wetlands Partnerships, notably with Brazil and Colombia.
- **Enhanced knowledge, innovation, and monitoring capacity:** We contributed to science-based policymaking through improved biodiversity data (in waterbird population monitoring), EU guidance development, and innovation via Horizon projects like SpongeBoost and EUROLakes. We also laid the groundwork for launching the large-scale LIFE Aquatic Warbler conservation project across 10 countries in 2025.
- **Organisational development and visibility:** We strengthened our capacity, governance, and outreach through updated internal systems, strategic alignment efforts, team expansion, and enhanced communication strategies—leading to increased visibility and institutional credibility within the EU and beyond.

4. Our Programmes

4.1 Rivers and Lakes

Without water, there is no life — no agriculture, no industry, no resilience, no future. Wetlands determine both the quantity and quality of our water, whilst their health also depends on it.

Recognising that the water cycle is being broken by climate change and water (mis) management, water policy sits high on the EU agenda for 2024-2029, with a new Commissioner Portfolio specifically addressed to Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy. The European Water Resilience Strategy (WRS) announced by the EU 2024-2029 Political Guidelines, will address the management of water sources and address scarcity. The strategy signals a paradigm shift toward treating water as a strategic resource.

At Wetlands International Europe, we work to protect clean waters, by safeguarding and restoring healthy rivers and lakes. Across the EU, water management issues like floods and droughts are increasing — partly driven by the loss of natural water retention in our landscapes. We promote and implement nature-based solutions (NbS) that restore the land's ability to absorb, store, and release water — helping to retain water in the landscape, strengthen climate resilience, adapt to a changing climate and build back our biodiversity. We advocate for the effective development, enforcement, and defence of EU freshwater laws, pushing back against efforts to weaken them and promoting nature-based solutions to restore our broken water cycle.

Advocating for healthy waters in EU Policies

Freshwater is the basis for all life, and wetland health is inextricably linked to good quality water and the right quantity of water at the right time. For a quarter century, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and its sister Floods Directive (FD) have been the prime EU policy mechanisms driving Member States to maintain and restore the quality of their wetlands. The growing impact of climate change and wider human impacts on the environment have driven calls for new thinking in water policy.

In 2024 we focused on assuring that the WFD delivers on the protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystems, helping Member States meet their commitments and ensuring that river restoration targets are included. Actions included calling for better implementation and enforcement of the WFD and additional restoration measures to achieve Good Ecological Status by 2027 (in close cooperation with the Living Rivers Europe coalition). We have actively contributed by participating in working groups supporting the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) process and submitting input on key deliverables and consultations.

At river basin scale we addressed a landmark complaint procedure before the UNECE of the Water Convention, to improve transparency and accessibility of transboundary governance of shared river basins between Spain and Portugal. This resulted in the issuance of recommendations on behalf of the UNECE to improve transparency and stakeholder engagement in functioning of the Albufeira Convention. Good governance is essential to ensure that river flows maintain wetland, including river health along the length of rivers.

Restoring Europe's free-flowing rivers

The majority of Europe's rivers are highly degraded. Their fragmentation by a wide variety of infrastructure including dams, barrages, dikes and flood risk management structures is reflected in the 93% decline in freshwater migratory fish populations, the loss of ancestral fishing practices, increased soil erosion, nutrient depletion, flood risk and the loss of fertile floodplain farmland across Europe.

These includes targets for the restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems to strengthen biodiversity, climate resilience, and water security. Its adoption includes binding restoration targets for Member States, as part of their national restoration plans.

Working with members, partners and networks, Wetlands International Europe has developed best practices, embedded targets in policy and mobilised knowledge-based action. During the past two years we have ensured that the 25,000km free-flowing rivers target, enshrined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, has been codified into EU law becoming a binding union-wide target under the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) in 2024. To facilitate effective implementation of the NRR, we enabled our Italian member CIRF (Italian Centre for River Restoration) to co-develop the EU Commissions methodology criteria for free-flowing rivers, guiding member states on how to implement this target.

Another major achievement was the successful incorporation of a non-deterioration target for free-flowing rivers as part of the NRR to ensure that improvements in river health are not undone by damaging management elsewhere. This obligation will be instrumental in ensuring that targets under the Renewable Energy Directive, which stimulates the deployment of hydropower plants in rivers all around Europe, do not deteriorate stretches of river that have been restored under the NRL (Nature Restoration Law).

We prepared a guidance for NGOs on how to engage with national authorities on their National Nature Restoration Plans (NNRPs), organised webinars and prepared a brief on how dam removal can contribute to the NRR targets.

We have continued to support the Dam Removal Europe movement to facilitate barrier removals. Together, we co-organised the largest river restoration event of the year, the Free Flow Conference, served on the jury of the European Dam Removal Award and supported publication of the annual dam removal report. Through our members we supported Italy's 1st conference on river connectivity to meet the NRR target (CIRF), and an analysis of the legal framework in Greece as a roadmap for barrier removals to achieve the target (MedINA- Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos).

Rewetting Europe: The power of wetland sponges

The effects of climate change are increasingly making themselves felt across Europe through more erratic weather and associated extremes of floods and droughts. A key element of the solution is the deployment of nature-based solutions (NbS), at scale across the continent. Wetlands or sponge landscapes have a central role to play as they store and slow the flow of water before it moves into rivers and flows downstream. This means that damaging flood peaks can be reduced and flows maintained in times of drought. We are a thought leader and front-runner on this issue in Europe. Our programme has continued to develop strongly in 2024, highlighted by the publication of our first peer-reviewed research paper that builds on a decade of experience and demonstrating that damaging flood peaks can be reduced and higher flows maintained in times of scarcity.

More EU action on Water Resilience was at the top of the political agenda of decision makers throughout the year. In a position paper developed with the Living Rivers Europe (LRE) coalition, we pushed for ecosystem-based adaptation, with new, legally binding targets and the establishment of an “EU Sponges Funding Facility”. Our meetings with the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council (Belgian Presidency), as well as speaking opportunities at several events, including the high level Climate Adaptation Summit of the Belgian Presidency in Wallonia, were successful in influencing the position of political parties and Council Conclusions of the Belgian Presidency which included strong language calling for “achieving availability and security of water supply through the application of nature-based solutions such as conservation and restoration of wetlands and other freshwater ecosystems.” The LRE position was also adopted as part of the EU Civil Presidency of NGOs during the Hungarian Presidency, the European Green Party in its Election Manifesto, as well as the programme of the S&D party in its new EU Parliamentary agenda calling for a Climate Adaptation Law.

We succeeded in expanding our portfolio of projects and partners to deploy and upscale sponges on the ground with the kick off of new Horizon Europe research project called SpongeBoost, led by the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig, Germany. The project will test innovative approaches in field sites across Europe and create a roadmap for implementing transformative sponge measures to improve resilience to extreme events. The consortium includes 10 front-runner institutions, including member CIREF with two field sites in Spain, and our long-term knowledge partner Bureau Strooming. The project is one of three EU-funded sponge research projects, giving us an opportunity to feed the results into policy implementation and creating momentum to realise large scale sponge implementation.

2024 saw many exciting developments as we continued to develop our work on the ground in several European landscapes, building partnerships, contributing to the knowledge base and demonstrating the impact of multi-benefit sponge solutions:

- Despite the challenges of working in a transboundary setting and in a war-affected country, our planning project “Reconnecting the Latorica River Floodplain” supported by the Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes Programme, spanning the border region of Slovakia and Ukraine, made significant progress. A Transboundary Steering Committee was established and meetings held with almost all priority actors in both countries, and the knowledge base that will guide the vision for restoration is almost complete.
- Our work in the priority landscape of Eifel region in Germany, impacted by catastrophic floods of 2021 continued to progress, with a field site established in the Nister river supported supported by Effektiv Spenden and in another location by the SpongeBoost project and partner University of Aachen.
- Our study of the landscape factors that contributed to damaging floods near Toledo (Spain) in 2022, helped bring together a partnership of organisations including member CIREF (Iberian Centre for River Restoration), and was the basis of a more in-depth report funded by the Suntory Beverage and Food Spain to identify potential sponge measures to implement on the ground.

