



Concept note

# Development of the ERFP Secretariat

Draft report of Task Force for ERFP General Assembly 2020

ERFP Task Force: S.J. Hiemstra, D. Bojkovski, M. Castellanos, C. Danchin-Burge,  
H. Goederz, C. Ligda, D. Planchenault, J.H. Schneider, S. Stojanovic, R.  
Svesteine

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# Introduction

The European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources (ERFP) is the regional network and platform to support the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and sustainable use of animal genetic resources (AnGR), facilitating the implementation of FAO's Global Plan of Action for AnGR. Since 2001, ERFP is stimulating the collaboration, coordination of work and exchange of information and experience between different European countries and governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Permanent Working Groups (WG) consisting of National Coordinators (NC) or other experts from countries in Europe are the most important executive bodies in the activities coordinated by the ERFP. The three WGs are: WG Ex situ conservation, WG Documentation and Information, and WG In situ conservation and Valorisation. More short-term work may be carried out through Task Forces or Ad Hoc Actions.

The work of ERFP and its bodies is supported by the ERFP Secretariat with its wide range of responsibilities. The Secretariat plays a central role in the functioning of the regional ERFP platform and network.

According to the ERFP Terms of Reference (TOR)<sup>1</sup> the main responsibilities of the ERFP Secretariat are:

- to distribute relevant information on AnGR and to facilitate communication among the NCs and national experts within the ERFP network,
- to communicate with the Global Focal Point at FAO and other regional focal points,
- to give secretarial support to the Assembly of the NCs and to organise its Annual Meeting,
- to give secretarial support to the SC,
- to execute decisions made by the Assembly and the SC,
- to support the Working Groups, Task Forces and Ad hoc actions, as appropriate,
- to be responsible for the financial management of the ERFP budget,
- to provide technical and financial reports to the SC and the Assembly on a regular basis
- to maintain and update the ERFP website,
- to publish the ERFP newsletter and to implement other communication tools.

Since its establishment ERFP has worked with a rotating Secretariat, the Assembly electing a Secretariat every 4 years. A re-election for a period up to 4 years is possible. NC proposals for hosting the Secretariat are invited by the Assembly one year before the end of the hosting period. NCs may propose offers made by any institution within their country they consider competent to host the Secretariat.

France hosted the Secretariat for the first years, then the Secretariat functions were provided by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece (2007-2010), then by BLE - German Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (2011-2014), followed by the Department of Animal Science, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia (2015-2018). Since 2019, the ERFP Secretariat is hosted again by France, within the French Livestock Institute (IDELE).

Funding of ERFP is based on voluntary contributions of countries. The country contributions are based on the Gross Domestic Product rating according to the FAO / UN scales per country. The budget of ERFP is annually approved by the Assembly of National Coordinators (NCs). In the current situation, when all European countries are paying their voluntary contributions, the annual income of ERFP would be 123k€ maximum. In the period 2010-2020 the average annual income of ERFP was approximately 80k€. At the same time ERFP was able to keep annual expenditures for its activities low, also due to generous (in kind) support of the Secretariat hosting countries.

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<sup>1</sup> ERFP Terms of Reference, approved by General Assembly, August 2018. <https://www.animalgeneticresources.net/index.php/about-erfp/>

A SWOT<sup>2</sup> analysis was undertaken in 2018 by ERFP to review the current strategy and operation of the ERFP network, and to analyse its strengths, weaknesses, future opportunities and potential threats. NCs stressed the importance of the ERFP platform, and suggestions were made to further develop and to improve the organisation and operation of the network. Recommendations included enhancing the active participation of national experts and NCs, and further development of the internal and external communication strategy. National Coordinators appreciate the current functioning of the rotating Secretariat, and the *in kind* contribution of hosting countries keeping the necessary operational expenses of the Secretariat low. On the other hand the Assembly also noted that the capacity of the ERFP Secretariat is limited, when considering the ambitions reflected in the MYPOW<sup>3</sup> of ERFP. In the SWOT analysis of ERFP it was also noted that the current rotational system for the Secretariat and the financial commitments of countries to ERFP can make the ERFP network vulnerable.

In 2018, the ERFP General Assembly suggested to investigate options to further strengthen the role of the ERFP Secretariat. One option that could be considered is the establishment of a more permanent future foundation for the ERFP Secretariat, that possibly could mitigate some disadvantages of the current situation.

