

A photograph of a person in an orange kayak on a river with a rocky bank. The water is a vibrant greenish-blue. The number '20' is in white and '25' is in blue, both in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

2025

Annual Report

EUROPE



Wetlands
INTERNATIONAL

Wetlands International Europe brings together 16 European NGO members, working across Europe to raise awareness and implementing action on the ground for wetland ecosystems, while advocating for their sustainable use for people and nature, by linking science, policy and practice.



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Foreword

Wetlands across Europe are continuing to degrade -or even disappear- under the combined pressures of drainage, pollution, unsustainable water abstraction, infrastructure development, and a rapidly destabilising climate. This year we learned that in the Mediterranean alone, we have lost 50% in the past 50 years. It is no coincidence that droughts are becoming more frequent and severe while floods are growing more destructive. Wildfires are reaching landscapes once thought too wet to burn. In many regions, the hydrological rhythms that shaped ecosystems and communities over centuries are beginning to fracture. Alongside this, wetland biodiversity continues to decline with migratory fish populations down by more than 80% since 1970.

The trend is not new, but recent years have brought additional pressures that are deeply concerning. Competition over water is intensifying between agriculture, industry, expanding IT centres, energy production, cities, and nature.

Geopolitical instability and economic uncertainty are fuelling calls to weaken environmental safeguards in the name of competitiveness, food security, and deregulation.

Across Europe, a growing populist political shift is reshaping public debate and placing increasing pressure on the European Union's environmental agenda. Nature restoration, water protection, and climate policies are increasingly portrayed as obstacles to growth rather than nature's solutions to safeguarding our resilience.

Yet this narrative misses a fundamental reality: Europe cannot build prosperity, security, or resilience on degraded ecosystems and depleted water systems.

The science and lived experience are incontrovertible. Healthy wetlands are Europe's most effective and strategic green infrastructures mitigating floods and droughts, filtering pollution, sustaining biodiversity, locking away carbon and helping buffer communities against climate impacts. They are not peripheral environmental assets but essential systems underpinning economic stability, public health and social resilience.

Across Europe, concern over water security has moved rapidly from a niche environmental issue to a mainstream political and economic priority. This shift is creating new opportunities and momentum. Despite the political headwinds at EU level, important initiatives continue to emerge. The EU Nature Restoration Regulation has survived intense opposition and established a new benchmark for ecosystem recovery. Momentum around water resilience is accelerating within European institutions and Member States alike. Investment in peatland restoration, floodplain recovery, and nature-based solutions continues to grow. This year, we have seen a record number of obsolete barriers removed from our rivers. From the Danube to the Doñana, from urban wetlands to coastal deltas, local actors are demonstrating that restoration delivers tangible benefits for people, economies, and nature.

At Wetlands International Europe, we see these signs not as reasons for complacency, but as grounds for determination and optimism. The challenges facing Europe's wetlands are profound, but so too is the growing recognition that resilient societies depend on resilient ecosystems. In an era of climate disruption and

uncertainty, wetlands are no longer at the margins of Europe's future. They are becoming central to it.

Our annual report illustrates both our determination to push back against unfounded arguments and our commitment to mobilising action across the region. It demonstrates how the strength of our membership, alliances, and partnerships is helping to maintain — and reinforce — the conditions for action while driving change on the ground.



Jan Peters, Chair of the Board



Chris Baker, Director



In 2025, we operated in a significantly shifting European Union (EU) political landscape, where environmental ambition increasingly came under pressure. Following the European elections of 2024, the agenda moved towards simplification and competitiveness, often at the expense of environmental safeguards. A series of regulatory revisions and “simplification packages” sought to reopen or weaken existing frameworks, including elements of water, agriculture, and climate legislation. This created a challenging environment for wetlands, as protections risked being diluted and long-standing commitments questioned. At the same time, this context reinforced the need for strong, coordinated action from civil society, whose role and legitimacy were increasingly under pressure. We worked closely with our members and partners across the NGO community to respond to these developments, strengthening alliances and ensuring that the role of wetlands remained visible and grounded in science and policy evidence.

Against this backdrop, we reinforced our role as a leading voice for wetlands within the EU policy landscape, ensuring that these ecosystems are recognised as essential infrastructure for climate resilience, biodiversity recovery, and water security. We focused on defending existing environmental safeguards, shaping new legislation, and strengthening the integration of wetlands across key EU policy frameworks.

A central pillar of our work was the defence and push for effective implementation of Europe’s core environmental legislation. We actively contributed to the **rollout of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)**, providing technical and policy input to support ambitious national restoration plans. This included developing targeted policy recommendations and practical guidance to help translate legal commitments into implementation on the ground. At the same time, we worked to ensure coherence between the NRR and other key frameworks, promoting stronger alignment across biodiversity, water, and climate policies.

Protecting the integrity of existing legislation was equally critical. We are actively engaged in defending the **Water Framework Directive (WFD)** against political pressures that risk weakening water protection standards. Working through coalitions such as Living Rivers Europe, we highlighted the risks that regulatory rollback would pose to wetlands, biodiversity, and public health. We consistently positioned the WFD as a cornerstone of resilient water systems and a key instrument for safeguarding Europe’s wetlands.

Defending the role of wetlands in the EU policy agenda

Beyond defending legislation, we mobilised efforts to ensure wetlands are fully embedded in the EU’s broader policy agenda. In 2025, we shaped discussions around the **EU Water Resilience Strategy**, advocating for wetlands as “natural sponges” that provide cost-effective solutions to floods, droughts, and water scarcity. We promoted wetlands as nature-based solutions capable of delivering across multiple policy objectives, connecting climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and ecosystem restoration.

We also engaged in sectoral policies with significant implications for wetlands. Within the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, we advocated for stronger alignment between agricultural funding and wetland conservation objectives. We called for incentives that support sustainable land management practices, including rewetting and paludiculture,

recognising that current land-use systems remain a major driver of wetland degradation. In parallel, we contributed to emerging discussions on carbon farming and nature finance, working to unlock new funding streams while ensuring strong environmental integrity.

At EU budget level, we contributed to debates on the future **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. We advocated for maintaining dedicated funding for nature through programmes such as LIFE, highlighting the risks associated with diluting environmental financing. We emphasised that achieving EU environmental objectives requires predictable, ring-fenced funding, and we worked alongside partners to make the case for sustained investment in wetlands and nature restoration. We also called for stronger environmental and biodiversity commitments within the EU’s external financing instruments, promoting greater coherence between the EU’s internal and global environmental ambitions.



