



ECOLISE enters the EU policy arena

On November 8 and 9, representatives of seven ECOLISE member organisations attended a policy training event in Brussels, which included visits to the main EU institutions and meetings with senior EU politicians and officials. The event highlighted important opportunities and pathways for ECOLISE to contribute to EU policy making.



Hosted by AEIDL the training began with some introductory presentations from AEIDL staff on the **EU policy making process**, and policies and programmes of relevance to ECOLISE. **Tony Long**, the former Director of **WWF Europe** then provided some personal insights into EU policy making and strategies and approaches that ECOLISE could deploy to enhance its effectiveness.

The group then moved on to the **Climate Action Directorate-General of the European Commission**, where there was a presentation on practical tools for contributing to EU policy, followed by an open discussion, and finishing with an **invitation to ECOLISE to submit views and opinions on the future EU strategy on climate action**. **Officials from the Agriculture/Rural development and Regional Policy Directorate-Generals** then gave presentations on **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**, highlighting ways that ECOLISE could benefit from existing programmes, as well as contributing to the design of future programmes.

On the morning of the 9th, the group visited the **European Parliament** and met with **Mr Benedek Javor MEP**, who identified several opportunities for cooperation, on both current (existing Directives and funding proposals) and future work. **He offered to work with ECOLISE** and to host future meetings and events at the Parliament, including as part of the [European Day of Sustainable Communities](#).

The final part of the training included a visit to the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**, where the group met with, among others, the **President and Vice President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory**. The EESC has already been supportive of ECOLISE's activities and this meeting confirmed the desire on both sides to continue and strengthen this cooperation. A number of follow-up activities were identified and the EESC also offered to host an event as part of the European Day of Sustainable Communities.

Some of the main lessons from the first ECOLISE policy training initiative include:

- **The critical importance of engaging NOW, as discussion are already getting underway on EU policy and programmes for the period beyond 2020. Now is the time to get involved and help shape these policies/programmes while they are still in the conception stage;**
- **The importance of contributing at all stages of the policy cycle (from conception to legislative approval and beyond..);**
- **The openness and willingness of EU politicians and officials to engage with and support ECOLISE, and the opportunity this presents to contribute to EU policy making processes;**
- **The importance of alliances with other organisations/networks with which we have a shared interest (even, possibly, organisations from outside our normal circle);**
- **The need to prioritise our policy goals and objectives in order to aim for impact and avoid spreading our limited resources too thinly.**

The members of the ECOLISE Executive Board (all of whom participated in the training) will meet shortly to discuss potential follow-up and next steps.

Eamon O'Hara, 16/11/2016