## Task Force future ERFP Secretariat

The ERFP General Assembly decided to establish a Task Force (TF) to further investigate various options for further development of the ERFP Secretariat and to improve the effectiveness of ERFP. The establishment of this TF is also included in the 2019-2023 MYPOW.

The TF is composed of members of the ERFP Steering Committee and representatives of the current and previous ERFP Secretariats (France, Greece, Germany, Slovenia).

Based on the Terms of Reference for the TF, approved by the Assembly, the TF will analyse the current situation, and will evaluate various options and opportunities for further development and strengthening of the ERFP Secretariat. The TF is expected to report its first conclusions and proposed next steps to the General Assembly (GA) in 2020. The final report will be presented to the GA in 2021. In 2021 the GA will be asked to adopt recommendations of the TF.

## Assessing the current situation

First, the TF analysed the current situation regarding the ERFP Secretariat in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Next, opportunities and threats for the future ERFP Secretariat were identified on the basis of external developments, and strategic development options for the ERFP network (SWOT analysis). Details of the SWOT analysis can be found in Annex I.

In summary, the main outcomes and conclusions from the SWOT analysis are as follows. The light and effective structure of ERFP and the rotational system for the Secretariat have been beneficial for the development of ERFP in the past 20 years. Annual expenditures have been kept low and the rotational system contributed to building ownership across Europe. However, activities of the network and the work load of the Secretariat has increased over time, which is also reflected in the recently adopted MYPOW 2019-2023. ERFP ambitions, in particular the Secretariat work, are facing budget constraints. Moreover, in the rotational system, transfer of Secretariat and administration every 4 years requires additional efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> Elzbieta Martyniuk, Vera Matlova ,Nina Sæther, Danijela Bojkovski, Lorraine Puzin, Grazyna Polak, Sipke Joost Hiemstra, Beate Berger, Jeanne Bormann, Eva-Marie Stålhammar, Srdjan Stojanović, Jan Tomka. National Coordinators for Animal Genetic Resources perspectives on the European Regional Focal Point network: survey results

<sup>3</sup> ERFP Multi Year Programme of Work 2019-2023. Approved by General Assembly, August 2018.  
<https://www.animalgeneticresources.net/index.php/about-erfp/>

While the ERFP network itself is not a legal entity, the host institution of the Secretariat should be able to act legally on behalf of the network, and to participate in initiatives and projects on behalf of ERFP. The aim of ERFP is to raise its profile and ambitions, which requires a strong, professional and experienced Secretariat and sufficient funding. In order to take full advantage of opportunities at EU level to strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources (the ERFP and its Secretariat should develop further, as described in the next section “Strategic Vision”).

## Strategic vision

- As already reflected in the current MYPOW, the aim of ERFP is to be more ambitious and to further strengthen the network and activities of ERFP Member countries to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of AnGR in Europe, at national level and pan-European level. For example the current MYPOW demonstrates more ambition in terms of communication and access to data. Due to the limited capacity of the current Secretariat, ERFP is currently relying on external companies for core ERFP activities.
- The Secretariat is the “engine” of ERFP. The Secretariat needs sufficient capacity, relevant expertise and budget to facilitate and stimulate activities of the network, and to be able to represent the ERFP network internationally. Taking into account recent experiences and the current MYPOW 2019-2023, the ERFP network should aim at a minimum, structural capacity of 1 full-time-equivalent for the Secretariat and sufficient budget to involve additional technical experts where needed.
- A Secretariat rotational system has proven benefits for the ERFP network, however it is strongly recommended to introduce more continuity and longer commitment periods for Secretariats (and their host institution), but at the same time keeping the flexibility to transfer the Secretariat between countries/institutions when needed or desired.
- The ERFP network is not a legal entity. Therefore, the activities and responsibilities of the ERFP Secretariat should be based on a Letter of Agreement or Commitment Letter between the Steering Committee of ERFP and the host institution of the Secretariat. In the long run ERFP may want to explore further options for ERFP to become a legal entity itself.
- Ideally, the host institution of the Secretariat should be able to manage the finances of the network and to act legally on behalf of the ERFP network. This could also include participation in applications for project funding on behalf of the ERFP network, which should contribute to increased capacity and critical mass of the Secretariat.
- The ERFP Multi-Year-Programme-Of-Work (MYPOW) and the ERFP Terms of Reference (ToR), as approved by the General Assembly, are the framework for the activities and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the whole ERFP network. MYPOW and ToR of ERFP should be completely in line with the European Strategy for AnGR (currently under development in the context of GenRes Bridge).
- Individual ERFP member countries will be asked to sign a commitment letter to provide an agreed funding level based on UN scales, for a new MYPOW period. Ideally, the hosting period and agreement with Secretariat host institution is in line with the period of the agreed MYPOW.
- ERFP has a long and close collaboration with EAAP, including cooperation through the EAAP WG AnGR, financial and administrative cooperation, scientific cooperation. Under the future perspectives and ERFP ambitions, ERFP seeks to improve the strategic collaboration between the two bodies.
- The ERFP network should take a broader view at the whole field of animal genetic resources. In particular, the EU Animal Breeding Regulation foresees a European Reference Centre (ERC) for the preservation of endangered breeds or the preservation of the genetic diversity existing within those breeds, when there is a recognised need to promote the establishment or harmonisation of the methods used by breed societies, third parties designated by breed societies for the management of these breeds. The ERFP network itself will not be in the position to

