

Stakeholder Engagement Report

PATOKU LAGOON Project — Ishmi/Mati River Basins, Albania

Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) consultation summary | Prepared by the Project Management Unit, Urban Research Institute (URI) | CEPF Grant #63851

1. Purpose and Scope

This report summarises the stakeholder engagement carried out under the project “Conservation of Biodiversity in Patoku Lagoon and Ishmi/Mati River Outlet through Integrated River Basin Management” between January 2014 and June 2015, and records the interest, concerns and level of support expressed by stakeholders in relation to the environmental and social safeguards (ESS) of the project. It is based on the stakeholder engagement and country ownership matrix maintained by the Project Management Unit, which documents 16 distinct engagement streams in the Patoku Lagoon protected area and the Ishmi and Mati watersheds.

The engagement served four purposes: to establish the environmental and social baseline for the lagoon and its watersheds; to consult affected communities, resource users and institutions on the objectives and measures of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) for the Ishmi and Mati rivers; to agree the safeguard instruments applied to the action — the Environmental Impact Assessment / Environmental Management Plan (EMP), the Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions and the grievance mechanism; and to screen, monitor and verify ESS risks throughout implementation.

2. Engagement Approach and Coverage

Engagement was led by the Project Manager / ESS Officer at URI, together with the Albanian Society for the Protection of Birds and Mammals (ASPBM) and the Commune of Fushë-Kuqe (from July 2015 part of the Municipality of Kurbin), which hosted the project’s Local Office for Information, Monitoring and Assessment. Four instruments were used in combination:

- Structured surveys — a questionnaire and site visits in each of the 20 local government units of the Ishmi and Mati river basins to assess solid urban waste management coverage, equipment, contractors, illegal dumpsites, disposal arrangements and finances, and the pressures these units exert on the lagoon.
- Institutional consultation — public consultations with the Ministry of Environment, the water resources management authorities, the Agency of Protected Areas and the Regional Agency of Protected Areas of Lezha Prefecture on the objectives,

measures and monitoring indicators of the IWMP and on the legal and institutional gap analysis.

- Targeted training and dialogue — four thematic trainings for the Environmental Inspectorate, the Directorate of Forests and Protected Areas, the Regional Agency of Environment and the Kurbini Hunters Association, and Process Framework dialogue with traditional resource users on the hunting, fishing and gravel-extraction restrictions.
- Community mobilisation and awareness — school workshops, the summer and winter schools, Patoku Day and Wetlands International Day, bird watching and the nature exhibition, the clean-up action of 22 May 2015, posters, booklets, the on-line newsletter and the project website.

Across these streams the project engaged five villages of the Commune of Fushë-Kuqe — 2,061 families and 8,736 inhabitants, of whom approximately 4,000 live inside the Patoku Lagoon Key Biodiversity Area. Sixty-two officials (47 male, 15 female) attended the four thematic trainings, 18 biology teachers from 9 high schools of the Lezha region took part in a dedicated seminar, 60 school-aged children (31 male, 29 female) joined the school workshops and the summer and winter schools, 35 persons were trained as local eco-tourist guides, 11 businesses operating inside the protected area were reached by the informative campaign, and 26 adults took part in the two thematic community days. Eleven experts delivered the biodiversity baseline studies.

3. Stakeholders Engaged

The matrix records the following stakeholder groups, their role in the project and the position each expressed on the project's environmental and social safeguards.

Stakeholder group	Who was engaged	Position on ESS
Implementing consortium	URI (grantee), ASPBM and the Commune of Fushë-Kuqe; MoU on roles and responsibilities, January 2014	Full agreement and strong ownership; safeguard risks assessed as low and site-specific — all intervention land is state-owned, no land acquisition or resettlement, no new use restrictions; EMP and Process Framework prepared and disclosed
Local government authority	Commune of Fushë-Kuqe (from July 2015 Municipality of Kurbin); premises and staff for the Local Office	Strong interest and active support; concerns on weak law-enforcement capacity, absence of waste collection in parts of the area and uncertainty from