Our policy engagement also extended beyond the EU. Through our **Global Europe programme**, we promoted the integration of wetlands into EU external action, including international partnerships, trade, and development cooperation. We advocated for reducing the global environmental footprint of EU consumption and investments, and for recognising wetlands as strategic assets for climate action, water security, and sustainable development. This included engagement on key policy files and initiatives such as the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Just Transition agenda, the EU Deforestation Regulation, and the Global Gateway strategy.

Throughout the year, we combined advocacy with evidence-based engagement, often through EU projects supported by programmes such as LIFE and Horizon Europe. We contributed to policy-relevant research, publications, and high-level events, helping bridge the gap between science, practice, and decision-making. By convening policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, we supported the translation of technical knowledge into actionable policy recommendations, particularly in the context of scaling up wetland restoration across Europe.

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Overall, 2025 was a year of both heightened risk and renewed mobilisation for wetlands in the EU policy agenda. We responded by strengthening our advocacy, building alliances, and promoting a clear narrative:

Wetlands are not a niche environmental issue, but a strategic solution to Europe's most pressing challenges. Through our work, we keep ensuring that wetlands are recognised, protected, and restored as a foundation for a resilient and sustainable future.



Safeguarding the role of NGOs in evidence-based EU policy

In 2025, we operated in a policy environment where the role of environmental NGOs was increasingly questioned. Political narratives challenged the legitimacy, independence, and influence of civil society in EU decision-making, reflecting broader trends of polarisation and growing pressure on science-based policymaking. In this context, safeguarding the role of NGOs became essential to ensuring that EU policies remain transparent, inclusive, and grounded in evidence.

During 2025, Brussels-based NGOs faced heightened scrutiny regarding both our role and the use of EU funding. Allegations of misuse or undue influence gained visibility despite lacking credible evidence and being addressed by EU institutions. These developments risked eroding trust in civil society and weakening the contribution of independent expertise to policymaking. In response, we united our voice, gathering with multiple partner organisations to counter these narratives, reaffirming that NGOs are independent actors with robust governance and accountability frameworks. Together, we highlighted that EU funding instruments, as the case of operating grants are designed to enable civil society participation in achieving EU policy objectives.

In [this collective effort](#), we actively defended the legitimacy and added value of NGOs in EU policymaking. We emphasised that civil society brings essential scientific evidence, field-based knowledge, and public interest perspectives into policy processes, strengthening both the quality and credibility of EU decisions. At the same time, we raised concerns about the disproportionate focus on NGOs compared to other beneficiaries of EU funding. While we fully support transparency and accountability, we stressed that these principles must be applied consistently and without political bias. Together with partners, we worked to ensure that debates remained grounded in facts, including institutional findings confirming the sound management and public value of NGO contributions.



In parallel, we strengthened coordination across the NGO community to respond more effectively to these pressures. Through joint advocacy, aligned messaging, and coalition-building, we contributed to a collective effort to safeguard civic space and ensure that environmental priorities, and the organisations advancing them, remain part of EU policy discussions.

These developments coincided with the start of negotiations on the EU's next long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). In this context, we [actively raised concerns](#) about proposals that could weaken funding for climate and nature, including potential changes affecting the LIFE Programme. We advocated for maintaining dedicated, ring-fenced funding for environmental action and for the continuation of LIFE as a standalone programme, highlighting that achieving EU environmental objectives requires sustained investment and the active involvement of civil society.



© Relawan Saling Jaga Indonesia (Yayasan)

Mapping Europe's wetlands

As part of our participation in the Horizon Europe project WET HORIZON, we contributed to the development of the European Wetland Map — the most comprehensive openly accessible map of wetlands in Europe to date. By consolidating data from across Europe, the map provides a critical evidence base to support restoration planning, land management, and science-based policymaking. The success of the European wetlands map demonstrates the importance of sustained investment in research and innovation projects to strengthen the knowledge base and tools needed for effective EU environmental policy and wetland restoration.

As Wetlands International Europe, we brought a specific perspective by linking these debates to on-the-ground implementation. These narratives were often reinforced by our members, who provided concrete examples and practical implementation experience. Through our work on wetlands, we demonstrated how NGOs support the delivery of EU policies by translating objectives into practical solutions, engaging stakeholders, and generating evidence to inform decision-making. We ensured that wetlands, and the broader role of nature-based solutions, remained visible within discussions on funding, policy implementation, and environmental governance.

In 2025, NGOs operating within the EU policy space faced increasing pressure and scrutiny. In response, we strengthened our role as an independent, evidence-based organisation committed to effective and inclusive policymaking.

Protecting the role of NGOs is essential not only for civil society, but also for ensuring that EU policies remain credible, science-based, and capable of delivering meaningful environmental and societal outcomes.



Defending our freshwaters

At a time of growing water insecurity, healthy rivers, lakes, and freshwater wetlands stand as essential infrastructure for a climate-resilient economy. As it marked the adoption of the long-awaited EU Water Resilience Strategy and ended with the European Commission's unexpected decision to revise the Water Framework Directive (WFD) to ease access to mining permits, 2025 has been a key year in advocating for keeping our water laws strong and ambitious.

In June 2025, the European Commission launched the [EU Water Resilience Strategy \(WRS\)](#), responding to the growing urgency of droughts, floods, pollution, and freshwater ecosystem degradation across the continent. Along with the Living Rivers Europe (LRE) coalition, we closely followed the WRS developments. After meeting with stakeholders from all across the spectrum, bringing to the table nature-based solutions and showcasing their enormous untapped potential, we sent a set of [recommendations to the European Commission](#) aiming to keep the strategy ambitious enough to make Europe waters resilient for people, nature and the economy in a changing climate. Our advocacy efforts paid off. The adopted WRS includes several positive elements, as a strong call to implement existing EU water laws for achieving water resilience and multiple references to nature-based solutions, at is the case of the Sponge facility (more on page 13). But this is not enough. [As we flagged](#), the WRS still lacks binding commitments, dedicated funding, and governance tools to support its implementation.

In parallel, we succeeded in approving a new list of priority substances, which determines the most dangerous substances that Member States must monitor under their WFD obligations. Along with the LRE coalition, we raised awareness on the dangers of water pollution by organising a stunt in front of the European Parliament, featuring samples of polluted waters from multiple European countries.

But despite our collaborative efforts, the European Commission unexpectedly committed to revising the WFD by the second quarter of 2026 under the RESourceEU Action Plan, in order to promote "access to critical raw materials in the EU". [We tackled this extremely worrying move](#), as such revision threatens to bring down European water standards established for 25 years and which we fought for. Beyond the human rights implications, mining activities lead to severe contamination of water with heavy metals from discharged mine effluent, which can severely harm wildlife and drinking water quality.

