

European Living Lakes Association - ELLA

2023/2024 Biennial Strategy

Background

One central environmental challenge in Europe is an appropriate strategy to protect and restore our (water) ecosystems. Unfortunately, water ecosystems have in particular deteriorated significantly in Europe over the last two decades, in contrast to the perception of most European residents. The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC-WFD) – despite providing an appropriate framework - has not been able to achieve its main objective, a good status for all EU water bodies by 2027. Various factors such as water abstraction, eutrophication, pollution, navigation, invasive species, land use changes, traffic and tourism have significant negative influences on the health of water ecosystems and severe negative effects on their biodiversity. Additional challenges such as climate change, plastic pollution and endocrine substances have made the situation even more complex. Shallow lakes are particularly vulnerable (i.e. Lake Vörtsjärv, Lake Balaton).

Lakes and their ecosystem services also form a crucial economic factor in Europe, i.e. in view on tourism, drinking water and fishing. Furthermore, nature and natural ecosystems regulate weather and influence the climate. Nature-based solutions (i.e. restoring wetlands, peatlands and coastal ecosystems or sustainably managing marine areas, forests, grasslands and agricultural soils) will be increasingly essential for emission reduction and climate change adaptation. The EU Green Deal requests all Member States to restore damaged ecosystems and improve their ecological status. ELLA, as a civil society network, will try to play a significant role in supporting this objective considering that there is a need for more collaboration between experts, companies, environmentalists and other interest groups to protect European lake regions.

What is ELLA

The “European Living Lakes Association (ELLA)” is a legally constituted European association (NGO-network) whose mission is to protect, restore and rehabilitate lakes, wetlands and other terrestrial water ecosystems in Europe by fostering an improved and fruitful collaboration between stakeholders in lake regions, chiefly regional authorities, businesses, civil society organisations and scientific institutions.

ELLA’s Mission

ELLA’s mission is to enhance the protection, restoration and rehabilitation of lakes, wetlands, other terrestrial water bodies in Europe - including their catchments.

ELLA’s Vision

All lakes, wetlands and freshwater bodies in Europe shall be healthy ecosystems and - where they are being used by human beings - should be sustainably used without damaging the environment.

ELLA’s Objectives

ELLA aims at a fruitful collaboration between all relevant stakeholders in lake regions, i.e. regional and local authorities, businesses, civil society organisations and scientific institutions. Dialogues are

being conducted between NGOs, citizens, conservationists, tourism companies and other businesses and farmer associations with the aim to promote the protection and restoration of lakes and their connected ecosystems. ELLA started in four European Countries covering four climate risk regions of the EU - Southern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe and Northern Europe. More NGOs working on lake protection in other EU countries have already joined ELLA.

ELLA Goals 2022 – 2024

- Continuously extending the ELLA network aiming at representing 20+ lakes and wetlands from Europe;
- Focus on the protection of ecosystem services of lakes and wetlands in order to underline the importance of lakes as hotspots of biodiversity;
- Support activities which underline the human right for a clean and healthy environment and access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation;
- Promote important and appropriate legal frameworks in Europe such as the Water Framework Directive and the UN Watercourses Convention and, linked to that, effective and affordable measures to improve the quality of water ecosystems in Europe;
- Promote activities on climate mitigation and adaptation in lake regions in Europe;
- Initiate new projects on sustainable development of lake regions in Europe in collaboration with other lake organizations or networks;
- Involve the business sector in strategies and projects for the protection of water ecosystems and their biodiversity in Europe;
- Represent ELLA on events in Europe relevant for the protection of lakes and wetlands;
- Promote successful measures for habitat management and restoration, education and community development, sustainable agriculture and fishery and sustainable tourism;
- Intensify the focus on applied science, participatory monitoring, and participatory lake stewardship;
- Intensify the involvement of youth.

ELLA Tools

ELLA will evolve within the next five years using a wide range of tools and methods. The most relevant are model projects carried out by and in collaboration of the ELLA member organizations and other partners. Furthermore, ELLA events and conferences, the ELLA Webpage and publications shall provide a platform for exchange and cooperation in Europe and beyond.

Individual Goals of the ELLA Members

Besides the common goals of ELLA as a European network, all ELLA members identified concrete goals to achieve during the next five years in order to improve the situation of “their” lakes and wetlands. These goals are based on individual challenges lakes and lake regions are exposed to and on the activities and capacities of the ELLA member organization. Municipalities in lake regions have a special responsibility for the protection of “their” lakes and wetlands. They also have a special interest, because often they are directly affected by the degradation or destruction of lakes and their ecosystem services. Most of the ELLA members are already collaborating successfully with municipalities.

ELLA biennial Work Plan 2023 – 2024

ELLA will organise regular workshops/webinars on pressing topics for the preservation and sustainable management of European lakes and wetlands, bringing together experts from different

countries, fields and organizations. NGOs, conventions such as Ramsar, CBD and UNFCCC, as well as scientific institutions (e.g. of Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research, Global Green Growth Institute, Spanish Agency for Climate Change, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Hungarian Meteorological Service Siófok, Hungarian Academy of Sciences) will be invited to participate and contribute. Each of the events will focus on one urgent lake related topic (restoration of wetlands, carbon sequestration potential of wetlands, climate change adaptation, impacts of climate change, responsible agriculture, etc.) and will be organised by GNF together with one or more partner organisations. Each event will bring together at least 50 experts & decision makers. The final conference will bring together the conclusions regarding the four topics and bring together over 100 experts & decision makers. The events enhance an intensive exchange and discussions about the current state of scientific research and applied methods. A European wide transfer of the results to lake and wetland managers, environmental NGOs, political decision makers and stakeholders from the private sector will be realised.