		the territorial-administrative reform
Civil society / technical partners	ASPBM (11 experts, baseline studies and IWMP) and EIRLA (local coordination and mobilisation)	Full support and technical endorsement; interventions confirmed non-invasive and scheduled outside breeding seasons; residual risk low and manageable through the EMP
Local government units of the basins	20 municipalities and communes of the Ishmi and Mati river basins (questionnaire and site visits, 2014; report September 2014)	Broad participation — all 20 units responded; uncontrolled dumping, partial service coverage (20–70% in several communes) and shortage of equipment and finance confirmed as the main pressures; no objection raised
Central government / environment and water authorities	Ministry of Environment; water resources management authorities; Agency of Protected Areas and Regional Agency of Protected Areas of Lezha Prefecture	Constructive technical engagement but limited high-level ownership; IWMP adoption not formalised by closure owing to concurrent institutional reform; no objection and no additional permits required
Enforcement and protected-area authorities	Environmental Inspectorate (28), Directorate of Forests and Protected Areas (20), Regional Agency of Environment (7), Kurbini Hunters Association — 62 participants in 4 trainings	High interest and clear capacity gain; METT score for the reserve rose from 23 (May 2014) to 32 (June 2015); concerns on enforcement logistics, funding and staff instability
Affected resource users	Members of the Kurbini Hunters Association and users engaged in unlicensed hunting, fishing or gravel extraction (Process Framework)	Cooperative dialogue and no conflict recorded; the project imposes no new restrictions, which derive from existing legislation; impacts assessed as negligible and no grievances submitted
Local resource users / fisheries	Local fishermen and two fishing enterprises of the lagoon and river outlets	Very positive engagement; enterprises built and guarded the two nesting

		platforms and released protected species caught in nets; no adverse livelihood impacts or compensation claims
Private sector / businesses and services	11 businesses inside the protected area; V.A.L.E. Recycling and the National Association of Waste Recycling; a specialised tourism agency (35 eco-guides trained)	Interested and constructive; best-practice recommendations accepted, a public-private cleaning partnership established, and eco-trails routed along existing paths away from sensitive habitats
Schools, youth and education sector	Gurrezi High School “Nikoll Miri” and three further schools (60 children); 18 biology teachers from 9 high schools of the Lezha region	Very high interest and participation; schools identified as the most responsive group and a long-term sustainability partner; child health and safety during field activities mitigated and no incidents reported
Local communities and general public	Inhabitants of Gurrez, Fushë-Kuqe, Gorre, Patok and Adriatik — 2,061 families, 8,736 inhabitants; open grievance channel	Positive reception with growing but still limited participation; concerns on uncollected waste, illegal dumping and untreated wastewater; no resettlement, land take or access restriction, and no grievances received

4. Key Issues Raised and How They Were Addressed

No stakeholder raised an objection to the project. The concerns recorded during consultation, and the measures adopted in response, are set out below.

Issue raised	Raised by	Response adopted
Absence of municipal waste collection and of wastewater infrastructure; uncontrolled dumping	Commune of Fushë-Kuqe, the 20 local government units surveyed, EIRLA, local communities and businesses	Documented in the solid waste assessment (September 2014) and reflected in the IWMP measures and

along the river banks and in the lagoon		recommendations; clean-up action of 22 May 2015 in two areas of the protected area
Lack of municipal budget, equipment and finance for waste collection, and distance to the regional landfill of Bushat	Local government units of the Ishmi and Mati basins	Addressed through IWMP recommendations rather than works; recyclable fractions routed to the recycling industry and remaining waste disposed of at the authorised Bushat landfill
Destination of collected waste and risk of secondary pollution	V.A.L.E. Recycling, National Association of Waste Recycling, Commune of Fushë-Kuqe	Public-private partnership between URI, V.A.L.E. Recycling and the Commune for periodic cleaning of the reserve, with separation of recyclables and safe disposal of the remainder
Weak enforcement capacity, illegal hunting, illegal fishing and river-bed gravel extraction inside the protected area	EIRLA, Commune of Fushë-Kuqe, Environmental Inspectorate and protected-area authorities	Four thematic trainings for enforcement and protected-area staff, distribution of species and conservation guidelines, completion of the METT, and project-funded guards during the 2014–2015 breeding season
Potential impact of restrictions on traditional hunting, fishing and gravel-extraction users	Kurbini Hunters Association and traditional resource users	Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions applied: restrictions derive from existing legislation and none are created by the project; affected persons involved in paid project activities and referred to communal social assistance and labour schemes
Possible disturbance of sensitive habitats and species by trails, signage and platform works	ASPBM experts, protected-area authorities, eco-guide trainees	Existing routes used only — no new routes opened and some proposed for closure; signs sited away from sensitive habitats and unstable mud zones; works