© Un Río en el Río, Mexico



We will multiply our efforts to keep our freshwaters healthy, clean and resilient to climate change.

We also kept advocating for stronger freshwater species conservation. Leading the implementation of our Trans-European Swimways Programme, we achieved to see migratory freshwater fishes being increasingly recognised by European practioners as species requiring urgent conservation and restoration action. Our Swimways approach to the conservation of their populations was acknowledged in high-level documents and reports such as the EU Red List of Freshwater Fish and the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Report on Migratory Freshwater Fish.

Finally, we organised the [Dam Removal Award](#) in October 2025 as part of the Dam Removal Europe movement. The Award celebrates innovative projects that remove obsolete barriers, revive ecosystems, and strengthen communities' connection to healthy rivers. This is a public acknowledgment of the important work of dam removal practitioners, river users, communities, and authorities who put their hearts into these projects to restore free-flowing rivers.

2025 marked the launch of the [DANUBElifelines project](#) - which we are part of – aiming to safeguard migratory fish and their habitats in the Danube River Basin. Along with the [EUROLakes project](#) – which we are coordinating – we achieved to put down deeper roots in the [EU Mission to restore our Ocean and Waters](#).

Driving wetland action under the Nature Restoration Regulation



© Sarah Heuzeroth

While EU environmental legislation continued to face political pressure in 2025, the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) began moving forward across Europe. As Member States started preparing their National Nature Restoration Plans (NNRPs), Wetlands International Europe played a key role in helping translate the law into practical implementation for wetlands, such as rivers, freshwater ecosystems as well as peatlands

Throughout the year, we focused particularly on supporting the implementation of the EU's river connectivity obligations under Article 9 of the NRR. By combining policy engagement in Brussels with the technical expertise of our members and partners, we helped shape the early interpretation and application of one of the law's most important restoration provisions for freshwater ecosystems. To support this process, Wetlands International Europe developed a [legal briefing](#) exploring practical interpretations of Article 9 and identifying how countries could operationalise river connectivity restoration obligations within their National Restoration Plans. This work also informed our engagement in several national stakeholder consultation processes supporting the preparation of NNRPs. Among the different actions, we organised a [webinar](#) highlighting the strong potential of barrier removal as a cost-effective restoration measure capable of delivering multiple co-benefits across biodiversity, climate, water resilience, and other EU policy objectives.



© Kevin Feytons, Pripyat valley

Another major achievement in 2025 was our contribution to establishing a shared EU understanding of what constitutes a “restored river stretch” under the Nature Restoration Regulation — a critical step for ensuring coherent implementation across Member States. Through close collaboration with our member CIRF (Italian Centre for River Restoration) and our policy engagement at EU level, we supported the development and approval of EU guidance that will play an important role in shaping how countries interpret, report, and implement river connectivity restoration obligations in practice.

Beyond the EU level, we strengthened coordination among our members through a dedicated NRR Task Force, creating space to exchange experiences, identify challenges, and support more ambitious wetland restoration planning across countries.

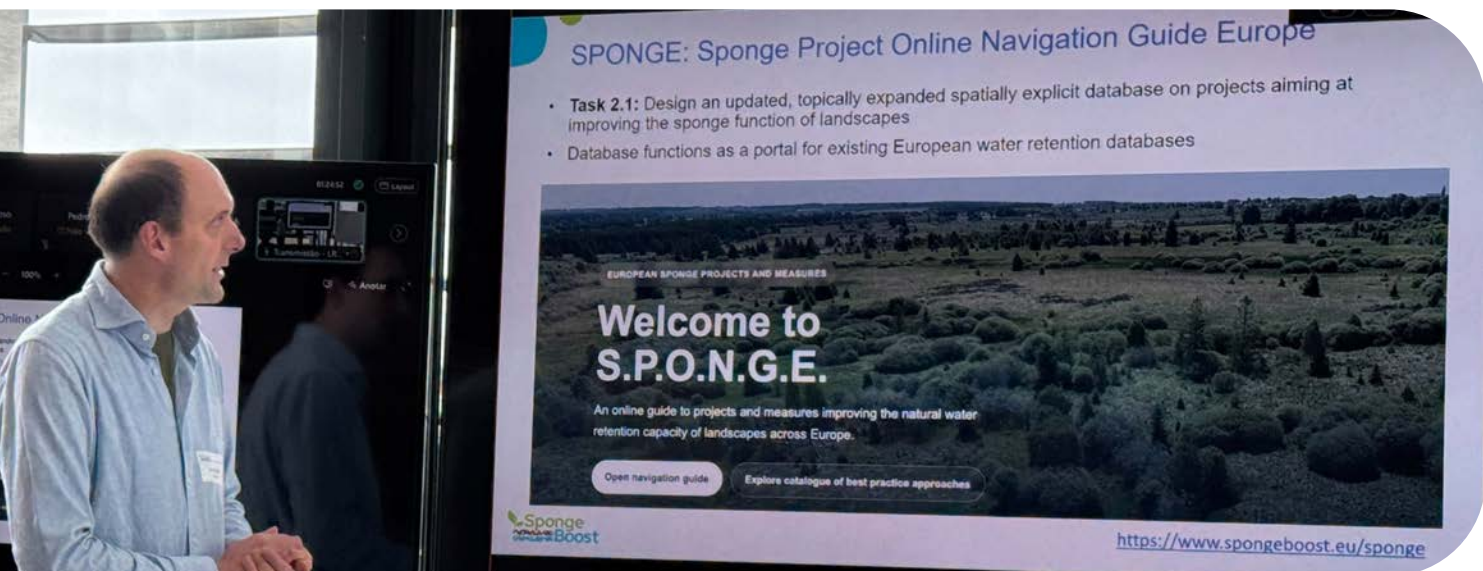
Through our involvement in the [Dam Removal Europe](#) coalition, we also helped communicate these developments more broadly, encouraging NGOs, scientific networks, and practitioners to engage with national authorities and contribute expertise to restoration planning processes.

Complementing this work done around the NRR on river connectivity, we also advanced discussions on practical solutions to restore ecological connectivity for migratory fish species, including through policy engagement linked to the Trans-European Swimways Programme and the [promotion of approaches](#) such as barrier removal and fish passage solutions to be implemented within and beyond the [Swimways of European Importance](#) we identified in 2023.

At a time when EU environmental legislation continued to face repeated challenges, our work helped ensure that the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation remained grounded in practical restoration needs and supported tangible opportunities for wetlands and freshwater ecosystems across Europe.