apply for such a future potential ERC in a call for proposals, but the host institution of the ERFP Secretariat could apply for the ERC role.

- Currently the EU GenRes Bridge project is developing an integrated strategy for genetic resources of food and agriculture in plants, forestry and livestock in Europe. The integrated European Strategy for Genetic Resources will give opportunities to strengthen the role of ERFP and also for enhanced collaboration between the three domains and their Secretariats. In addition, each sector shall develop its own strategy that harmonizes with the common strategy.
- Both the integrated and the AnGR specific strategy should *inter alia* contain a recommendation to establish an ERC, which should also have the task of coordinating the work of the National Coordinators (the ERFP). The ERFP domain specific strategy should describe in more detail the need for establishing an ERC as an opportunity for better coordination. The tasks of the ERC described in Annex IV of the EU Animal Breeding Regulation must be taken into account.

## Terms of Reference and selection criteria for ERFP Secretariat

For future ERFP Secretariat applications the following criteria should be taken into account. These criteria are based on the needs of ERFP and expected requirements for an ERC<sup>4</sup>. ERFP Secretariat and ERC could be combined in one institution. Potential host institutions can be placed on national or international level.

### ERFP network and AnGR policies

- Competence in the field of the AnGR, in particular concerning the goals of ERFP.
- Involvement with ERFP in the past years, affiliation with the ERFP network, knowledge of the ERFP framework.
- Involvement in policy development and implementation, in particular in the context of the FAO Global Plan of Action for AnGR.
- Experience in the field of international collaboration, co-ordination and networking
- Knowledge of research activities at national and international level
- Absence of possible conflicts of interests between hosting the ERFP Secretariat and applicant/host institutes other business
- Institution hosting the ERFP Secretariat should preferably also be interested and capable to serve as a potential European reference center (ERC) for AnGR in the context of the EU animal breeding legislation.

### Suitable and qualified staff

- The institution has recognized expertise and track record in the preservation of endangered breeds, animal breeding, conservation strategies, population and molecular genetics
- Secretariat staff has experience in coordination of international initiatives or projects
- Access to infrastructure, equipment and products necessary to carry out the tasks, in particular modern communication skills and tools, and access to legal and financial expertise in the host institution.

### Legal and financial

- Host organisation should be able to provide stability and legal backing for the ERFP secretariat and the ERFP network.
- Ability to act legally on behalf of ERFP, to be confirmed in MoU/Commitment letter between host institution and chair of the Steering Committee. The MoU should provide a clear mandate and list commitments, rights and obligations of the hosting institution.

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<sup>4</sup> Selection and eligibility criteria derived from/reference to EU Breeding Legislation (EU Reference Centre Interbull)

- Willingness and ability to take part in projects and initiatives on behalf of ERFP
- The hosting institute should be willing to legally act on behalf of ERFP, so that contracts, e.g. for potential outsourcing of activities, or applications for project funding, can be signed.
- The institution has mechanism and procedures, and suitably qualified staff, to respect the confidential nature of certain subjects, results or communications.
- Although it may not be efficient to transfer the administration and account holding regularly between countries/institutions, the host institution for the ERFP Secretariat should at least be able to manage the annual ERFP finances, on a project basis.