Restoring lake ecosystems for a resilient future

Lakes are important wetland that have until recently received less attention in our programme. Human activities continue to place considerable pressure on lake ecosystems through excessive water abstraction, pollution, eutrophication, and hydro-morphological changes — pressures increasingly intensified by climate change. In response, the EU-funded Horizon EUROLakes project started 2024,

aiming to help protect and restore the ecological health of European natural lakes. The project is grounded in the [4 Returns Framework for Landscape Restoration](#), promoting sustainable, long-term solutions at the landscape level.

As coordinator, we are leading this Horizon Europe project in close collaboration with 11 other organisations. EUROLakes focuses on working with local communities to develop integrated protection and restoration strategies, promoting nature-based solutions and sustainable financing mechanisms. Three demonstration sites, Lake Vico in Italy, Lake Bistreț in Romania, and Lake Dümmer in Germany, will serve as the main sites for piloting these approaches, with the aim of enabling replication and scaling-up across Europe. The project's objectives are closely aligned with key EU policies.

Providing visibility to Mediterranean wetlands

We continue to build Wetlands International Europe's Mediterranean programme prioritising wetland conservation in freshwater, coastal and delta wetlands through coordinated advocacy, targeted restoration, and strengthened collaboration within the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands (MAW). The MAW General Members Meeting, held in Arles, France, provided a forum for exchanging knowledge, sharing lessons learned and identifying resource gaps to enhance network capacity and strategic alignment.

Several high-visibility conservation efforts were advanced over the year. Two major Red Alert campaigns were launched to counter urgent threats to critical sites, generating strong public support, media coverage, and pressure on national and international decision-makers. In the Camargue (France), a planned high-voltage power line project threatened the wetland and we sparked coordinated advocacy by 74 organisations. In Vjosa-Narta (Albania) we continued to support action against the Vlora airport construction in a protected area, home to endangered species, gaining responses from the European Commission, Albanian government and IATA. Additional campaigns were prepared for Urdaibai (Spain) and successfully halted harmful agricultural activity at Lake Marmara (Turkey) through legal action, offering hope for ecosystem recovery.

► Main achievements:

- We secured the free-flowing rivers target in the NRR and inclusion of a non-deterioration target.
- Our member CIRF co-lead development of the EC's methodology and guidance for achieving the free-flowing rivers target to improve the good status of EU waters and share this knowledge with expert audiences and NGOs.
- Working with Dam Removal Europe and our members we catalysed the accelerated removal of barriers.
- We influenced the position of political parties and Council Conclusions of the Belgian Presidency ahead of a European Water Resilience Strategy
- We expanded our portfolio of projects and partners to deploy and upscale natural sponges on the ground, including the launch of Horizon SpongeBoost.
- We mobilised awareness and action related to threats to important wetlands in the Mediterranean.
- We launched the EUROLakes Horizon project to protect and restore Europe's natural lakes using NbS — with the goal of delivering real benefits to local communities and ecosystems.

4.2 Peatlands

Peatlands are unique wetlands where waterlogged conditions slow plant decay, creating carbon-rich soils that store nearly 30% of the world's soil carbon despite covering just 4% of the Earth's surface. They support specialised biodiversity and provide vital ecosystem services like carbon storage, water purification, flood regulation, and climate resilience.

In Europe, peatlands cover about 12% of the land but nearly half are degraded, mainly due to drainage for agriculture, forestry, and peat extraction. Restoring peatlands faces challenges including ongoing agricultural use of degraded peat soils for crops like maize and potatoes, continued peat extraction for greenhouse production and horticulture, and fragmented land ownership complicating large-scale restoration efforts. Despite these barriers, protecting and restoring Europe's peatlands is critical for achieving climate and biodiversity goals. It requires urgent prioritisation within EU and national policies to secure peatlands' ecological functions and long-term sustainability.

Unlocking climate resilience through peatland restoration policies

Wetlands International Europe, together with our members and partners, advocate for ambitious peatland restoration targets, integration into national climate and biodiversity strategies, and sustainable financing mechanisms, creating a more positive enabling environment for peatland restoration. We support knowledge exchange and the uptake of nature-based solutions that make peatlands part of Europe's response to the climate and biodiversity.

Several evolving policy files in Brussels offered significant opportunities in 2024, and we were actively engaged to ensure that peatlands received the recognition they deserved. Through consistent dialogue and technical input, via the European Commission Expert Group, we influenced the Carbon Removals Certification Framework (CRCF) regulation to support peat-inclusive standards that will allow Member States to channel financing towards peatland restoration.

We also welcomed the final adoption of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)—a milestone marking years of advocacy. The regulation now includes mandatory targets for peatland restoration and recognises paludiculture as a viable measure for restoring degraded peat soils. Member States need to propose National Nature Restoration Plans (NRPs) determining priority areas to restore and engage in dialogues with local stakeholders to implement restoration. We are contributing to the visibility and dissemination of wetland restoration examples to support a better understanding and implementation of the law, while also gathering available data and resources to create a repository that can facilitate its effective application.

In addition, together with partners we secured important outcomes under the Soil Monitoring Law (SML). The law now includes provisions for organic soil carbon monitoring, the recognition of paludiculture, and a pathway toward mandatory soil health targets in the future.

Apart from influencing EU policies, we also worked at the national level with our partners and members. In 2024, we analysed national-level policies that include peatlands in various countries, as a step toward addressing existing gaps and contributing to better integration of peatlands into national policy frameworks. Together, these legislative gains represent a major step forward in embedding peatland protection and restoration in the EU's climate, biodiversity, and agricultural frameworks.

Raising awareness of peatlands and their restoration benefits

To unlock large-scale restoration, we support knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Over the past year, we have communicated the critical role of peatlands in addressing climate change, water security, and biodiversity loss, with a strong focus on their restoration and sustainable use. Our work on restoration showcased practical field approaches but we have also communicated non-technical restoration best practices such as the co-creation of peatland restoration visions and plans highlighting the importance of early involvement of local communities and stakeholders.

We raised visibility through strategic presentations and events—including the Food Policy Coalition and Eurosite Annual Meeting in Durham, England—while ensuring that peatlands and paludiculture were acknowledged in EU strategies and political moments.

Recognising that peatlands are essential for reaching Europe’s climate neutrality and biodiversity goals, we stepped up efforts in 2024 to position sustainable peatland management as a key policy and investment priority. We have shared clear insights into available financing mechanisms and opportunities to support options for restoration.

Together with partners like Rewilding and Wilderway, we developed country factsheets to identify barriers and opportunities for peatland carbon removal initiatives.

To further boost awareness and solutions, we launched a Paludiculture Cookbook “Morsels from the Moor” in collaboration with the youth collective RE-PEAT, illustrating the potential of paludiculture for food production and including recipes from paludiculture plants. This resource will support future advocacy, particularly on the post-2027 CAP.

Lastly, on the 30th of May, we hosted our first World Peatlands Day event in Brussels, drawing over 100 participants and building momentum across sectors.

Building momentum for Paludiculture in the EU

Paludiculture is the sustainable land use of wet or rewetted peatlands using water-tolerant crops, allowing continued agricultural production without draining peat soils. Unlike conventional agriculture, which causes significant carbon emissions and land degradation by draining peatlands, paludiculture maintains the essential waterlogged conditions needed for carbon storage. This practice reduces greenhouse gas emissions, supports climate mitigation, promotes biodiversity, mitigates flood and wildfire risks and improves water quality.

Economically, paludiculture offers alternative livelihoods and market opportunities through products like biomass energy, insulation materials, and sustainable horticultural substrates, aligning with circular and green economy goals. At the policy level, it is increasingly recognised in EU frameworks such as the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and the Carbon Removals Certification Framework (CRCF) as a key solution for peatland restoration, climate action, and just rural transitions.