In the framework of the ALFAwetlands Horizon project, we developed a [policy brief](#) on restoring wetlands in Europe together with our member Michael Succow Foundation (MSF). The brief explored the links between wetland restoration and the Nature Restoration Regulation, providing key recommendations to support informed decision-making by policymakers and stakeholders.

Advancing sponge landscapes for water resilience



Sponge landscapes, healthy wetlands, floodplains, and natural ecosystems that absorb, store, and slowly release water, are emerging as a key solution to Europe's growing water challenges. In 2025, we helped position these approaches at the centre of EU water resilience efforts, demonstrating their potential to reduce flood risks, mitigate droughts, improve water quality, and support biodiversity. As climate pressures intensify, restoring natural water retention is no longer optional—it is essential infrastructure for a resilient Europe.

To help advance this agenda, we combined policy advocacy, technical expertise, and on-the-ground engagement. Working through the Living Rivers Europe coalition and through direct engagement with EU institutions, we advocated for sponge landscape approaches to be recognised not only within water policy discussions, but also across broader climate resilience and land-use frameworks.

This work contributed to concrete policy progress in 2025. Sponge landscape approaches were recognised within the [EU Water Resilience Strategy](#), including support for a dedicated Sponge Facility to help accelerate implementation. This represents an important step towards embedding ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions within Europe's response to growing climate and water resilience challenges.

We also contributed expert input to EU guidance on climate-resilient landscapes and participated in the EU CAP Network Working Group on Water Resilience, bringing our expertise into discussions on how agricultural systems can better support water retention and ecosystem restoration.

In parallel, via the Horizon Europe project [MYRIAD-EU](#), we contributed to advancing understanding of how healthy wetlands as nature-based solutions can help address interconnected climate and disaster risks. The project explores how floods, droughts, and other climate impacts create cascading effects across sectors and societies, helping strengthen approaches that improve long-term resilience and risk management across Europe.

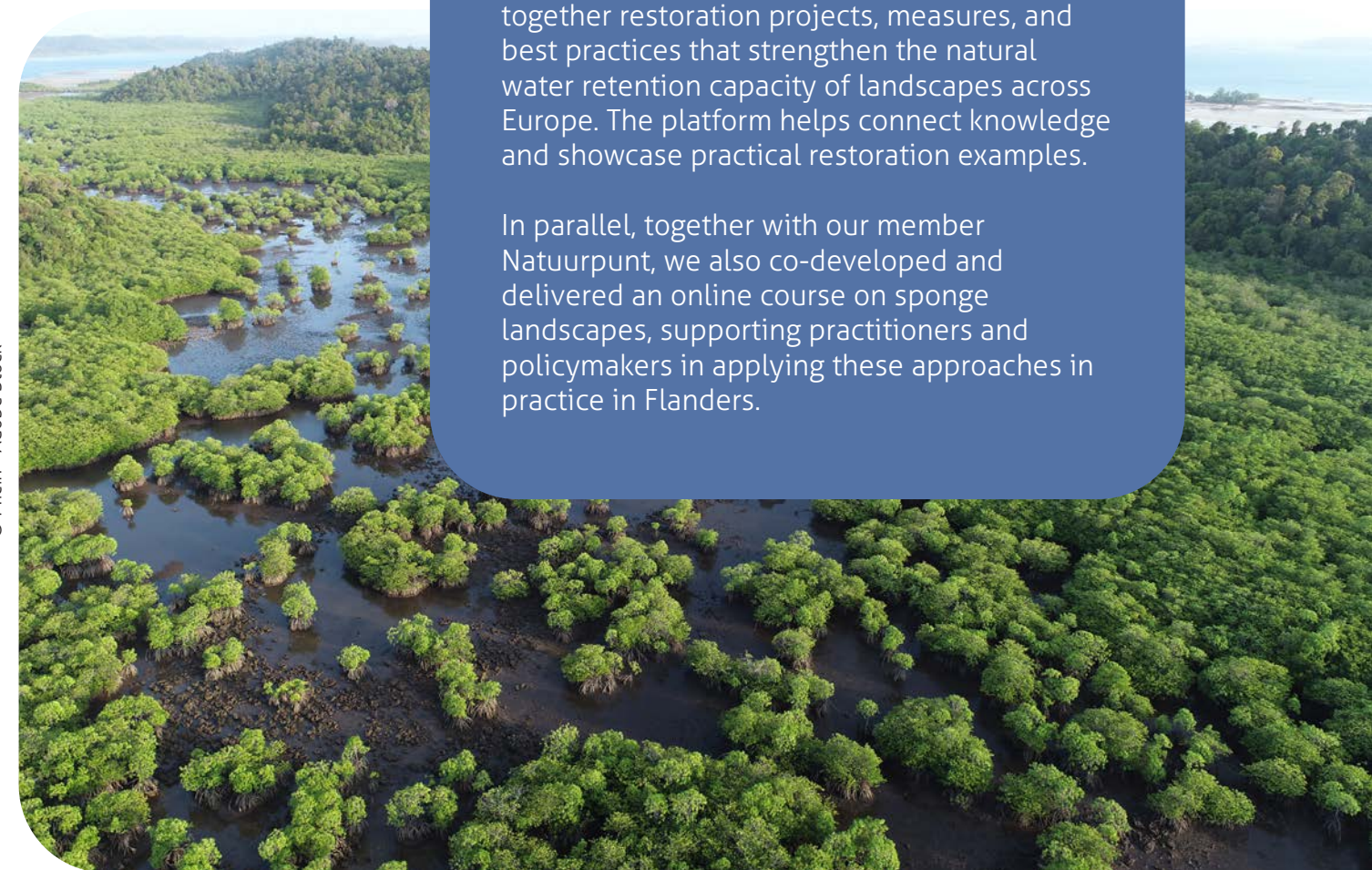
We also translated this ambition into tangible outcomes on the ground. Through the Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes planning grant, we delivered a transboundary restoration vision for the [Latorica floodplains](#) in Slovakia and Ukraine. This resulted in a stakeholder-endorsed framework for reconnecting rivers with their floodplains and restoring water retention capacity at scale. In Germany, we established a partnership to restore the Nister river floodplain in the Upper Rhine basin, demonstrating how sponge approaches can be applied in practice to enhance resilience to both floods and droughts while restoring habitats.

In parallel, we contributed to the Dutch NL2120 initiative, a 10-year programme providing a policy blueprint identifying concrete EU entry points for scaling up nature-based solutions.

