

# International Environmental Funding

FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY-IMPLEMENTATION, INTERNATIONAL FUNDING IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCES AT THE ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES AUTHORITY'S DISPOSAL. HERE, THE SENIOR OFFICER FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, **DANIELLA SAMMUT** EXPLAINS WHY AND TALKS ABOUT HOW LOCAL CITIZENS AND BUSINESSES CAN TAP INTO THEM.

There are no two ways about it: money makes the world go round. That is also true for the understanding and safeguarding of the environment. In fact, the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) utilises various international funds to help it reach its goals, whether it's reducing waste, designating areas of ecological importance, or conducting environment-related surveys.

"International funding is one of the main sources to tap into for us to develop our policies as an Authority and a nation," says Daniella, who, along with a small team, looks at possible funding opportunities that could benefit ERA and Malta.

"This includes the different funding programmes the European Union (EU) Commission launches, which we are responsible to tap into on behalf of the Government and the country. On top of that, we also look at other ways of funding, like the United Nations Environment Programme and that of the MAVA

Foundation, which is a philanthropic organisation that focuses on the conservation of biodiversity in the Mediterranean, West Africa and Switzerland."

Over the years, this funding has helped ERA with some of its most important projects.

Among these were three *LIFE* (the European Commission's Financial Instrument for the Environment) projects which aimed to raise awareness and verify important areas for reefs, caves, dolphins, turtles and seabirds, and which led to the identification of new Marine Protect Areas (MPAs) in Malta. Another project under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) led to the development of Management Plans

and conservation orders for Maltese terrestrial Natura 2000 sites. This project also included a vast stakeholder consultation, which helped in increasing the knowledge of the public on nature conservation.

"*LIFE*, is a Funding Programme that was established by the EU which set a budget for various projects," she explains, "but these funds aren't just for governmental bodies."

In fact, ERA is also involved directly with key local NGOs, which have benefitted from the *LIFE* Funding Programme to continue their work. The *LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija*, is one example, and was an initiative spearheaded by BirdLife Malta and which saw the NGO and other relevant entities work towards

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reducing noise and light pollution in cliff areas to allow the Yelkouan Shearwater (an endemically Mediterranean seabird) to rest properly as it migrates.

"The effective management and sustainable use of marine resources is for the benefit of the environment and for all marine sectors, including our economy," Daniella continues. "Devising a holistic approach towards marine monitoring is one of ERA's ultimate goals and it has secured a project through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

"As part of this project, the Marine Monitoring Consortium (M3C) has been commissioned by the ERA to implement and update the existing marine monitoring programme and to develop a database of the data gathered. The scope of the monitoring programme is to assess the state of the marine environment."

Indeed, ERA will be sharing the concrete data and information obtained from the project with various entities. In this regard, the project will contribute towards reaching Malta's obligations as an EU Member State in relation to the marine sector.

"Malta's environment isn't just important to us, however. Given its transboundary and global nature, it is also important to those around us and beyond. That's why we have a responsibility to make use of these funds for the betterment and safeguarding of our environment."

"But, more than just that, these funds help our Officers meet their counterparts in other countries, learn about what others are doing, bring back ideas and lessons learnt, network and work together. This is vital for issues related to the environment."

But ERA and Malta don't just receive funding, they also give back to various consortia by providing the available information on species and the environment to help fill knowledge gaps. ERA, in fact, works with a number of such organisations, including the Regional Activity Centre for Specially-Protected Areas, and MedPAN (Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas Network) to assist in related funded projects.

On top of this, there are currently two on-going waste projects. The first is COCOON (Consortium for a Coherent European Landfill Management Strategy), which works on the EU's vision to make landfills obsolete by bringing all 28 Member States together to look at landfill waste management to reduce and manage it better. The second is WINPOL (Waste Management Intelligent Systems and Policies), which looks at using technology to sort out waste, with smart/intelligent bins being one example of the things being looked at.

"It is important that the money is invested wisely and for the benefit of all those who are involved," Daniella continues, "and this has to include our immediate communities here in Malta."

In fact, Maltese NGOs, businesses, scholars and citizens are also privy to applying for funding from the various



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organisations that ERA and Malta are associated with. While, in this case the projects have to be related to the environment, the possibilities are still endless.

"Whether you're an entrepreneur who is looking for money to invest in environmentally-friendly measures or technology; an academic who would like to conduct research related to the environment; or a private company wishing to do an assessment on environmental practices or to use zero-waste policy to your advantage, there is funding available!"

"Calls for these are made to the public often and can be found in newspapers and on social media. In order to meet our national priorities, ERA continuously works on the creation and review of new projects. For more information on future collaborations, kindly contact us on [funding@era.org.mt](mailto:funding@era.org.mt)."

As Daniella herself concludes, not using these funds goes against Malta's best interests and it is for that reason that she and her team work so hard to secure and use any funds they can to continue building on certain policy areas, conducting research and make evident and lasting changes for the betterment of the environment. Because, ultimately, when it comes to the environment, money is only a tool; the real and only prize is its safeguarding. □



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