In 2024 we advanced paludiculture adoption by raising awareness through seminars, awareness raising events like World Peatland Day and continuing to mobilise innovation. With a large consortium of expert organisations, including our members MSF, CMoK, Pelkių atkūrimo ir apsaugos fondas and an SME aeeco we mobilised the Horizon project PaluWise that will test, innovate and demonstrate paludiculture, in support of upscaling paludiculture in Europe. This project investigates best practices of paludiculture,

technical implementation, the benefits and impacts of a transition from drained peatlands to paludiculture use and what are the drivers and barriers in legislation. Four demonstration in 50 ha sites in the Netherlands, Poland, the UK and Finland will be implemented with local actors. Our main task in the project is to deliver the socio-economic and political drivers of paludiculture to influence relevant stakeholders for a paludiculture value-chain development.

We supported the youth collective RE-PEAT's Peatlands Justice Campaign, promoting peat-free alternatives and facilitating their engagement with industry to foster sustainable, peat-free horticulture solutions across Europe.

► Main achievements:

- We successfully advocated for the inclusion of peatland restoration and paludiculture in key EU policies such as the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and the Carbon Removal Certification Framework (CRCF), ensuring legal and financial support for peatland protection.
- We secured EU funding for the Horizon project PaluWise that will work to upscale paludiculture, establishing demonstration sites that showcase sustainable peatland cultivation practices across Europe.
- We promoted holistic approaches to peatland restoration that integrate financing strategies, policy alignment, and meaningful engagement with local communities.
- We actively engaged with the horticulture sector and youth groups like RE-PEAT to promote peat-free alternatives and support the transition away from peat-based growing media.
- We strengthened the visibility of peatlands and their contribution to biodiversity, climate, water quality, and circular economy goals, directly supporting the EU Green Deal and fostering a just transition for communities reliant on peatlands.

4.3 Biodiversity

European wetlands are among the continent's most biodiverse ecosystems, supporting thousands of unique species and delivering vital benefits to people. However, they are also a global hotspot for biodiversity loss. Early and widespread wetland drainage, along with pressures such as unsustainable hunting, fishing, habitat fragmentation, pollution, invasive species, and altered water flows, have led to steep declines. According to the European Red List and other assessments, 45% of Europe's waterbird species now have declining populations—more than landbirds or seabirds—and 37% of freshwater fish species are threatened, making them among the most imperilled taxonomic groups. Amphibians, aquatic plants, and invertebrates are also in significant decline.

Wetlands International Europe works to reverse this trend by improving the conservation status of wetland species and the ecosystems they depend on, with a strong focus on influencing EU biodiversity policies. Our biodiversity programme targets migratory birds and fish, connecting wetland habitats across Europe through flyways and swimways. This complements our broader work on peatland, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems. Building on a legacy of international cooperation dating back more than 60 years—we continue to drive science-based conservation and policy advocacy to halt biodiversity loss and restore healthy wetlands across Europe.

Strengthening the implementation of EU nature policy

As part of our efforts to support the implementation of the EU's biodiversity policies, we made significant contributions across several priority areas, helping to strengthen nature conservation and restoration across Europe.

In 2020, the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 was adopted, setting out a political commitment with ambitious targets to restore Europe's ecosystems. As part of its implementation, Member States were expected to submit pledges to expand the EU's network of protected areas, including targets to protect 30% of land and sea, with 10% under strict protection.

A major milestone in 2024 was the adoption of the NRR, after a complex and politically sensitive process. We played an active role in shaping and supporting this legislation through our participation in the #NatureRestore campaign, mobilising national members to counter disinformation and secure political support. Following the law's adoption, we began assisting our network in preparing for the development of National Nature Restoration Plans (NNRPs), due by 2026. We take particular pride in having helped secure the inclusion of targets for peatlands and free-flowing rivers—areas where our expertise and advocacy were especially impactful.

In collaboration with the European Habitats Forum (EHF), we engaged with the European Parliament elections in June 2024, by sharing our nature priorities for the next EU mandate (2024-2025), calling for effective implementation and enforcement of EU nature laws as well as for strong ambition on freshwater ecosystems, among other asks.

Through all these efforts, we have helped reinforce the integration of wetland and migratory species conservation into core EU biodiversity frameworks, ensuring stronger protection and restoration

commitments across the Member States. Our work continues to support the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, turning political ambition into action on the ground.

Advancing migratory waterbird conservation across Europe's wetlands

Migratory waterbirds are some of the most recognisable and iconic wetland biodiversity. Collectively they comprise hundreds of species in Europe alone and many are experiencing long-term negative trends, often linked to wetland loss and degradation. Wetlands International has been a driving force behind the conservation of migratory waterbirds in Europe and globally for more than 60 years. By coordinating annual data collection and synthesis through the International Waterbird Census (one of the world's longest running and arguably largest citizen science biodiversity monitoring survey) and translating these into knowledge it supports implementation of both the EU Birds Directive and the African- Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

In 2024 Wetlands International Europe continued to play an active role both in the implementation of the EU Birds Directive and AEWA. The results of our EU Multispecies Trend Indices showed an overall improvement for species under Annex 1 of the Birds Directive although the status of species that may be hunted remains less favourable than in the mid-1990s. We continued to play an active role in the EU Task Force on the Recovery of Birds, in the AEWA Technical Committee and work with several AEWA International Species Working Groups (ISWG).

WI-EA also has a long tradition facilitating flyway scale initiatives to further the conservation of species or groups of species. In 2024 we secured a major new LIFE programme called Aquatic Warbler on the Move (AWOM). This small but charismatic species is continental Europe's rarest migratory songbird, and it has suffered a catastrophic 95% decline in the past 100 years. Every year this 10-14 gramme bird moves annually from Eastern Europe to West Africa relying on wetland types that are fast disappearing. Together with 14 other organisations we are working on the staging and wintering sites, (while a sister LIFE project is implemented in the breeding areas), we will restore at least 20 sites and establish the foundations for a climate resilient flyway site network as a means to safeguard and improve its future.

Bringing migratory fish into the mainstream of EU nature policy

European migratory fish have experienced dramatic declines over recent decades, largely due to river fragmentation from dams, barrages, and other infrastructure that block their swimways. Despite the scale of this biodiversity loss, the issue has long remained under-recognised in conservation policy. In response, we have worked with member and partner organisations through the Trans-European Swimways Network (TEN-S) to bring the plight of migratory fish to the fore and build a robust, science-based foundation for future policy action.

In 2024, we released and promoted our landmark report Swimways of European Importance (SEI)—the first technical assessment identifying Europe's most vital migratory corridors for freshwater fish, based on available species distribution data. We actively disseminated the findings at key international platforms, including the Free Flow Conference and World Fish Migration Day in Brussels. In collaboration with TEN-S members and partners, we supported an European workshop on sturgeon bycatch, and

participated in the creation of an ambitious Horizon Europe project, Danube LifeLines, dedicated to restoring connectivity for fish in the Danube river basin.

This work not only expanded awareness but also directly contributed to the growth of TEN-S as a collaborative platform for experts, NGOs, and policymakers. It laid the groundwork for future engagement with the EU policy, supporting the objectives of the Habitats Directive and the European Eel Regulation. We also reviewed upcoming policy opportunities to strengthen SEI conservation, ensuring that migratory fish gain the visibility and protection they urgently need.

Main achievements:

- We actively contributed to the adoption and implementation planning of the EU Nature Restoration Law. Through the #NatureRestore campaign, we mobilised our network to secure strong representation of peatlands and wetlands in National Nature Restoration Plans (NNRPs) due in 2026.
- We improved waterbird population assessments, by enhancing the quality of waterbird population trend data by 8%, strengthening monitoring for the EU Birds Directive and AEWA reporting.
- We launched and coordinated the LIFE Aquatic Warbler on the Move (AWOM) project across 19 key sites in 10 countries. This is the largest flyway conservation programme supported by LIFE Nature SAP to date, aimed at safeguarding Europe's rarest migratory songbird.
- We promoted wetland and migratory species protection in EU policy, reviewing Member States' protected area pledges, contributed scientific data on wetlands, and supported enforcement planning under the EU Biodiversity Strategy.
- We made direct and influential inputs into the EU Biodiversity Partnership Expert Group on Nature Restoration and the AEWA Technical Committee enabling direct input into high-level policy and reporting processes.