Scaling up knowledge on sponge landscape solutions:

Through our participation in Horizon [SpongeBoost](#), we contributed to S.P.O.N.G.E. (Sponge Projects Online Navigation Guide Europe), a pan-European platform bringing together restoration projects, measures, and best practices that strengthen the natural water retention capacity of landscapes across Europe. The platform helps connect knowledge and showcase practical restoration examples.

In parallel, together with our member Natuurpunt, we also co-developed and delivered an online course on sponge landscapes, supporting practitioners and policymakers in applying these approaches in practice in Flanders.



60 years of impact: International Waterbird Census



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Many waterbird species gather in huge numbers at wetlands in January and February, giving us a great opportunity to monitor the sizes, trends and changes in the distribution of waterbird populations, and to identify their key sites. Every year, tens of thousands of volunteers go to the nearest wetland to count waterbirds, taking part in the International Waterbird Census (IWC). **In 2025, we celebrated the 60th count.**

Led by Wetlands International since its beginning, the IWC has grown into one of the world's most important long-term biodiversity monitoring efforts. The data collected through the yearly counts help us monitor the health of our wetlands and waterbirds and take actions to manage them sustainably.

2025 marked a shift. We celebrated the 60th IWC count with a dedicated brochure and a call for donation, to ensure that this global effort continues turning observations into knowledge and protection for waterbirds worldwide.

Aligned by the desire to keep the IWC an effective tool for both scientific research and conservation, close to 50 coordinators gathered in Riga in April 2025. As the counts rely heavily on volunteer time and minimal coordination budgets, the discussions centered on the maintenance of the IWC observer networks. This type of counting requires a high level of skill in both identifying the species and accurately counting their flocks. It is therefore essential to ensure that the counters adhere to specific methodologies while reporting their counts.

At a time when wetlands are under growing pressure from climate change, pollution, and development, long-term data is what allows us to see changes, identify threats early, and monitor wetlands restoration. In some countries, a lack of basic support can mean counts do not happen at all.

The EU remains a critical wintering area for many waterbird species, many of which breed further north and east. Monitoring these populations is essential for fulfilling obligations under the EU Birds Directive, the Ramsar Convention, and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement. Our yearly **trend monitoring report**, based on data from the IWC, provides long-and short-term EU population trends for 33 selected species.

Assessing major threats to waterbirds

In November 2025, we launched the 9th edition of the Report on the Conservation Status of Migratory Waterbirds in the Agreement Area at the Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), an independent inter-governmental treaty, dedicated to the conservation and management of migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Greenland, and the Canadian Archipelago. [This report](#) systematically assesses threats to AEWA waterbirds for the first time, showing that biological resource use, such as hunting and fisheries, infrastructure development, and agriculture affect the largest numbers of populations.

© Kevin Guille



A new LIFE project started to save the Aquatic Warblers by restoring wetlands

The Aquatic Warbler is continental Europe's rarest migratory songbird. Every year, this long-distance migratory passerine fly more than 12.000 km from Eastern Europe to West Africa and back. During this journey, this tiny bird rests and feeds in low sedge marshes along the Atlantic coast. These specific wetlands were once common but are now fast disappearing due to drainage, river regulation and unsustainable farming practices. In the last century, Aquatic Warbler population suffered a catastrophic 95% decline.

Since May 2025, we coordinate the [LIFE AWOM](#) (Aquatic Warblers on the Move) project, aiming to restore the Aquatic Warbler staging and wintering areas – wetlands and gathering 14 organisations from Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Senegal.

Advancing peatland restoration through policy and finance

Despite growing recognition of peatlands as critical ecosystems for climate mitigation, biodiversity, sustainable farming, and water resilience, progress in strengthening EU agricultural policies for their protection remained limited in 2025. Discussions around the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as revisions to the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) framework under the CAP simplification package, risked weakening protections for wetlands and peatlands across Europe.

Throughout the year, we worked to ensure that peatland restoration remained firmly embedded in EU climate, agriculture, and finance policy discussions. Together with our members and partners, we engaged directly with EU institutions to advocate for stronger [protections under GAEC 2](#), promote targeted financial incentives for sustainable peatland and wetland management, and prevent further weakening of environmental safeguards within the CAP framework.

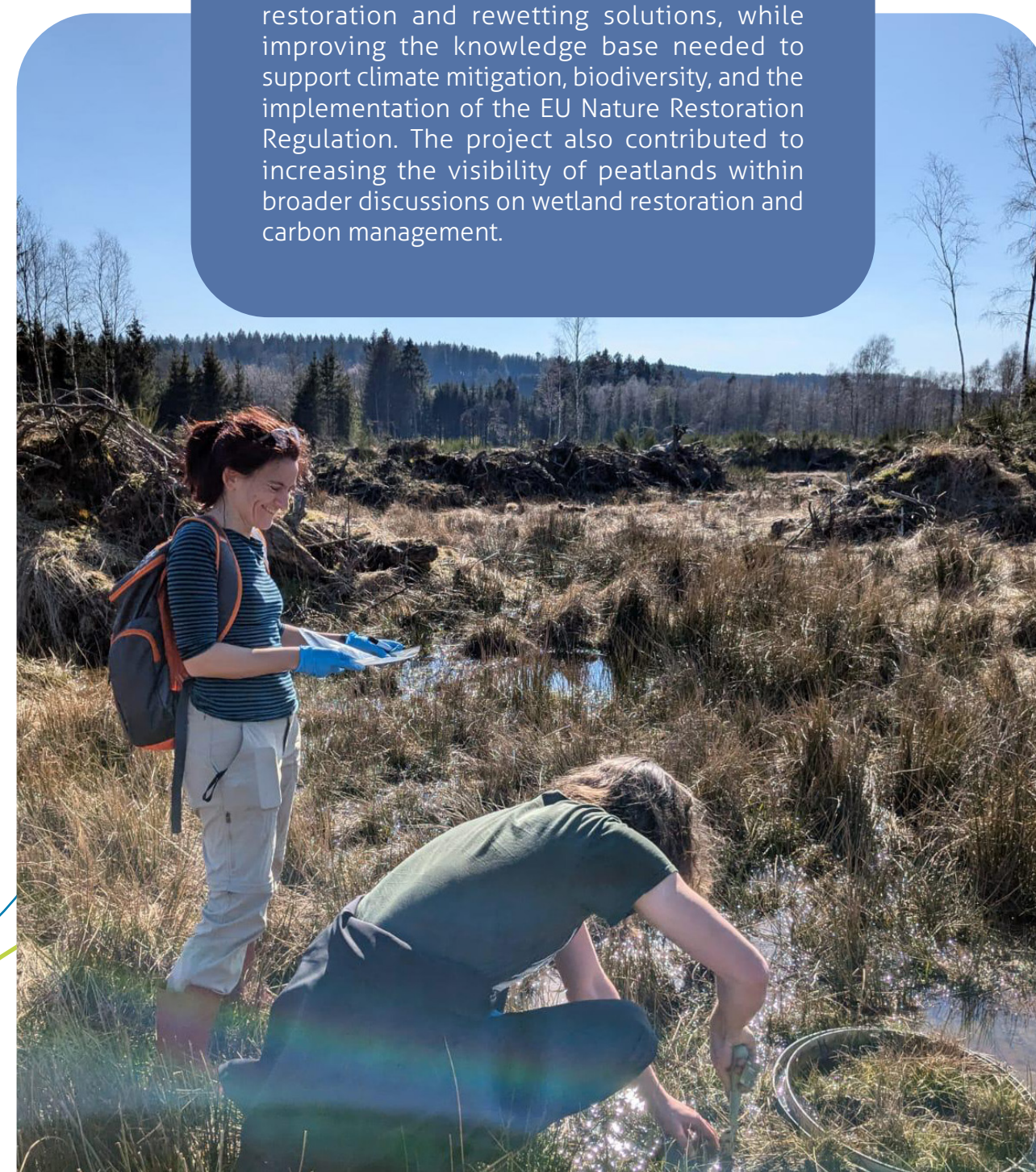
A key achievement in 2025 was our contribution to shaping the peatland methodology under the Carbon Removal and Carbon Farming Regulation (CRCF). Through joint efforts within our CRCF Task Force and drawing on the expertise of several members including Michael Succow Foundation (MSF), we helped ensure that peatland restoration and rewetting approaches remain visible within emerging EU carbon farming discussions and that peatland safeguards are included in future certification schemes. Beyond this, together with our member Fundación Global Nature (FGN), we advocated for opening the CRCF to enable carbon farming to support the financing of restoration in Mediterranean wetlands.

