

Title:

## An overview of EUROPARC Consulting activities 2013

Recommendation:  
That the report to be noted

See also our website at [www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org) and our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting](https://www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting).



Use the experience, knowledge and commitment of our professionals working with you and together we support the EUROPARC Federation - use us and we all win! All the professionals we use have first-hand experience of protected areas.

[www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org)



**EUROPARC**  
CONSULTING

## 1 Economic climate and EUROPARC Consulting

In our last report to Council we indicated that the year 2013 made a promising start. However, the third and fourth quarters showed a marked deterioration of our trading situation. None of the tenders and expressions of interest we submitted translated into actual contracts. The contracts we were awarded (on the basis of preparatory work in 2012) had smaller profit margins which we accepted as competition on small and medium-sized contract is fierce. In addition, many of the Charter applications (particularly for French, Spanish and Italian Charter candidates) involved a great deal more administration work than usual.

We have now signed a contract with the EUROPARC Federation regarding our future involvement in work for the Charter. Our concerns on the effect of changes to the Charter work are well rehearsed but, essentially, the reduction in Charter turnover and the new process will have the effect of reducing our cash-flow at the critical period between January and June each year which, in turn, affects our ability to bid for larger contracts. It means that we are left with tendering mainly for small and medium-sized contracts which are usually more fiercely contested.

As the financial situation is currently very tight we need to be prudent in our forward planning. We are postponing all investments into the company until 2015 and have allocated no budget funds in 2014 for travel, including visits to potential clients, or communications. Any work in these fields will have to be funded through projects. We have, however, ring-fenced some funding for keeping some promotional activity going, although much reduced.

We welcome the continued help and support of the whole EUROPARC family, the Directorate, the Sections in the different countries and all the EUROPARC members. However, it must be noted that, apart from our Charter work, less than 15% of our work in 2013 originated from EUROPARC members. If more members of the EUROPARC Federation were to give us an opportunity to tender for projects it would be of great benefit not only for the EUROPARC Federation but also for the whole EUROPARC network and, far beyond, for all protected areas.

Since 2008, EUROPARC Consulting has provided the EUROPARC Federation with 142,500.50 €.

Our regularly updated website [www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org) and constantly changing Facebook page [www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting](http://www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting) give further details of what we do and can offer our clients. Our work directly provides money to support the Federations work for all protected areas across Europe.

## 2 Examples of our work and clients over the past year

This is in update on work carried out in 2013.

### ➤ Dinaric Arc Parks and Sustainable Tourism – more members for the Federation

As reported previously, in May 2013 we took a group of 20 protected-area practitioners from 14 protected areas in the Dinaric Arc region and two representatives from WWF Mediterranean region (WWF MedPO) to Provence, France, to learn more about sustainable tourism and the



Charter. The Dinaric Arc region stretches through Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. EUROPARC Consulting has been working here since early 2012.

One of our aims is to persuade as many protected areas in this region to become first of all members of the EUROPARC Federation and then aim for European Charter status. 10 protected areas have already joined the Federation. With the help of this study tour plus workshops, conferences and steady advice from EUROPARC Consulting, we hope to achieve that aim for another 10 EUROPARC Federation members by the end of 2015.

Through our contract with the WWF Mediterranean Section (WWF MedPO) we have a stand-by arrangement under which any protected area in the region can contact one of our mentoring experts and ask for paid advice on sustainable tourism and its implementation. This process was deepened by our attendance at the 2nd Dinaric Arc Park Conference in Budva, Montenegro, in December 2013 where we conducted open sessions with all participants to this important event.

#### ➤ **International COOL tourism project**

In January 2013, EUROPARC Consulting started work on the COOL Tourism Project, an INTERREG programme to develop and promote the tourism offer in rural areas of the Cross-Channel region in France and the UK.

This European partnership of eleven local authorities and organisations in the east and south of England, and in the north-west of France, is based on the original idea for a rural tourism project by Visit Kent and Pas de Calais Tourism. It is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The project looked at opportunities to grow the rural tourism sector and identify obstacles and challenges. EUROPARC Consulting will help to create low-impact, environmentally-friendly sustainable tourism that cherishes, not destroys, and builds environmental awareness, whilst taking into account the needs of the environment, local residents, businesses and visitors.