4.4 External Dimension/ Global Europe

European decisions have far-reaching impacts on ecosystems worldwide, particularly on wetlands such as peatlands, rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. Despite the EU's growing engagement in water diplomacy and its promotion of nature-based solutions, wetlands remain underrepresented in key policies and initiatives.

The Global Europe programme (formally known as External Dimension) aims to prioritise wetlands in the EU agenda by positioning them as essential to addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development, while fostering stronger international cooperation and alignment with EU external action priorities.

Driving change in EU global policy and investment priorities

Wetlands worldwide continue to face increasing pressure from unsustainable production and consumption patterns. While the EU is taking essential steps through policies on deforestation, raw materials, and sustainable trade these measures continue to have unintended consequences for wetlands, including peatlands within and beyond Europe's borders. If not carefully designed and implemented, such policies contribute to habitat loss, pollution, and infrastructure-driven degradation. Strengthening coherence across EU policies is essential to ensure they support, rather than undermine, wetland protection globally. In response, Wetlands International Europe has consistently worked to raise awareness, influence EU external action, and promote nature-based solutions focused on wetlands by contributing to regional and country consultation on EU Annual Action Plans.

Promoting wetlands for resilience, peace, and security

In fragile and conflict-affected areas, wetlands serve as natural buffers against climate shocks by regulating water flows, reducing the risks of floods and droughts, and sustaining access to vital resources such as water and food. These ecosystem services are essential for stabilising livelihoods, easing competition over scarce resources, and preventing displacement and social tensions; as such they underpin climate resilience, social and economic stability. Their restoration and conservation can be an important support to peacebuilding, especially in regions where natural resource scarcity fuels conflict. In regions like the Sahel, where the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation intensify human vulnerability, wetlands can significantly reduce the environmental pressures that contribute to conflict. Recognising this, we advocate for the wise use and restoration of wetlands as tools to advance peace and security through EU external policies.

Over the past year, we engaged in high-level policy dialogues, expert consultations, and stakeholder fora to elevate wetlands as nature-based solutions that foster both climate adaptation and social cohesion. Through targeted outreach to EU policymakers and partners, we worked to ensure that the role of wetlands is recognised and embedded in the EU's global action—highlighting their relevance to peacebuilding, development cooperation, and humanitarian interventions. Our participation in EPLO (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office) roundtable was reflected in the event's final report—highlighting wetlands as part of sustainable peace solutions.

Advancing global action: Calling for EU Wetland Partnerships as a flagship initiative

In 2024, we called for the establishment of the EU Wetland Partnerships Initiative as a Global Gateway flagship to strengthen the EU's global leadership in climate action, biodiversity, and sustainable development. The initiative promotes international cooperation for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of wetlands—vital for water security, food systems, and livelihoods. It aligns with key EU external priorities and global commitments, including the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Freshwater Challenge, with a focus on partnerships in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Through events in and around the EU Parliament, engagement with key Commission bodies, parliamentarians, other Brussels based NGOs in the environment and development sectors such as Environmental Justice Foundation, the European Investment Bank and partner country representatives we have developed increasing enthusiasm for the establishment of Wetland Partnerships as a potentially important financing mechanism.

Building on the success of two high-level events on Wetland Partnerships during EU Green Week and Amazon Week, we achieved some key milestones: a Brazilian Parliamentarian formally requested Wetland Partnerships in a letter to the Ministry of Environment and we secured agreement with the Colombian Ambassador and the Brazilian Mission to the EU to co-organise a high-level event on wetlands ahead of COP30.

Tackling commodity-driven Wetland loss in global supply chains

Wetland degradation is increasingly driven by the expansion of major soft commodities such as soy, palm oil, and timber. While the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) addresses forest impacts, it currently excludes wetlands and other critical ecosystems. In response, we are advocating for the inclusion of wetlands as part of a planned review of the EUDR to prevent harm to wetlands from infrastructure and commodity production. Given that Article 34 of the Regulation foresees a first review during 2025, we convened a dedicated workshop with wetland experts to assess the regulation's potential implications for wetlands and to explore the added value of expanding its scope to reflect wetland-related risks better.

In Latin America, we support our regional office in advancing the Corredor Azul Programme, promoting integrated conservation and sustainable development along the Paraná-Paraguay river system from the Pantanal in Brazil to the Parana Delta in Argentina. This major and comparatively intact riverine wetland system is under major threat from a range of commodity driven investments including navigational infrastructure, port developments and clearance for cattle ranching.

Advocating for responsible Lithium mining to protect critical wetlands

Critical raw materials like lithium are vital for the EU's green transition, yet their extraction poses serious risks to fragile wetlands, particularly in Latin America's High Andean region. Mining activities threaten water resources, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of local communities. Together with our Argentina office, we raised awareness of these impacts within the so called "lithium triangle" region (Argentina, Peru, Chile and Bolivia) and supported the Saving High Andean Wetlands for People and Nature Programme. Through advocacy for responsible mining practices, backing conservation efforts, and engaging policymakers, we work to integrate wetland protection into raw material supply chains. Our aim is clear: to ensure the EU's climate goals are achieved without compromising ecosystem health or social equity.

► **Main achievements:**

- Increased recognition among EU stakeholders of the role of wetlands in reducing climate vulnerability, enhancing water security, and mitigating natural resource conflicts.
- Wetlands were indirectly reflected in several partner country Annual Action Plans (AAPs) through broader water-related language and priorities.
- Recognition of the need to integrate wetlands into peacebuilding strategies.
- Growing momentum for the establishment of Wetland Partnerships as an important financial mechanism to invest in the sustainable development, conservation and restoration of major wetland systems in partner countries.
- Our Global Europe Programme Manager represents the organisation in the Global Gateway Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) advisory Platform.
- Establishment of a strategy for the Global Europe programme to underpin its future development and impact.

5. Governance and team

The Board

Wetlands International Europe is a network of NGO members based in ten European countries but working in many more. Each focuses on a variety of specific wetland ecosystems, themes and their biodiversity. Member organisations address particular threats, develop practical solutions, work with local government, private sector and grass roots organisations, engage with expert institutions, and contribute to policy development.

As part of the global Wetlands International network—with around 200 staff across 19 offices—Wetlands International Europe operates under the supervision of a Board of Directors. The Board, appointed by the General Members Meeting, oversees the organisation’s overall direction and meets at least twice a year. Its responsibilities include approving the Annual Report and Accounts, financial forecast and budget, succession planning, and membership applications, as well as providing general oversight of the Secretariat. Board members are not remunerated for their work.

Composition of the Board in 2024:

Board member	Organisation represented	Position
Jan Peters	Michael Succow Foundation	Chair
Han de Groot	Wetlands International	Vice-Chair
Eduardo de Miguel	Fundación Global Nature	Secretary
Alison Debney	Zoological Society of London	Treasurer
Andrea Goltara	Centro Italiano per la Riqualificazione Fluviale	Member

Our members

Wetlands International Europe’s governance is rooted in the active involvement of its members, who in addition to actively participating in our work programme guide the Secretariat’s work and strategic direction. Each year, members convene at the General Members Meeting (GMM) to review the Association’s progress, reflect on shared achievements, and identify future priorities.

In 2024, the GMM was held in Brussels in July and was preceded by a special networking event to mark the 10th anniversary of the Association. Established in 2013 by seven founding organisations from Spain, Poland, France, the UK, and Germany, Wetlands International Europe emerged from a shared vision to inspire and mobilise society to safeguard and restore wetlands. Over the past ten years, the Association has steadily expanded its geographical reach and strengthened its programmes, achieving notable successes in peatland recognition, pioneering work on natural sponges, the protection of migratory waterbirds and migratory fish, and the integration of wetlands into the EU’s global policy agenda. A video presenting the history and milestones of the Association was released during the event.

In addition to the annual meeting, the Secretariat maintains an ongoing relationship with members throughout the year—through bilateral engagement and by organising thematic sessions with groups of members to address specific issues and foster collaboration.