We also contributed to advancing the economic and policy conditions needed to scale up paludiculture and wet peatland management. Through the [PaluWise Horizon](#) project and collaboration with partner initiatives, we [supported exchanges](#) between policymakers, practitioners, and industry actors, while contributing to EU-level discussions on sustainable and circular bio-based materials. This included a visit to the only paludiculture pilot site currently operational in Belgium. Furthermore, our involvement in the PaluDIGcultuur project strengthened our engagement at local level, contributing to pioneering research on the potential of paludiculture in Flanders.

Alongside policy engagement, we strengthened knowledge sharing on European peatlands through the development of [Peatland Factsheets](#), supporting greater awareness of the restoration challenges and opportunities faced by EU Member States.

At a time when environmental protections continued to face political pressure, our work helped keep peatlands visible within key EU policy and finance discussions, while promoting practical pathways for restoration and sustainable land use.

Through the Horizon Europe [project REWET](#), we contributed to advancing science-based approaches for wetland restoration, including peatlands, across Europe. In 2025, the project strengthened collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working on restoration and rewetting solutions, while improving the knowledge base needed to support climate mitigation, biodiversity, and the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation. The project also contributed to increasing the visibility of peatlands within broader discussions on wetland restoration and carbon management.



Global Europe: Working across EU policy and international action

EU policies and investments have impacts on wetlands and water systems far beyond Europe's borders. In 2025, our work focused on integrating wetlands into EU external action, climate, trade, development and investment policies. Through advocacy, partnerships and engagement with EU institutions, civil society and industry actors, we promoted wetlands as essential natural infrastructure for climate resilience, water security, biodiversity and sustainable development.

As the NDICI–Global Europe instrument approaches its end in 2027, we contributed to discussions on its implementation and future direction, including consultations on Regional Annual Action Plans and country programming. We advocated for stronger integration of wetlands, water resilience, climate adaptation and biodiversity within EU external action and development cooperation. Together with our network offices, we supported engagement with EU Delegations through field-based evidence and case studies, helping bring local perspectives into EU programming discussions. Through coalitions such as CONCORD Europe and the MFF Hub, we also contributed to discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), calling for stronger environmental and climate commitments within EU external financing instruments.

Wetland Partnerships remained central to our efforts to promote integrated approaches to climate resilience, water security and sustainable development under the Global Gateway strategy. We promoted these partnerships as practical cooperation mechanisms linking EU investments with global biodiversity, climate and freshwater commitments, while highlighting their role in mobilising finance, reducing systemic risks, and supporting the implementation of global initiatives such as the Freshwater Challenge and the Mangrove and Peatland Breakthrough. In 2025, we contributed to discussions at the United Nations Development Programme on the road to the Biodiversity COP in 2026 and the European Parliament on Global Gateway and climate, helping strengthen recognition of wetlands and water resilience within EU external investment policies.

We advanced the integration of wetlands into EU discussions on peace, security, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction, highlighting the links between ecosystem degradation and water insecurity and socio-economic fragility. Wetlands gained greater recognition as nature-based solutions supporting resilience, livelihoods and disaster prevention.

A major focus in 2025 was advocacy on the impacts of critical raw materials extraction, particularly lithium mining in High Andean wetlands. Supporting Wetlands International Argentina's [Save High Andean Wetlands programme](#), we engaged with the Critical Raw

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Materials Act and broader EU raw materials discussions to raise awareness of the impacts of lithium extraction on wetlands, water resources and Indigenous communities. Through EU Green Week, Raw Materials Week and targeted communications, including a [consumer survey](#), we [promoted](#) stronger environmental and human rights safeguards within EU supply chains and investments.

Our work on commodities and wetlands also expanded through support to the [Corredor Azul programme](#) in Latin America, addressing links between deforestation, commodity production and wetland degradation. We promoted protection of the Pantanal via policy engagement and events, including a [high-level event](#) at the European Parliament during Amazon Week. We also organised a second global experts workshop on commodities and wetlands and published a briefing, contributing to discussions on the EU deforestation-free products regulation and preparations for the UN Climate conference (COP30) and the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Finally, we strengthened engagement with industrial and trade actors through Water Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee and DG Trade Civil Society Dialogues to push for healthy wetlands and resilient water systems to be seen as essential to economic stability, industrial production and secure value chain.

Our governance: Members and Board

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.