On time and on budget, we delivered our final report in December 2013. It contains a common methodology for all partners that will eventually find its way into a COOL business toolkit. The actual design and implementation of the toolkit will form part of a new contract for which we hope to tender later this year.

The COOL project gave us an excellent opportunity to show that sustainable tourism can function in rural areas, both inside and outside protected areas/designated landscapes. Ultimately, all tourism should be fully sustainable.

#### ➤ **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**

Following the May 2013, Latvia Council decision we received a short draft service contract on 6th August 2013. It raised for us a number of important questions which we summarised in our



“Notes for clarification” for the Directorate to consider and discuss. We further responded and gave additional clarifications on VAT and the need for contracts on 16th August. We have since signed the Charter contract which is now in force. Although it is likely that the agreed contract price will result in a financial loss for EUROPARC Consulting it was agreed by the EUROPARC Consulting Board that we should go ahead with it nevertheless, as EUROPARC Consulting remains dedicated to the closest possible co-operation on the Charter. Without the Charter work, the Board felt that EUROPARC Consulting would not have the credibility it needs in an increasingly difficult market.

### **3 A challenge to all EUROPARC members**

EUROPARC Consulting has been successfully working in many countries with members of the EUROPARC Federation over the past twelve years. We have built a wide and skilled pool of experts with knowledge of all parts of protected-area work. We have the capacity to double our turnover with the current level of staff and experts.

However, we can only achieve this if more members of the EUROPARC Federation give EUROPARC Consulting an opportunity to tender for projects. This would be helped if we could implement the EUROPARC Federation President’s suggestion at the April 2013 meeting of the EUROPARC Consulting Advisory Board that it should be possible for EUROPARC Consulting to send out material directly to EUROPARC Federation members using the Federation mailing list (for example, a thematic E-newsletter).

The challenge for EUROPARC members is: please check that we are on the tender list that their organisation uses when seeking external contractors, specialists or advice.

### **4 EUROPARC Consulting GmbH origins and its Advisory Board**

As Council members have many important matters to consider, they may not always remain familiar with some of the details of the origins and background of EUROPARC Consulting GmbH. The process started in 1999 with a funding commission appointed by EUROPARC Federation Council to explore ways of generating funds for the work of the Federation. One of the initiatives, setting up a commercial consulting unit, wholly owned by the Federation, was presented to members at the General Assembly and endorsed unanimously by them. A funding commission obtained funds from outside the EUROPARC Federation from a private foundation, sufficient to provide start-up capital for EUROPARC Consulting GmbH.

They also asked lawyers to carry out research on the most appropriate legal basis for the company and its relationship to the Federation. They were advised to operate as a commercial trading company, where representation on the board by Federation office holders was required not to exceed 40%.

A five-member board was therefore assembled with the following Federation representation:

- the holder of the office of President, also acting as the only shareholder on behalf of the Federation (share capital reserves of 25,000 EUR) and
- the EUROPARC Federation Director.



Three other board members, not having official office holder or voting status within the Federation, were chosen from the original funding commission, from different parts of Europe, then Germany, Spain and the UK. The board appointed its chair from the independent members. All board members were required to act in an unpaid capacity.

Currently our Board consists of the two ex-officio members from the EUROPARC Federation, the President, Thomas Hansson, and the EUROPARC Federation Director, Carol Ritchie. In addition, there are the three independent members, Norbert Heukemes (BE), the Board Chairman, Richard Partington (UK), and Hans Schiphorst (NL). The Board also co-opted Richard Blackman as advisor to the Board with his long experience as the Federation's past deputy Director.

Legal advice obtained stressed the importance of EUROPARC Consulting keeping an appropriate legal distance from the Federation in order to guarantee its commercial trading integrity. They chose as the most appropriate structure the status of a GmbH (limited company) which required registration according to German law with appropriate tax status and financial regulations. In 2001, the detailed proposal for the new company was approved by Federation Council, presented to and endorsed by the General Assembly in open session.

EUROPARC Consulting GmbH, as a commercial organisation, must be separate from the EUROPARC Federation which fully owns the company. However, we are registered in Regensburg where we share our headquarters with the offices of our parent organisation, the EUROPARC Federation.