During 2024 our membership network has grown and become more engaged, increasing from 11 members in 2022 to 13 in 2024. The Blue Rivers Foundation joined Wetlands International Europe in 2024.

Enhanced communication tools—such as a dedicated newsletter and thematic working sessions—have strengthened member participation in joint projects and policy advocacy.



Our Secretariat

All of Wetlands International Europe's operations are made possible thanks to the dedication and professionalism of the Secretariat. In 2024, the team continued to grow, starting the year with 17 staff members and reaching 20 by December (18.8 FTE). This growth reflects our ongoing commitment to strengthening our capacity and expanding our impact. In addition to our core staff, we continue to benefit from the valuable contributions of interns, volunteers, associated experts, and consultants.

Throughout the year, we reinforced our internal systems and governance, enhancing the accountability of the association. We ensured the timely, accurate, and transparent provision of information to both our Board and General Members, in line with our commitment to high standards of oversight and communication.

We continue to operate primarily from our Brussels office, while also benefiting from the support of the Wetlands International Global Office, which provides additional office space for some of our staff members and operational assistance.

A major milestone in 2024 was the successful completion of our official registration in Belgium with our branch office, solidifying our presence in Brussels and allowing us to have better access to national initiatives.

We also strengthened our team by welcoming a new Policy Officer focused on Freshwater ecosystems — as well as a Project Coordinator for the EUOLakes initiative and a new Communications Officer. Additional temporary support was brought in to bolster our work on biodiversity.

Looking ahead, we are strategically investing in our management and operational capacity. A new Head of Operations is being recruited (and joined us in early 2025), and we plan to expand our resource development capacity by recruiting dedicated support for fundraising and business development. As we consolidate our organisational structure, we will also explore options to further strengthen programme management—particularly for our Peatlands, as well as adding support to our Global Europe programme.

Lastly, we aim to step up our communications and outreach efforts, with the objective of better informing our external audiences, members, partners, and donors, and increasing the visibility and impact of our work.

Networks

Much of Wetlands International Europe's impact is achieved through close collaboration with many networks and partner organisations. These relationships significantly extend our reach, enhance our technical expertise, and amplify our collective voice in influencing policy, promoting best practices, and mobilising action for wetlands conservation and restoration. Here are some of the highlights of our cooperation.

During 2024, Wetlands International Europe decided to begin exploring new avenues of collaboration with European government members of the Wetlands International Global Network. Although separate from the European Association, these members contribute to network governance and offer strategic opportunities. Notable collaborations included work with Ireland on the European Peatlands Initiative, engagement with Belgium around its EU Council Presidency, exchanges with Slovenia on Wetland Partnerships, and project implementation with Slovakia on Natural Water Retention Measures. Strengthening these links could help bridge gaps between EU policy processes and national-level implementation—particularly in advancing the Nature Restoration Law across work programmes.

As a regional office of the Wetlands International global network, Wetlands International Europe plays an active governance role through participation in the Network Management Team, Global Board, and Heads of Office meetings. This engagement enables the European office to influence global strategic decisions, attract investment, and lead key initiatives such as the European Peatlands Programme and the Global Europe Programme.

In 2024, we deepened our engagement with Eurosite, a network of organisations and individuals dedicated to land and nature conservation across governmental and civil society sectors, both within and beyond the EU. We signed a Friendship Agreement with Eurosite, with a particular focus on advancing our work on peatlands and sponge landscapes in the coming years.

As noted earlier, we also continued our active role in Dam Removal Europe, a dynamic coalition of river enthusiasts, environmental professionals, activists, and agencies committed to restoring free-flowing rivers. Our involvement supports efforts to improve the enabling environment for barrier removal across Europe, aligning with our freshwater restoration objectives.

We maintained strong ties with the Mediterranean Wetlands Alliance, a coalition of 32 environmental NGOs and research institutions from 17 countries. This partnership continues to strengthen the role of civil society in safeguarding wetlands across the Mediterranean region.

6. Our projects

Our project portfolio has seen significant growth and diversification over the past three years, increasing from 18 projects in 2021—including 3 EU-funded initiatives—to 26 projects in 2024, of which 8 are supported by EU funding.

Our participation in multiple Horizon Europe consortia is rapidly expanding our knowledge and innovation network. Through projects such as **ALFA Wetlands**, **EuroLakes**, **PaluWise**, **REWET**, **WaterLANDS**, **WET HORIZONS**, **MYRIAD**, as well as **SpongeBoost**, we collaborate in consortia totalling close to 100 partners, including research institutions, NGOs, and SMEs. We are coordinating one of these initiatives and playing a partnership role in the others. These partnerships provide us with access to cutting-edge science, applied expertise, and new opportunities to strengthen our advocacy and communications efforts. Increasingly they also provide small scale pilots which we can try to upscale and replicate.

In addition to the LIFE Operating Grant which has long provided the financial spine of the organisation, we secured a new multi-country LIFE project called **Aquatic Warblers on the Move (AWOM)**. WIE will lead this 5 years, 14 partners project to improve the status of this small but charismatic bird through wetland conservation and restoration along the southern end of its flyway route.

7. Communications and outreach

In 2024, Wetlands International Europe significantly expanded its communications and outreach activities, reinforcing its role as a key voice for wetland conservation and restoration in Europe. These efforts aimed to raise awareness, inform policy, and mobilise action across a wide range of audiences, including decision-makers, partners, and the general public.

Amplifying our message across digital platforms

We expanded our digital outreach by launching new social media channels and maintaining an active, growing presence across multiple platforms:

- **LinkedIn:** We launched our LinkedIn account in April 2024 and rapidly built an engaged audience, reaching more than 2,000 followers within the year. By consistently sharing policy updates, news from our network, and highlights from key events, we strengthened our professional visibility and outreach
- **Instagram:** Our new account was only opened in September 2024 and has seen a good engagement with a growing number of followers (+300) gained in less than a year. We share accessible, engaging content to raise awareness about wetland solutions, primarily through short videos. Using a light and relatable tone, it aims to inform and inspire the general public, civil society organisations, and grassroots movements.
- **X (formerly Twitter)** served as a platform for real-time updates on advocacy campaigns, publications, and events. We discontinued its frequent use in early 2025.
- Our bi-monthly **newsletter** keeps members informed about upcoming opportunities, events, and key developments across our network.

A notable highlight of the year was the launch of the [Natural Sponges website](#)—an interactive digital platform illustrating how wetlands function as nature-based solutions for water management, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation. This resource was developed to enhance public understanding and support for wetland ‘sponge’ restoration initiatives.

In 2024, we redesigned our website to reflect a more modern and cohesive visual identity. The updated layout places stronger emphasis on wetlands and showcases the role and contributions of our member network.

Informing policy, inspiring action

Wetlands International Europe published several key documents to guide and influence EU environmental and climate policies:

- A [Water handbook for the 2024–2029 EU Mandate](#) provided a strategic roadmap for integrating freshwater ecosystems into EU policy frameworks.
- We published the first-ever inventory of the [Swimways of European Importance \(SEI\)](#), highlighting key migration routes essential for the survival of migratory freshwater fish across Europe.
- We launched [Morsels from the Moor](#), a new book exploring the value of peatlands and the potential of paludiculture for sustainable food production, featuring personal stories and recipes.
- Advocacy materials included public statements, open letters, and policy briefings, such as the call for EU-wide restrictions on the use of lead in outdoor activities.

These publications contributed to ongoing dialogue with EU institutions and stakeholders, reinforcing the urgency of protecting and restoring wetlands in Europe.