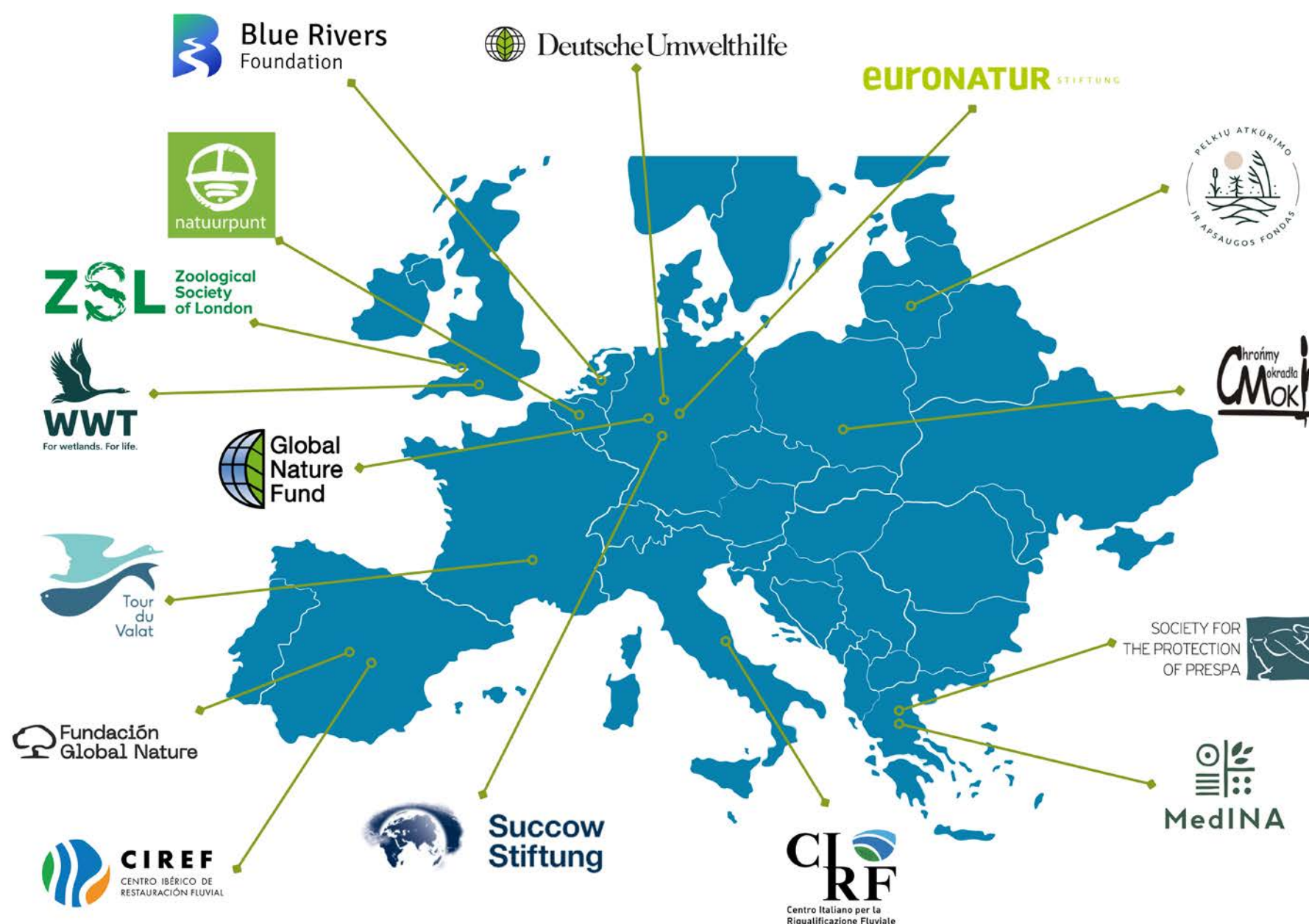
Together with 18 offices around the world, we work as one network with shared goals and a common Global Strategy. We collaborate with partners and experts to protect and restore wetlands for people and nature everywhere.

Wetlands International Europe operates under the guidance of a Board of Directors appointed by the General Members Meeting (GMM). The Board provides strategic oversight to the organisation, supporting its long-term direction, governance, and financial sustainability, while ensuring accountability and alignment with the association's mission and priorities.

The organisation's governance is rooted in the active involvement of its members, who contribute to shaping both the work programme and strategic direction of the association. Each year, members convene at the General Members Meeting to review progress, reflect on shared achievements, and discuss priorities for the years ahead. In 2025, the GMM was held in Valencia in November and was followed by a field visit to LIFE AWOM project's restoration wetlands.

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 2025 our membership network has grown and become more engaged, increasing from 13 members in 2024 to 16 in 2025. The Society for the protection of Prespa (Greece), Deutsche Umwelthilfe (Germany) and the Global Nature Fund (Germany) joined Wetlands International Europe in 2025.



Our team

Wetlands International Europe's work is made possible through the dedication and professionalism of its Secretariat. In 2025, the organisation maintained an average team of 20 staff members, reflecting our commitment to strengthening organisational capacity and impact. The Secretariat also benefited from the valuable support of interns, volunteers, associated experts, and consultants.

The main activities continued to be carried out primarily from the Brussels office supported by our Ede office and additional support from the Wetlands International Global Office. During the year, the team was further strengthened through the recruitment of new staff across operations, project coordination, policy, and technical expertise, particularly in the areas of sponge landscapes, carbon policies, biodiversity, and peatlands.

MANAGEMENT TEAM

- Chris Baker**
Director
- Remco Haex**
Financial Controller
- Pilar Perez**
Head of Operations

BIODIVERSITY

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- **European Commission**
- **European Investment Bank**
- **IWC- International Waterbird Census**
- **MAVA Foundation**
- **McMillen Europe**
- **ORP- European Open Rivers Programme**
- **Stichting Wetlands International**
- **Wetlands International LAC**
- **And our members**

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We have also been involved in several projects through 2025:

