

# SAVE BIODIVERSITY THROUGH THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

We are facing an ecological emergency. One million species are currently threatened with extinction, and the health of the ecosystems on which we all depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever<sup>1</sup>. Biodiversity loss is one of the most critical environmental threats alongside climate change and the two are inextricably linked. Protecting and restoring ecosystems will be essential in putting our planet on the path to recovery.

Transformative solutions are needed to halt and reverse current trends of biodiversity loss, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We need urgent action to address the drivers of nature deterioration, and it needs to happen at an unprecedented scale.

The political guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024 and the Mission Letters to Executive Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Sinkevičius put such actions at the heart of the European Green Deal.

“We need to change the way we produce, consume and trade. Preserving and restoring our ecosystem needs to guide all of our work. We must set new standards for biodiversity cutting across trade, industry, agriculture and economic policy. [...] Europe will work with its global partners to curtail biodiversity loss within the next five years. I want us to lead the world at the 2020 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, just as we did at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.”

- Ursula von der Leyen, 16 July 2019.

We welcome this ambition and present in this paper five priorities that will make sure the European Commission delivers on this during its five year mandate, for the benefit of nature, climate and people.

## 5 PRIORITIES TO MAKE THE EU A TRUE CHAMPION FOR NATURE

1. Ambitious and credible strategies to halt ecological collapse
2. Full implementation and enforcement of existing environmental legislation
3. A legally binding restoration target for nature and climate
4. Ensuring effective marine protection
5. Reducing the EU's global footprint

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<sup>1</sup> IPBES Global Assessment: <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>

# 1 Ambitious and credible strategies to halt ecological collapse

The EU needs to be a champion for nature protection both in Europe and globally by advocating for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. **The EU must make sure that this framework is rigorous enough to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and include strong implementation and accountability mechanisms.** To be credible, this needs to be accompanied by coherent and ambitious action in the EU.

The EU has had biodiversity targets in place for several decades, but has consistently failed to meet them due to low political attention and low priority given to halting nature loss, as well as a lack of accountability, and policy coherence. **The upcoming EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 must therefore move away from voluntary commitments and instead set out legally binding targets for the EU and its Member States.**

The planet's health and ability to function as we depend on it, is spiraling into the emergency zone. The EU should act accordingly, and **mobilise sufficient funding** to face the crisis. It should ensure additional financing to be channeled into nature conservation and restoration action. To ensure coherent spending, the EU will need to fully phase out all environmentally harmful subsidies like those fueling overfishing, intensification of agriculture and hydropower development.

# 2 Full implementation and enforcement of existing environmental legislation

The EU has world-leading environmental and nature legislation<sup>2</sup> in place, but implementation is lagging behind. Many Natura 2000 sites for instance are not effectively protected and therefore remain "paper parks". Equally, Member States are failing to effectively tackle pressures on freshwater ecosystems, which is a legal obligation under the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Following the ongoing fitness check, **the European Commission and Member States must conclude that the WFD is fit for purpose, and significantly improve implementation and coherence of all legislation** relevant to protect and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems. In addition, **the European Commission must step up enforcement of environmental and nature legislation.** For this, the European Commission will need to deploy internal resources appropriately, and ensure adequate staff capacity is in place to mainstream environmental action in sectoral policies across the Commission services. This will ensure better support to Member States with implementation, and with the Commission's capacity to handle complaints and bring infringement cases forward to the European Court of Justice at a scale commensurate with the crisis.

## Save Kresna Gorge from the EU funded motorway

The Bulgarian government plans to build a motorway with EU funds through Kresna Gorge, an EU-protected natural jewel. Nature advocates and the local community have fought for nearly two decades to save the gorge from destruction. It is essential that the Commission halts the funding for the project and demands that less damaging alternatives - which exist - are implemented, as required by EU law. The Commission needs to play an active role to uphold the Nature Directives and take legal proceedings against the Bulgarian government for the massive loss of wildlife that has occurred due to the build-up of traffic.