		scheduled outside sensitive breeding seasons
Health and safety during clean-ups, platform construction and school field activities	Project partners, ASPBM, schools and teachers	Advance briefing, supervision, protective equipment and insurance of workers; teacher supervision for pupils; no incidents reported
Uncertainty created by the territorial-administrative reform and by the restructuring of water and protected-area institutions	Commune of Fushë-Kuqe, businesses, central authorities	Recorded as a project risk to sustainability; institutional gap analysis prepared and shared with the responsible authorities, and the IWMP framed to survive the reform
Need for continued awareness and monitoring after project closure	Schools and teachers, EIRLA, local communities	Local Office for Information, Monitoring and Assessment hosted by the Commune; Patoku Day established as an annual event; schools and teachers engaged as long-term awareness partners; biodiversity monitoring indicators handed over with the IWMP

5. ESS Risk Conclusion

On the basis of the consultations recorded in the matrix, the safeguard risks of the project were assessed as low, site-specific, reversible and manageable through standard mitigation. All intervention land is state-owned, no land acquisition or involuntary resettlement is involved, no construction or hazardous operation was undertaken, and no new use restrictions were created by the project — the hunting, fishing and gravel-extraction limits inside the protected area derive from existing national legislation, namely Law No. 111/2012 and National Water Council Decision No. 1 of 07.07.2011, so the project works towards their enforcement only. An Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan and a Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions were prepared and disclosed on 12 January 2014, and the implementing consortium confirmed this classification at inception and through continuous risk screening during implementation.

No stakeholder identified concerns relating to land acquisition, involuntary resettlement, cultural heritage or indigenous peoples, and no environmental permits were required. No

livelihood is legally based on the restricted activities, no economic displacement or restriction of business activity resulted from the project, and no compensation claims were made. Grievance information was displayed on posters at several locations in the commune and a dedicated complaints section was maintained on the project website; no complaints or grievances were recorded during implementation, and the conflict resolution arrangements through local authorities and village heads foreseen in the Process Framework were not required. Monitoring confirmed that mitigation measures were completed, that no unexpected negative impacts occurred and that no corrective measures were needed. URI reports that all environmental and social safeguard requirements were followed in line with the World Bank safeguard policies applied by CEPF.

6. Country Ownership and Sustainability

Country ownership is evidenced by the composition and conduct of the partnership: URI acted as grantee and lead, ASPBM as technical partner and the Commune of Fushë-Kuqe as local government partner, their roles agreed in a memorandum of understanding at inception in January 2014. The Commune provided the premises and human resources for the Local Office for Information, Monitoring and Assessment and co-organised all public events. Twenty local government units of the Ishmi and Mati basins took part in the solid waste assessment, and the Ministry of Environment, the water resources management authorities, the Agency of Protected Areas and the Regional Agency of Protected Areas of Lezha Prefecture were consulted on the IWMP, on the legal and institutional gap analysis and on the monitoring indicators. Adoption of the Plan had not been formalised by project closure, mainly because of the concurrent reform of the water and protected-area institutions and of the territorial-administrative reform in force from July 2015; the grantee recorded the difficulty of securing senior-level participation as a risk to sustainability.

Sustainability arrangements were negotiated with the stakeholders who will carry them: a public-private partnership between URI, V.A.L.E. Recycling and the Commune of Fushë-Kuqe for periodic cleaning of the Patok–Fushë-Kuqe–Ishëm managed nature reserve; Patoku Day, established on 13 December 2014, as an annual community event; the eco-touristic trails to Godulla and the Mati Delta, the signage and the 35 trained local guides as a basis for local income from eco-tourism; and the schools, the 18 trained biology teachers and the Kurbin Education Directorate as the long-term channel for awareness raising. Capacity built in the enforcement and protected-area authorities is reflected in the rise of the METT composite score for the reserve from 23 in May 2014 to 32 in June 2015. Continued engagement will therefore focus on the enforcement of existing restrictions with the regional authorities, on maintaining the cleaning partnership and the monitoring indicators established under the IWMP, and on sustained awareness activity with schools and the lagoon communities.