Horizon projects

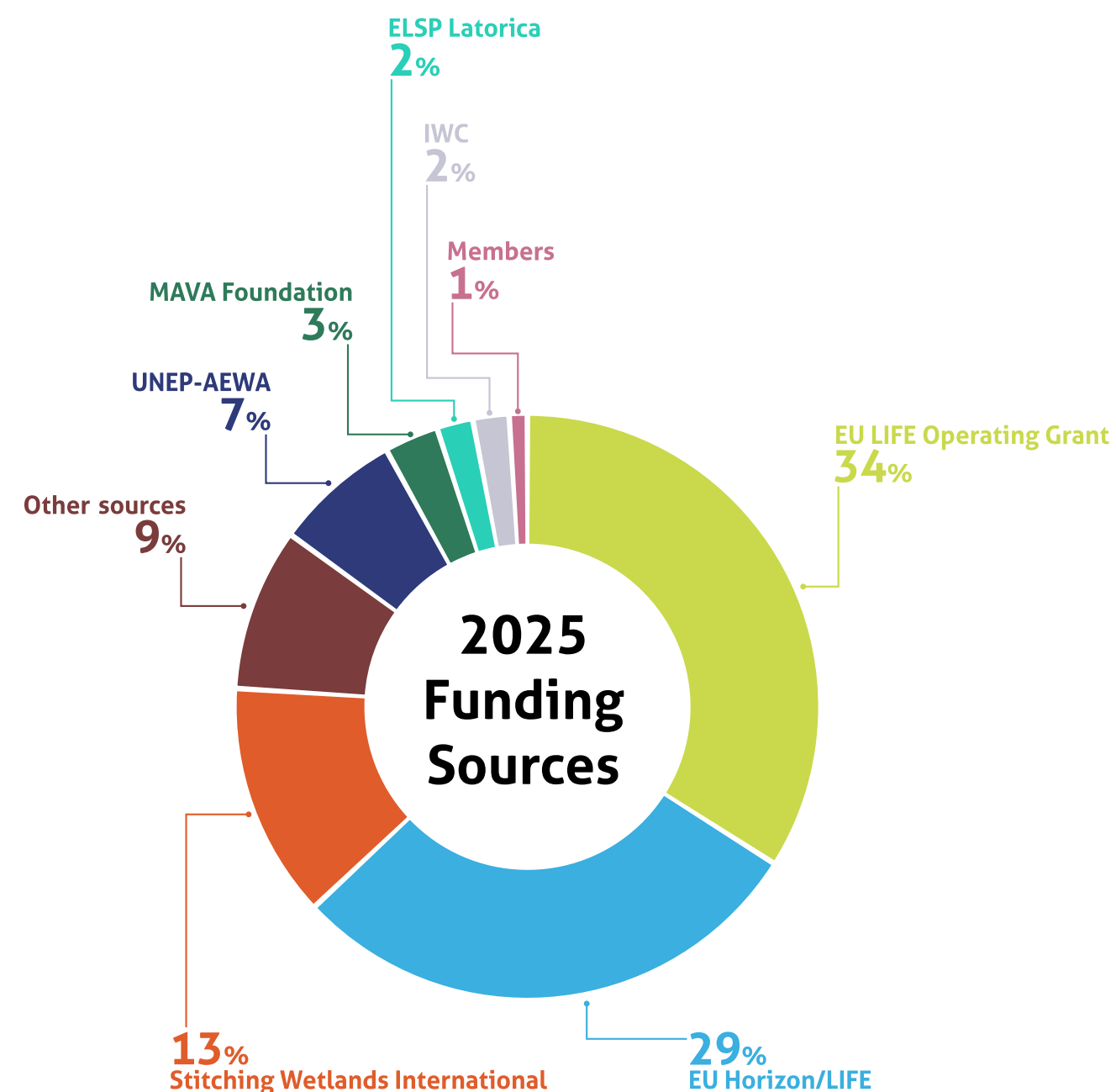
ALFAWetlands
DANUBElifelines
EUROLakes
MYRIAD-EU
PaluWise
REWET
SpongeBoost
WaterLANDS
WET Horizons

LIFE projects

AWOM

Other Projects

ELSP Latorica
ORP- Open Rivers Programme
RhineSponges



Note: The EU income intended for the consortium partners under the LIFE AWOM project and Horizon EUROLakes project is excluded from this overview. Other sources include grants below €50k.

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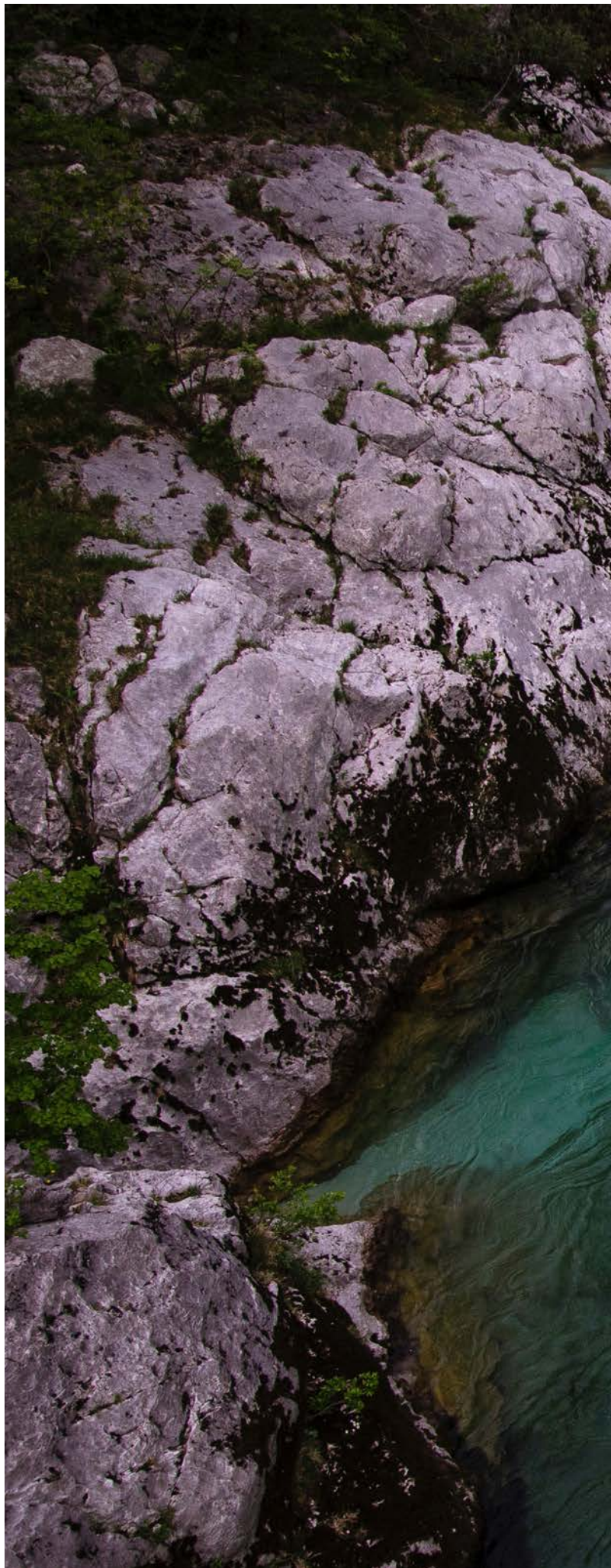


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