Raising awareness with focused events

We also played a prominent role in several high-profile events:

- [Walking Rivers](#) (March 2024), the second edition of Walking Rivers took place in 2024 and counted with over 2000 people that walked along 93 rivers throughout the 5 continents.
- [World Fish Migration Day](#) (May 2024), we organised two public awareness events in Brussels—a documentary screening and a guided river walk—highlighting the importance of protecting freshwater fish migration routes.
- [World Peatlands Day](#) (May 2024), we organised a cultural event in Brussels that mixed music, photo exhibition and sound performance inspired by peatlands stories, to raise awareness about peatlands and inspire action for their protection and safeguard.
- During [EU Green Week](#) (June 2024), Wetlands International Europe co-hosted an event to put on the spotlighting the role of wetlands in building climate resilience and reducing flood risks. Also within that week, we organised a high-level roundtable in [Wetland Partnership](#) Brussels, bringing together diplomats, policymakers, and environmental organisations to highlight the role of Wetland Partnerships in advancing the green transition, global water security, and climate commitments.
- We celebrated our [10th anniversary](#) in July 2024 with an event in Brussels. The event brought together staff, former staff, partners and members to celebrate a decade of achievements and future work in mobilising wetland safeguarding and restoration across Europe. A [video](#) featuring our history and main achievements was released.
- For [Amazon Week](#) (September 2024). Together with the Environmental Justice Foundation, we co-organised an event in the European Parliament on restoring the Pantanal, bringing together EU representatives, ambassadors, and NGOs. The event was accompanied by a public photo exhibition showcasing the Brazilian Pantanal.

Growing collaboration and visibility

In addition to institutional communications, Wetlands International Europe leveraged its participation in various Horizon Europe projects (including REWET, WET HORIZONS, WaterLANDS, and SpongeBoost) to strengthen its profile and knowledge-sharing networks. These collaborations helped extend the organisation's communication reach and visibility, while also enhancing its access to cutting-edge research and practice in wetland restoration.

8. Summary of finance and resourcing

Since 2016, Wetlands International Europe has been granted a LIFE NGO Operating Grant under the EU's LIFE Programme. This grant has co-financed the running costs of the Association. Following the application to conclude a Specific Grant Agreement (SGA) under the 2022-24 Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA), we signed a new year long agreement for 2024. At the end of this year the FPA ended and we responded to a new call for the period 2025-2026. In March 2025, Wetlands International Europe was awarded the FPA for the years 2025 and 2026.

In 2024 we were implementing 7 Horizon projects as a partner or sub-contractor. In September 2024, the EUROLakes project started which we lead and we signed a new LIFE project (AWOM) which we also lead and started on the first of January 2025. Next we signed a contract with the AEWA secretariat (UNEP) which started in November 2024 and runs till the end of March 2025. The objective is the preparation of the 9th edition of the Conservation Status Report for the entire African-European region.

In 2024, we submitted different project applications to public donors such as the European Commission and private donors on topics such as wetland sponges, swimways and biodiversity. From this we have been awarded two Horizon projects of which one started in February 2025 (PaluWise) and one started in May 2025 (DANUBELifeLines).

As reflected in the graphic below, in 2024, the main sources of funding came from the LIFE NGO Operating Grant (European Commission), Wetlands International Global and Horizon Europe programme (European Commission). Other sources are projects with a total income of less than € 50.000 and these include projects contracted through Wetlands International Global but sourced from other donors for work by Wetlands International Europe.

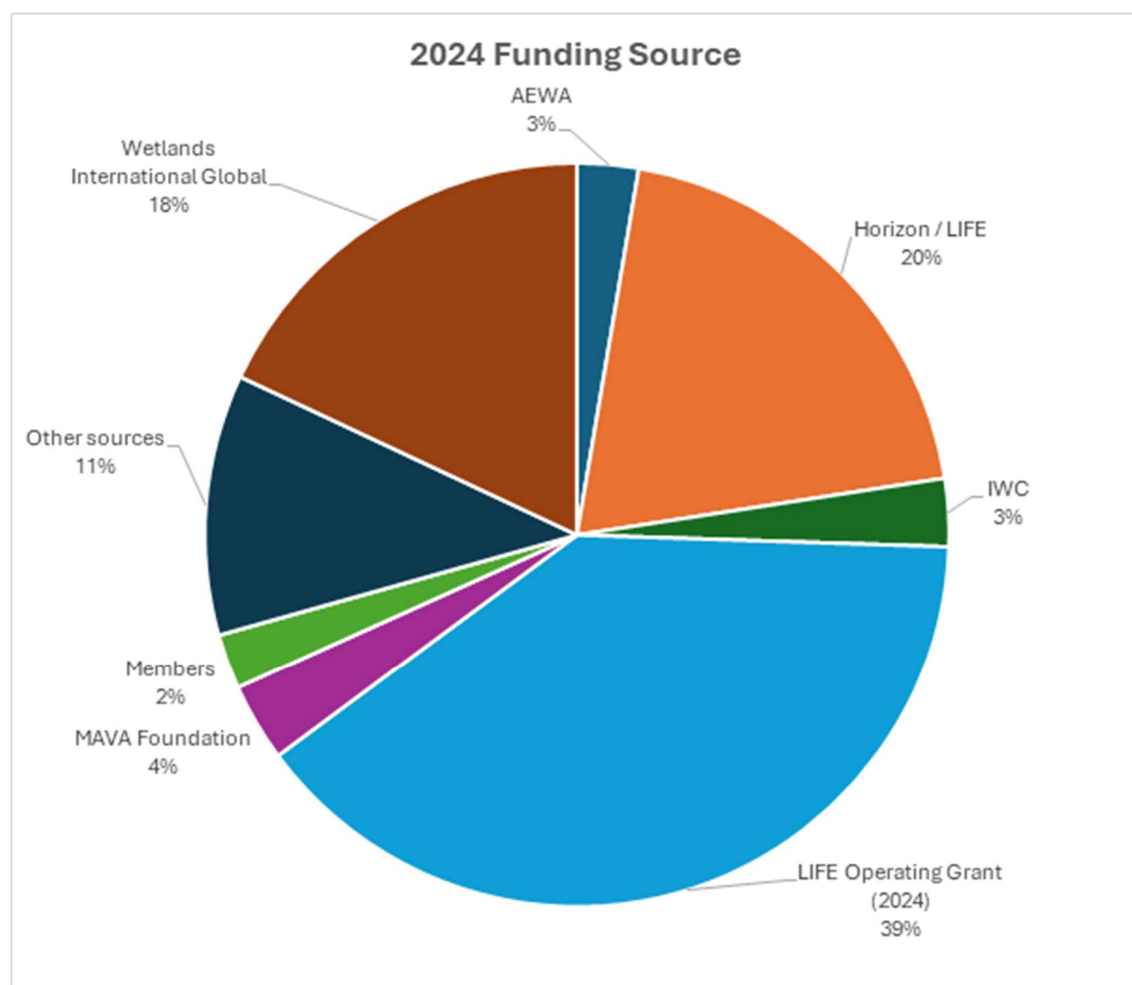
The **total income in 2024 was € 1.731.792** of which € 305.297 came from the Wetlands International Foundation (see pie chart below). The total **expenses amounted to € 1.648.932**. As a result, the year ended with a **surplus of € 82.860** which has been added to the Association's Continuity reserves which now totals € 186.986 at the end of 2024.

Reserves

As Wetlands International Europe is largely dependent on project funding, it needs a capacity to deal with cash flow distress. Therefore, Wetlands International Europe holds a minimum position of the continuity reserve. The continuity reserves are meant to cover short term risks and to ensure that the organisation has a buffer to respond to its obligations in the long term.

As per our reserves policy, the minimum position of the continuity reserves, based on analysis of the risks, is determined at the level that it allows for payment of 3 months (25%) of the annual fixed organisational cost.

We continued working towards building our continuity reserves to reach the agreed target, recognising that a strong reserve is essential for ensuring our long-term stability and resilience.



Actuals and Budget 2024

In the table below the actuals 2024 are compared with the budget 2024:

	Actuals (€) 2024	Budget (€) 2024	Deviation (€)
Income			
Subsidies	1.004.328	935.332	68.996
Other income	727.464	604.683	122.781
	1.731.792	1.540.015	191.777
Expenses			
Staff costs	1.152.747	1.125.422	27.325
Direct project costs	374.747	254.851	119.896
Housing costs	33.786	42.220	-8.434
General costs	82.827	114.179	-31.352
Depreciation	4.825	3.343	1.482
	1.648.932	1.540.015	108.917
Result	82.860	0	82.860

Result

The result is € 82.860 higher than foreseen as the budget contained a fundraising target.