#### Hosting period

- Hosting period should be at least 5 years. Re-election is possible for an additional 2 years, or for another 5 years.
- Hosting period of 5 years is associated with national commitments (agreements between ERFP and national government/institutions) of 5 years for funding of the ERFP Secretariat.

#### Viability and sustainability

- The applicant centre shall be viable without ERFP/EU financial assistance, confirmed by the relevant competent national authority.

## Annex – SWOT-analysis regarding the ERFP Secretariat

### Strength

- The ERFP network is open to all countries, based on solidarity, equal chances and access to all activities and outputs, including the chance for all countries to apply for the Secretariat role.
- The light structure of ERFP and the rotational system for the Secretariat and the Steering Committee has been beneficial for the development of ERFP in the first 20 years. It has contributed to building ownership, awareness raising and capacity building across Europe.
- Annual expenditures for the Secretariat have been kept low, also thanks to generous (*in kind*) support of the Secretariat hosting countries
- ERFP has established an effective working structure (Steering Committee and National Coordinators/Experts collaborating in Working Groups, Task Forces, Ad Hoc Actions), facilitated and supported by the Secretariat.
- The financial account of ERFP has been properly and independently managed (by EAAP, under responsibility of ERFP).

### Weakness

- The current level of annual budget of ERFP (stable over the years) hinders the increased activity and growing ambitions of the network (MYPOW 2019-2023)
- The transfer of Secretariat tasks every 4 years between host institutions/countries requires additional efforts and is time consuming. For the incoming Secretariat it takes time to get familiar with all tasks and responsibilities and to organize the transition and the signing of agreements. Although the host organisation/Secretariat can legally represent the ERFP network, for example in a multi-year collaborative project, change of Secretariat during the project period can create (legal) bottlenecks.
- Part of the previous ERFP Secretariats, as an institution, were not able to act legally (sign contracts) on behalf of the ERFP network.
- Despite, the constructive collaboration with EAAP, on the financial administration, the situation seems also suboptimal in terms of administrative efficiency and responsibilities.
- The current funding mechanism for the Secretariat and the functioning of the ERFP network, based on annual, voluntary country contributions, is vulnerable and could negatively impact the future stability of the network.

### Threat

- The current light structure, the level of funding, and the rotational system for the Secretariat, may hamper the growing ambitions of ERFP.
- The number of countries willing to host the Secretariat is low and finding a new candidate has often proved being difficult. There is always a risk that no country is willing to host the Secretariat for the next 4 year period.
- When the ERFP network will not be able to raise its profile and visibility at national and international level, there is an increasing risk that national governments will not continue to commit their annual voluntary payments on a structural basis.
- The increased budget needed to fulfil the higher ambitions of ERFP could possibly result in increased difficulties persuading ERFP member countries to contribute annually.
- Instability and discontinuity of NC positions in some countries, lack of coordination, and low priority of AnGR conservation, sustainable use and valorisation at national and European level, may negatively impact the role and position of ERFP.

### Opportunity

- There is an increasing interest in society for biodiversity, including for AnGR, which creates a positive environment for ERFP.



- The EU Horizon 2020 project GenResBridge is providing opportunities for collaboration among networks of plant, forest and animal genetic resources. Joining forces and collaboration of ERFP with other GenRes networks can create synergies and a critical mass to improve public awareness and to lobby for common objectives.
- In addition to the core responsibility of the ERFP Secretariat there are also opportunities for the ERFP Secretariat to apply for additional funding on behalf of, or representing the ERFP network and its objectives. ERFP should financially benefit from participating in international projects, and in this way contributing to the financial security and sustainability of ERFP.
- ERFP could serve as an expert body on conservation and sustainable use of AnGR, and as an advisor to EU on AnGR related matters. Linking the ERFP Secretariat/host institution with a potential European reference centre (EU animal breeding legislation), will strategically have a clear added value.
- A stronger international and EU policy and legal framework (reference to GenRes Bridge) might support the conservation and sustainable use of AnGR with a growing interest, awareness and room for development.