ELLA will motivate and support private sector actors (companies) in lake regions - starting in the four pilot countries - to integrate biodiversity as a significant aspect of sound corporate management. Practical tools such as a Biodiversity Check will be applicable for larger companies as well as SMEs. The project will promote the consideration of biodiversity in decision processes of companies and will help to foster a local (legal) framework with favourable conditions for the development of pro-biodiversity-businesses in lake regions. To achieve the goals of the ambitious EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, a strong involvement of the private sector is required.

Green = completed ; **Yellow** = ongoing ; **Red** = to be completed

A. Strengthen ELLA and the benefits for its members

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	Status 10/2023
Regular exchange among the members of ELLA for strategic planning	Every 3 months via virtual meetings	Coordinated by ELLA secretariat	Regular meetings taking place. Agendas and Minutes available.
4 – 5 online capacity building events on various topics	Starting Nov. 2022	ELLA partners. ELLA secretariat will announce events.	9 online workshops/webinars have been organized More will be planned for 2024
Publication of a “Flashlight Study”	By summer 2023	ELLA partners will gather articles. ELLA Secretariat will be the editor in chief.	1 st draft in Dec. 2022 2 nd draft in May 2023 Final version Sept 2023
Provide opportunities to create joint projects by informing the ELLA secretariat on funding opportunities on EU level and organizing workshops on funding opportunities and joint	Continuously	All partners with ELLA secretariat	Regular topic at the ELLA team meetings. One ERASMUS+ project application completed. Online workshop on

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	Status 10/2023
projects			funding opportunities planned.
Elaborate an evaluation scheme for ELLA projects including upscaling and replication potential	Scheme by spring 2024	ELLA secretariat with partners' input	Based on SDG matrix template with a simplified rating scheme (quantitative and qualitative project impacts indicators) Relevant for future projects
Optimise the ELLA organizational structure as a formal network with organizations representing ELLA in their countries	By the end of 2023	ELLA secretariat with partners' input	5 new organizations have joined ELLA, reaching 10 in total (from 6 different countries). Structure and membership strategy were discussed in person during Members' Assembly in Rome (27 Sep. 2023)

B. Intensify the collaboration with other organisations and institutions

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	Status 10/2023
Contact conventions (CBD, MAB, CMS, UNFCCC, RAMSAR), IUCN, ILEC, INBO, Wetlands International, WWF Freshwater Programme, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Conservation International (CI), EuroNatur - related to lakes and wetlands (in Europe!)	Contact the organisations prior to the ELLA Conference at the latest (Sep. 2023)	ELLA secretariat	Institutions have been contacted, ELLA was introduced with the baseline report and work plan to ask for feedback.
Contact other NGOs working in lake/wetland management and protection	Contact the organisations prior to the ELLA Conference at the latest (Sep. 2023)	ELLA secretariat	Around 80 European NGOs have been regularly contacted to share project results and invitations to events

C. Increase profile & popularity of ELLA

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	Status 10/2023
At the start of every new calendar year, every ELLA partner will send a short description of relevant activities or a general annual report.	First time in 2024	ELLA Secretariat coordinates - ELLA partners reply	Partners will be asked at the end of 2023
ELLA partners will attend EU (and international) events in representation of ELLA. This will help to be recognized as a new water/lakes network.	Continuously	All partners	All project partners have participated in events representing ELLA in 2023 – should continue in 2024
Creation of Social Media channels, if possible	Starting 2024	ELLA Secretariat and partners	An ELLA website is planned within the Living Lakes Website, implementation planned for the first quartile of 2024
Consider to initiate ELLA campaigns – i.e. to reduce pollution from micro plastics in lakes	Starting 2024	ELLA Secretariat with partners	Discussed during Members' Assembly; could be planned for certain dates like World Wetland Day, World Water Day, etc.
Elaboration of one Position Paper & Case Study by 2023	By the end of 2023	ELLA partners	4 position papers have been published

D. Strengthen the multi-stakeholder involvement

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	
Approach local (water) authorities in ELLA member regions and motivate them to participate in the network.	After ELLA conference	ELLA members	Ask LL partners with which local authorities they are collaborating and how. ELLA might do bilateral agreements with authorities
Develop project proposals/application (together with local authorities and/or ELLA partners).	By the end of 2023 with 2024 outreach	ELLA members	Applied for Erasmus+ "Explaining EU Water Directives" Preparing eligibility process for EU NGO

			Grant and later proposal (2024)
Establish partnerships with relevant scientific institutions.	Continuously – but rather after first publication as reference	Each ELLA partner should try to establish (at least one) partnership	Scientific institutions were approached for the publication of the Flashlight Study Partnership should be consolidated in 2024
Strengthen the involvement of youth.	Continuously	ELLA Partners	ELLA is in contact with Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW), looking for collaboration possibilities

E. Business Sector Involvement

Actions	Timetable	Responsible	
Elaborate a project on business and biodiversity in lake regions and present for funding.	2024		To be discussed with ELLA members as a goal for 2024
Develop/improve practical instruments to evaluate water footprint and biodiversity footprint of companies in lake regions	2023/2024		Biodiversity checks have been conducted with companies in 5 countries; online workshop on water footprint organized in October 2023

Last Update: 31.10.2023 – TS, LB, UG (ELLA Secretariat)