Income

Income is 12,5% higher than budgeted. The main reason for this are increases other sources of co-funding and an increase in the organisational subsidy received from Wetlands International Global. The contribution of the Life Operating grant for 2024 was only 5% lower than budgeted, this due to ineligible cost from the year 2023.

Expenses

The overall expenses increased with a total of € 108.917 against the budget. On the one hand there is the increase in the direct project cost. Mainly due to more subcontracting and travel than was budgeted. Next there is the decrease in the general cost of activities and cost that did not happen in 2024.

Annual Accounts Wetlands International - European Association 2024

Balance sheet as per 31 December

(in Euros)

	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
ASSETS		
Tangible fixed assets		
Tangible fixed assets (1)	80.318	114.841
Current assets		
Debtors and other receivables (2)	2.160.372	469.048
Cash and Banks (3)	<u>2.609.204</u>	<u>39.598</u>
	4.769.576	508.646
Total assets	<u><u>4.849.894</u></u>	<u><u>623.487</u></u>
LIABILITIES		
Reserves and funds		
Continuity reserve (4)	186.986	104.126
Subsidies (5)	68.439	102.290
Short term Liabilities		
Creditors (6)	60.341	37.513
Taxes and social security (7)	26.620	51.233
Other short terms liabilities (8)	<u>4.507.508</u>	<u>328.326</u>
	4.594.469	417.072
Total liabilities	<u><u>4.849.894</u></u>	<u><u>623.487</u></u>

Statement of Income and Expenditure Wetlands International - European Association 2024

(in Euro's)

	2024	Budget 2024	2023
Income			
Subsidies (9)	1.004.328	935.332	816.286
Other income (10)	727.464	604.683	629.678
	<u>1.731.792</u>	<u>1.540.015</u>	<u>1.445.964</u>
Expenses			
Staff costs (11)	1.152.747	1.125.422	1.016.185
Direct project costs (12)	374.747	254.851	308.361
Housing costs (13)	33.786	42.220	25.925
General costs (14)	82.827	114.179	70.672
Depreciation (15)	4.825	3.343	2.645
	<u>1.648.932</u>	<u>1.540.015</u>	<u>1.423.788</u>
Result	<u>82.860</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>22.176</u>

Result appropriation	2024	Budget	2023
Decrease / Increase continuity reserve	82.860	0	22.176
	<u>82.860</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>22.176</u>

Cashflow Statement

(in Euros)

	2024	2023
Cash flow from operating activities		
Result	82.860	22.176
Depreciation	42.977	28.991
Cash flow	<u>125.837</u>	<u>51.167</u>
Changes in work capital		
- Change in receivables	-1.691.324	-227.558
- Change in short-term debts	<u>4.177.397</u>	<u>213.333</u>
	2.486.073	-14.225
Changes in subsidy fixed assets	-33.850	102.290
Cash flow from operating activities	<u>2.578.060</u>	<u>139.231</u>
Cash flow from investing activities		
Investments in fixed assets	<u>-8.454</u>	<u>-136.865</u>
Cash flow from investing activities	-8.454	-136.865
Change in cash & banks	<u>2.569.606</u>	<u>2.366</u>
Cash & banks		
- as per 1st January	39.598	37.232
- as per 31st December	<u>2.609.204</u>	<u>39.598</u>
Change in cash & banks	<u>2.569.606</u>	<u>2.366</u>

General accounting principles

Wetlands International - European Association is established on 25 September 2013 and is registered with the Dutch Chambre of Commerce with number 58891641.

Since 2018 Wetlands International - European Association has the ANBI status.

The financial statements are prepared according to the following principles:

The annual accounts 2024 have been drawn up in accordance with Dutch Accounting Guidelines.

Valuation of assets and liabilities and determination of the result are calculated under historical cost convention.

Unless presented otherwise at the relevant principle for the specific item, assets and liabilities are valued at nominal value.

Transactions in foreign currencies are recorded using the rate at the time of the transaction. Assets and liabilities denominated in foreign currency are converted at the exchange rate at the year-end.

Income and expenses are accounted for on accrual basis. Profit is only included when realized on the balance sheet date. Losses originating before the end of the financial year are taken into account if they have become known before preparation of the financial statements. Cash and bank balances are freely disposable, unless stated otherwise.

The financial year runs from January 1st to December 31st.

Currency

All amounts are expressed in Euro.

Principles of valuation of assets and liabilities

Tangible Fixed assets

Tangible Fixed assets are presented at cost less accumulated depreciation and, if applicable, less impairments in value. Depreciation is based on the estimated useful life of 3-5 years and calculated as a fixed percentage of cost, taking into account any residual value. Depreciation is applied from the date an asset comes into use.

Projects in progress

Projects in progress started before 31 December 2024 and continue into the next financial year.

Project grants are generally determined after the end of the project, upon submission of a report on the use of the funds made available. Insofar the received tranches from donor exceed the costs spent on the project, this surplus is recognised as a grant liability and presented under "Projects to be executed", as part of the short term debts. If the costs spent exceed the grants received, the difference is recognised as a claim on the donor and presented under "Project funds to be received", as part of the short term receivables. In valuing the costs spent on projects, account is taken of whether or not the costs are eligible and the maximum amount of the grant.

Taxes

The tax authorities decided that the organization is not subject to VAT tax and company tax.

Principles of determination of results

Income and expenses are accounted for in the profit and loss account at the time of supply of the relevant goods or services. Results are determined by the difference between income and expenses concerning the financial year.

Principles of determination of the Cash Flow

The cash flow is drawn up based on the indirect method.

Other off-balance sheet assets and liabilities

The European Commission granted us a LIFE NGO Operating Grant "Framework Partnership Agreement" for a three-year period 2022-2024, with only an indicative budget. For each year a separate agreement is signed. For the years 2025-2026 a new call has been published by the European Commission in April 2024. We have been awarded the LIFE NGO Grant for 2025-2026 in March 2025.

Wetlands International European Association has a rental agreement for the office in Brussel till the end of December 2025.

In 2025, the Belgium office was registered as a branch in Belgium.

Explanatory Notes to the Balance sheet

(in Euros)

(1) Tangible fixed assets	ICT Hardware	Furniture	Projects	Total
Balance 1st January				
Purchase value	20.129	768	128.635	149.532
Accumulated depreciation	8.128	218	26.346	34.691
Book value 1st January	12.001	550	102.290	114.841
Investments	4.153	0	4.302	8.454
Desinvestments Purchase value	-5.532	0	0	-5.532
Desinvestmenst Accumulated depreciation	5.532	0	0	5.532
Depreciation	4.672	154	38.152	42.977
Balance 31st December				
Purchase value	18.750	768	132.937	152.454
Accumulated depreciation	7.267	371	64.497	72.136
Book value 31 December	11.482	397	68.439	80.318

Fixed assets financed by specific projects and in use by Wetlands International Europe (staff) are activated. The counter value of these assets is accounted for under 'subsidized fixed assets' which are decreased in line with the depreciation of the assets.

(2) Debtors and other receivables	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Debtors	200	812
Other donor funds	2.011.475	221.645
Current Account WI Foundation	71.293	206.808
Prepayments	63.506	29.718
Other receivables	10.497	6.920
Rent Deposit	2.902	1.398
Staff advances	500	1.747
	<u>2.160.372</u>	<u>469.048</u>

Contributions outstanding for more than 1 year are amortized. For contributions outstanding 2 years or more, the policy is maintained to institute a provision for 100% because in practise it is impossible for the Association to enforce such payments.

(3) Cash & banks	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
ABN AMRO Current account EUR	48.832	39.598
ABN AMRO Savings account EUR	2.560.372	0
	<u>2.609.204</u>	<u>39.598</u>

All liquidities are available on demand

(4) Continuity reserve	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Balance 1 January	104.126	81.950
Result appropriation	82.860	22.176
Balance 31 December	<u>186.986</u>	<u>104.126</u>

The result in the Association's annual account is added to the continuity reserve, in accordance with the organisation's reserves policy.

