EUROPARC Sustainable Agriculture and Grasslands Working Group Terms of Reference

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Rationale

EUROPARC represents the interest and ambitions of Protected Areas at different European political and technical levels, especially through championing the value and benefits of Protected Areas for the society and developing and maintaining partnerships with key institutions.

In Europe agriculture plays a crucial role, not only for human subsistence, but also for biodiversity protection. Agriculture and biodiversity are closely interrelated with a number of habitat types strongly dependent on agricultural practices, while food production requires and benefits from rich biodiversity. This interrelation is particularly evident in Protected Areas where cooperation among the conservation and farming sector can produce mutual benefits for agriculture, biodiversity and the broader services they provide for communities.

Semi-natural grasslands are a valuable example of this interrelation, as their maintenance highly depend on human activity, such as livestock grazing and mowing. Covering 13 % of the EU area (540 507 km^2), they are amongst the most valuable habitats on the European continent, providing multiple services such as quality grazing and forage for livestock, biodiversity preservation (including rare and threatened species), water and soil regulation, carbon sequestration, etc.
Yet these habitats and the services they provide, remain under threat also in Protected Areas, mainly due to agricultural intensification and agricultural decline.

EUROPARC is committed to support positive dialogue between the agricultural sector and Protected Area communities. In this context, the EUROPARC Sustainable Agriculture and Grasslands Working Group (SA&G WG) will contribute to address the following strategic objectives of the EUROPARC Strategy to 2030:

#2 "**Strengthen the status of Protected Areas**" advocating for sustainable practices to be integrated and valued in European policies, strategies and

funding schemes. Further, by building connections and encouraging the exchange of good practices among PAs and the farming sector.

#3 "**Enhance the status of nature on land and sea and people's connection to it**" to raise the expertise of Protected Areas managers and stakeholders on sustainable agriculture practices, with a specific focus on the management and benefits of seminatural grasslands.

#4 "**Promote sustainable development tools and approaches for people and nature**" to highlight the concrete benefits of sustainable agriculture – in particular semi-natural grasslands. By reinforcing efforts to maintain them, the WG will contribute addressing the theme "Protected Areas role in climate change mitigation and adaptation".

Main objectives:

The SA&G WG aims to inform and influence sustainable agriculture and grassland management policies and practices in Europe. For this the WG aims to:

- Provide advice, insights and expertise to the EUROPARC Directorate on sustainable agriculture and seminatural grasslands management in Protected Areas.

- Inform EU policy development with good practices of sustainable agriculture and grassland management in Protected Areas.

- Provide Protected Areas with tools to support the conservation and management of semi-natural grassland farming systems.

- Explore the development of a European wide initiative to value, promote and reward sustainable agriculture in Protected Areas.

Expected outputs:

The specific outputs that the group can provide — always taking into account members' perspectives and needs — include:

- Suggestions to the Council and Directorate on priority areas (on policy and practice) that require particular attention, including potential strategic actions that EUROPARC could take;
- Advises on key policy and communication actions to improve sustainable agriculture in Europe;
- Knowledge exchange and collection of good practices to improve fruitful cooperation among the farming sector and Protected Areas with a specific focus on seminatural grasslands conservation and management;
- Elaboration of practical tools and recommendations for Protected Areas to strengthen dialogue with farming sector and improve the conservation and management of seminatural grasslands in Europe;
- Connections with Sections and members, at national, regional and local level, for the dissemination of good practices and recommendations, and to support mutual coordination;
- Explore the development of an a European wide awarding scheme;
- In coordination with the Directorate, occasionally attending international meetings and events to represent EF interests.

Timeline

The SA&G WG is expected to be a permanent EUROPARC Working Group. Priorities will be selected on an ongoing basis, according to the evolution of the discussion with members, Protected Area's and EUROPARC's needs.

Practical organisation of the work

The membership will include 6-10 key experts from within the EUROPARC network, ensuring a balanced representation in terms of expertise, regional representation, gender, age distribution and other considerations, aiming to ensure an inclusive and functional group. The meetings will be attended by a Council representative (as Chair), in order to ensure the SA&G WG work aligns with EUROPARC strategic priorities and activities. External expertise can be sought so as to ensure the best advice possible. In any case, membership will be reviewed regularly by the Chair and the Directorate, considering issues such as potential expertise needs or active participation. The Annex to this document includes the list of members and their functions (e.g. Chair and Directorate's liaison) and will be updated as needed.

The SA&G WG activities will be coordinated and facilitated by the EUROPARC Directorate. The use of a communication platform will be considered in order to facilitate internal communication and online collaborative work.

In principle, one meeting every 2 months will be convened virtually, and the meetings will last about one hour, always trying to be very strict with the time. If feasible, an in-person meeting annually will be explored.

It is foreseen to have a special focus on one particular topic during each meeting; the agenda setting will happen via email in advance to the meetings, and background documents will be drafted by the Directorate as needed.

Succinct notes from each meeting will be prepared by the Directorate, including decisions / agreements, action points / next steps, and sticky points. Such notes will be shared with the Council, as background information for the subsequent Council meeting.

Potential opportunities to help advance EUROPARC's agenda, but also to highlight the work of the Working Group or present results or ideas (e.g. at the General Assembly or external events) will be identified and explored. In any case, while participating in external events as a representative of the SA&G WG is possible, an agreement in advance within the SA&G WG and with the Directorate, will be needed.