<sup>2</sup> Birds and Habitats Directives, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Water Framework Directive



## 3 A legally binding restoration target for nature and climate

The European Green Deal, and especially the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy, must include an ambitious legally binding target to restore degraded habitats, through restoration of natural forests, peatlands, floodplains, wetlands, biodiversity rich grasslands, coastal zones and marine areas that are important to help us mitigate and adapt to climate change, and provide a home for European species. Progress on the current restoration objective<sup>3</sup> has been largely insufficient. **A restoration target that delivers must therefore set a concrete number of ha/km<sup>2</sup> on land and at sea, and it must be legally binding** if it is to drive any real change. Co-benefits of ecological restoration are widely recognised, as large scale restoration of degraded habitats would contribute to increasing EU carbon sinks and would improve resilience to the impacts of climate change in addition to enhancing people's health and well-being. A legally binding restoration target would also improve the connectivity of the Natura 2000 network, making the network more resilient to pressures, including to a changing climate. The forest restoration plan for Europe should also be included in this wider restoration initiative.

### Restoration in focus

There is growing evidence of the climate change mitigation and adaptation potential of restoring natural habitats. A good example is the recent map produced by RSPB/ BirdLife UK<sup>4</sup> which analysed the overlap between biodiversity areas and carbon stocks. The project mapped all of the UK's priority habitats for wildlife and plant life and calculated that those areas hold carbon equivalent to over 2Gt of CO<sub>2</sub>, the equivalent of all of the greenhouse gases the UK's industry, transport and power sector would generate in four years. However, 40% of these spaces are not in good condition which means that they are currently releasing carbon into the atmosphere, rather than storing it. Restoring these areas is therefore urgently needed, both to bring Europe's nature back and to tackle the climate crisis.

## 4 Ensuring effective marine protection

Europe's seas include some of the most intensively used marine waters in the world. They are threatened by overfishing, intensive shipping, heavy development of marine infrastructure and extractive activities. These activities destroy marine biodiversity, degrade habitats and pollute the marine environment. A recent WWF assessment<sup>5</sup> of the EU's progress to effectively protect at least 10% of its marine and coastal areas by 2020 shows that European seas remain in a poor state and significantly lack appropriate biodiversity protection. Only 1.8% of the EU marine area is covered by Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with management plans, despite 12.4% being designated for protection. This means that 85% of all designated MPAs are currently not providing protection and are mere paper parks. The fisheries management measures in several marine Natura 2000 sites are lacking and are allowing for harmful extractive fishing

<sup>3</sup>Target of the current Biodiversity Strategy: By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/carbon-mapping/>

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.wwf.eu/wwf\\_news/media\\_centre/?uNewsID=352798](http://www.wwf.eu/wwf_news/media_centre/?uNewsID=352798)

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such as bottom trawling to take place in protected habitats. Without increased political will and tangible actions to implement robust management plans, Europe's seas will be rendered to one large unsustainable fishing ground without biodiversity protection. **The 2030 Biodiversity Strategy must set a binding target to protect and effectively manage at least 30% of EU waters by 2030, including the establishment of "no take zones" – areas permanently protected from any extractive activities and direct human disturbance – to allow the restoration of marine ecosystems.**

## 5 Reducing the EU's global footprint

The EU represents only 7% of the world's population, but uses almost 20% of the global biocapacity, which reflects the world's ability to regenerate resources and absorb waste. This means that EU consumption has a significant ecological footprint outside of the EU, leading to increasing greenhouse gas emissions and nature loss in other regions around the world. This footprint also affects people by taking away their lands or their livelihoods. It is therefore imperative for the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy not to be limited to nature conservation and restoration within Europe, but also include concrete targets and actions to tackle biodiversity loss globally by significantly reducing the EU's global footprint.

**We call for new legislation, as part of broader EU action<sup>6</sup>, to stop products that lead to deforestation, ecosystem destruction and human rights violations from being placed on the EU market.** This will go a long way in halting the destruction of valuable ecosystems and the biodiversity they host, and in helping to avoid further acceleration of climate change by allowing carbon dioxide to remain in the ocean, soil and vegetation. It will also put Europe at the forefront of the drive to achieve the SDGs.

<sup>6</sup> The recent EC Communication on "Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's forest" is a welcome basis for the development of decisive EU action. Implementing a comprehensive set of measures and initiatives, including new legislation, is essential to reduce the EU footprint on the world's natural ecosystems.

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