(5) Subsidized fixed assets	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Balance 1st January	102.290	0
Assets financed by projects	4.302	128.635
Depreciation subsidized assets	38.152	26.346
Balance 31st December	<u>68.439</u>	<u>102.290</u>

Subsidized tangible assets are amortized in line with other tangible assets.

(6) Creditors	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Creditors	60.341	37.513
	<u>60.341</u>	<u>37.513</u>

(7) Taxes and social security	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Tax & Social costs on salaries	25.729	50.868
Pension	891	365
	<u>26.620</u>	<u>51.233</u>

(8) Other short term liabilities	31/12/2024	31/12/2023
Projects to be executed	4.384.852	223.594
Creditors Subcontractors commitments	71.822	46.502
Holiday reserve	19.298	23.536
Reserve holiday hours outstanding	14.274	12.912
Auditors	15.249	15.357
Other	2.012	6.424
	<u>4.507.508</u>	<u>328.326</u>

Projects to be executed are received funds from donors which exceeds the project cost. In this case one of the projects starts in January 2025.

Subcontractor commitments are contracted amounts due to subcontractors for the execution of projects.

Explanatory Notes to the Statement of Income and Expenditure

(in Euros)

(9) Subsidies	2024	Budget 2024	2023
European Commission LIFE Operating Grant	667.039	699.960	649.794
European Commission Horizon 2020 / LIFE	337.289	235.372	166.492
	<u>1.004.328</u>	<u>935.332</u>	<u>816.286</u>

The LIFE Operating Grant report for year 2023 had been submitted in March 2024. The reported amount was included in the Annual accounts 2023. After the Annual accounts were endorsed, the EC informed us that part of the submitted costs were ineligible. These ineligible costs are accounted for in the subsidy of 2024. For 2024, the financial report has been submitted (March 2025), but has not yet been approved.

(10) Other income	2024	Budget 2024	2023
Project income from donors/partners	150.809	158.119	288.388
Other sources of co-financing	514.101	292.941	315.044
Project income co-funding by members	32.651	37.398	24.347
Project income other revenues	6.044	0	0
Membership fees	2.000	3.000	1.900
Interest income	21.860	0	0
Extraordinary profit and losses / Fundraising Target	0	113.225	0
	<u>727.464</u>	<u>604.683</u>	<u>629.678</u>

(11) Staff costs	2024	Budget 2024	2023
Wages & salaries	900.659	0	819.949
Social security costs	169.250	0	144.805
Pension costs	44.326	0	39.779
	<u>1.114.235</u>	<u>1.093.422</u>	<u>1.004.534</u>
Sickness / maternity benefits	0	0	-21.165
Other personnel costs	38.512	32.000	32.816
Total staff costs	<u>1.152.747</u>	<u>1.125.422</u>	<u>1.016.185</u>

(12) Direct project costs	2024	Budget 2024	2023
Subcontracting	159.651	98.451	168.827
Travel costs	74.308	55.600	49.264
Depreciation project investment	38.152	27.500	26.346
General Publication costs	8.457		2.300
Meetings/workshops	10.710	10.000	6.535
Events	31.967	20.000	16.823
Conference fees	2.010		1.030
ICT costs	7.542	7.000	5.827
Project audit costs	8.904	8.300	8.010
Other project running costs	33.047	28.000	23.400
	<u>374.747</u>	<u>254.851</u>	<u>308.361</u>

(13) Housing costs	2024	Budget 2024	2023
Rent	33.786	42.220	25.925
	<u>33.786</u>	<u>42.220</u>	<u>25.925</u>

(14) General costs	2024	Budget 2024	2023
General Publication costs	45	0	0
Office costs	43.637	53.500	40.075
Travel costs	0	12.400	0
Auditors	5.992	4.200	4.314
Other advice	4.762	5.000	496
Banking costs	379	500	392
Subscription service providers	16.636	12.300	16.271
Others	11.376	26.279	9.124
	<u>82.827</u>	<u>114.179</u>	<u>70.672</u>

(15) Depreciation costs	2024	Budget 2024	2023
ICT Hard- & Software	4.672	3.189	2.492
Furniture	154	154	154
	<u>4.825</u>	<u>3.343</u>	<u>2.645</u>

Budget 2025 Wetlands International - European Association

On 25 November 2024 the following budget for 2025 was approved by the General Members Meeting. For comparison reasons the actuals 2024 have been added.

(in Euro's)

	Budget 2025	Actuals 2024
Income		
Subsidies	1.277.979	1.004.328
Other income	618.441	727.464
	<u>1.896.420</u>	<u>1.731.792</u>
Expenses		
Staf costs	1.466.516	1.152.747
Direct project costs	233.728	374.747
Housing costs	44.220	33.786
General costs	147.888	82.827
Depreciation	4.068	4.825
	<u>1.896.420</u>	<u>1.648.932</u>
Result	<u>0</u>	<u>82.860</u>

Result appropriation	Budget 2025	Actuals 2024
Decrease / Increase continuity reserve	0	82.860
	<u>0</u>	<u>82.860</u>



INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To: the management of Wetlands International European Association.

A. Report on the audit of the financial statements 2024 included in the annual report

Our opinion

We have audited the financial statements 2024 of Wetlands International European Association based in Ede.

In our opinion the accompanying financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of Wetlands International European Association as at 31 December 2024 and of its result for 2024 in accordance with Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code.

The financial statements comprise:

1. the balance sheet as at 31 December 2024;
2. the profit and loss account over 2024; and
3. the notes comprising a summary of the accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Basis for our opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Dutch law, including the Dutch Standards on Auditing. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report.

We are independent of Wetlands International European Association in accordance with the Verordening inzake de onafhankelijkheid van accountants bij assurance-opdrachten (ViO, Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants, a regulation with respect to independence) and other relevant independence regulations in the Netherlands. Furthermore we have complied with the Verordening gedrags- en beroepsregels accountants (VGBA, Dutch Code of Ethics).

We believe the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

B. Report on the other information included in the annual report

In addition to the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon, the annual report contains other information that consists of:

- the management board's report;
- other information as required by Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code.

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Based on the following procedures performed, we conclude that the other information:

- is consistent with the financial statements and does not contain material misstatements;
- contains the information as required by Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code.

We have read the other information. Based on our knowledge and understanding obtained through our audit of the financial statements or otherwise, we have considered whether the other information contains material misstatements.

By performing these procedures, we comply with the requirements of Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code and the Dutch Standard 720. The scope of the procedures performed is substantially less than the scope of those performed in our audit of the financial statements.

Management is responsible for the preparation of the management board's report in accordance with Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code and other information as required by Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code.

C. Description of responsibilities regarding the financial statements

Responsibilities of management for the financial statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with Part 9 of Book 2 of the Dutch Civil Code. Furthermore, management is responsible for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

As part of the preparation of the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the company's ability to continue as a going concern. Based on the financial reporting framework mentioned, management should prepare the financial statements using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Management should disclose events and circumstances that may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern in the financial statements.

Our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objective is to plan and perform the audit assignment in a manner that allows us to obtain sufficient and appropriate audit evidence for our opinion.

Our audit has been performed with a high, but not absolute, level of assurance, which means we may not detect all material errors and fraud during our audit.

Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements. The materiality affects the nature, timing and extent of our audit procedures and the evaluation of the effect of identified misstatements on our opinion.



We have exercised professional judgement and have maintained professional skepticism throughout the audit, in accordance with Dutch Standards on Auditing, ethical requirements and independence requirements. Our audit included e.g.:

- identifying and assessing the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, designing and performing audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtaining audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control;
- obtaining an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control;
- evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management;
- concluding on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting, and based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause a company to cease to continue as a going concern;
- evaluating the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures; and
- evaluating whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant findings in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Utrecht , 25 June 2025

Bonants Accountancy & Advies

P.A.J.M. Bonants RA
Partner