

To: EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen
Berlaymont, Rue de la Loi 200
1000 - Brussels

09 June 2022

Open letter on Peatlands in the EU Restoration Law

Dear Commission President Ursula von der Leyen,

cc Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans,

cc Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius,

We, a broad coalition of conservationists, scientists and farmers caring for wetlands and peatlands across the EU, are writing to you to raise our concerns regarding the insufficient protection of peatlands in the EU.

The publication of the “Nature Package” with i.a. the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law has been postponed several times and was promised to be published “in June”.

We urge you to a) **no further delay** the publication date of 22 June for the planned legislative proposals, and b) **keep ambition with regard to the restoration and protection of peatlands**¹, including on agricultural land.

A swift publication is of utmost importance as the climate and biodiversity twin crises are not pausing. The latest IPCC AR6 report of April 2022 was a powerful reminder. Each day matters, if we want to achieve the 2030 ambitions of the EU and the UN and a just transition. Also, for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (with final preparatory meetings already happening at the end of June in Nairobi), it is important to show leadership and come up with the proposal in June.

In order to trigger effective ecosystem restoration, it is crucial to cover peatlands with dedicated targets (just as with forests). Peatlands are important – and cost-effective – to address in the EU Nature Restoration Law:

1. **Rewetting drained peatlands leads to drastic GHG emission reductions while building a bio-based circular economy.** Wet peatlands are the most space-efficient long-term carbon store and sink in our planet’s biosphere. When drained (as for agriculture, forestry, and peat extraction), they release huge amounts of CO₂. In the EU, drained peatlands emit 220 Mt CO₂-equivalents per year, i.e. 5% of total EU GHG emissions². For climate protection, we must (1) keep undrained peatlands wet and (2) rewet and/or restore already drained peatlands. Rewetted peatlands can be managed for nature conservation (increasing biodiversity benefits) or for paludiculture (maintaining

¹ Peatlands are lands with a naturally accumulated peat layer at the surface. They occur in almost all EU Member States, with a concentration in north-western, Nordic and eastern European countries, covering a total area of c. 250,000 km² in the EU (and c. 1,000,000 km² in entire Europe).

² Tanneberger F, Appulo L, Ewert S, Lakner S, Ó Brolcháin N, Peters J & Wichtmann W (2020): The Power of Nature-based Solutions: How Peatlands can Help us to Achieve Key EU Sustainability Objectives. *Advanced Sustainability Systems* 5(1). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/adsu.202000146>

production and rural livelihoods). Early restoration will facilitate a just transition while further delays will make this increasingly more difficult. Shifting to paludiculture is the biggest carbon farming game-changer and key for a bio-based circular economy. By rewetting just 3% of the EU agricultural land, the EU can cut up to 25% of total emissions from EU agriculture, and - in case of paludiculture – even without sacrificing agricultural land.

2. **By rewetting drained peatlands, substantial improvements in flood protection, water scarcity buffering and water quality come along as co-benefits.** Rewetted peatlands no longer suffer from local flood damage (e.g. crop failure) and function as retention areas to mitigate flood damage downstream. Rewetting also stops the release of nitrate by peat mineralization (currently in the EU amounting to 1-5 Mt per year), with substantial impact on ground and surface water quality and drinking water provision. In addition, rewetting may result in increased groundwater stocks in the entire catchment and in increased cooling of our landscape – very much needed in a warming world.
3. **By rewetting drained peatlands, threatened habitats of wetland/peatland flora and fauna can be restored.** At present, over 50 % of all peatland sites in the EU are degraded³, have a bad conservation status and the trend is negative⁴. Rewetting and restoring such peatlands will help reaching the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 of bringing back nature to agricultural land and of restoring soil ecosystems⁵.

Turning drained peatlands with exceptionally high GHG emissions and low biodiversity value into low-emission, biodiversity-rich lands and potential carbon sinks is at the heart of the EU Green Deal; in particular the EU's Climate policies and laws, Biodiversity Strategy, and Farm to Fork Strategy, paving the way for a fairer, greener and more performance-based CAP. Peatland rewetting offers great potential for multiple benefits for climate, biodiversity and rural communities.

We urge you to defend the success of the EU Green Deal in the EU Restoration Law and to bring forward an ambitious policy for the rewetting of drained peatlands in Europe. To reach the climate action ambitions of the Paris Agreement and EU Climate Law, a transformation pathway for all EU peatlands⁶ should lead to net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050. The EU should act as a frontrunner of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and towards ambitious biodiversity targets at the upcoming CBD COP15 in Kunming.

We can assure you of all our support needed in the legislative procedure and in the subsequent implementation to make the Nature Restoration Law a success story!

Yours sincerely,

³ Tanneberger F, Moen A, Barthelmes A, Lewis E, Miles L, Sirin A, Tegetmeyer C, Joosten H (2021): Mires in Europe - Regional diversity, condition and protection. Diversity 13: 381. <https://doi.org/10.3390/d13080381>

⁴ European Environmental Agency, 2020. State of nature in the EU. Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018. EEA Report No 10/2020

⁵ European Commission, 2020. EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Bringing nature back into our lives.

⁶ GMC & Wetlands International (2021) [Protecting and Restoring Peatlands – Targets and Recommendations for Peatlands in the EU Biodiversity Strategy](#)

Signatories from organisations/countries inside the EU (in alphabetic order):

Zymantas Morkvenas	Baltic Environment Forum, Lithuania, Director	
Gábor Wichmann	BirdLife Austria, Director	
Martin Hellicar	BirdLife Cyprus, Director	
Lotta Berg	BirdLife Sweden, Director	
Aki Arkiomaa	BirdLife Finland, Director	
Danny Jacobs	Bond Beter Leefmilieu, Belgium, Director	
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The H2020 WaterLANDS consortium with 32 organisations from research, industry, government and non-profit sectors in 14 European countries endorses this letter.



Signatories from organisations/countries outside the EU (in alphabetic order):

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