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BirdLife's bi-annual Agriculture Newsletter

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Editorial: CAP Reform does not take holidays

Dear Reader,



We hope this Farming for Life newsletter finds you well and that the summer gives you some time to catch up on what might have slipped over the last couple of months. Therefore we give you a short overview of our work on agriculture and land use in 2010.

In this International Year of Biodiversity, where Europe infamously failed its own target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010, the EU has set itself a new target. While BirdLife strongly welcomes the target, we hope it signifies more than a paper exercise on political rhetoric and will be meaningfully integrated into other policy areas which have a clear and direct impact on biodiversity.

We aim here first at the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), where serious reform could be on its way if Commissioner Ciolos's good intentions are matched by the courage necessary to stand up to deeply rooted anti-reform forces. BirdLife is informing the debate both by proposing new policy frameworks (cfr. The [Proposal for a new EU Common agricultural Policy](#) we developed with 4 other organizations) and by continuously scrutinizing the policy in order to learn from previous mistakes (cfr. [Reality Check: Are CAP subsidies paying for environmental quality?](#)).

Secondly, we highlight our continuous scrutiny of the EU's bioenergy policies. Not only we try to bring the science back into the renewable energy equation, we also bring some fresh examples from our BirdLife Partners around the world showing the dire consequences the EU misguided policies are already having.

We hope this summer gives you some time to reload the 'renewable' batteries while we will do our best to keep thinking about the best possible future for our political ecosystem.

With very best wishes for a wonderful summer holiday,

Trees Robijns
EU Agriculture Policy Officer
BirdLife International European Division

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EU Biodiversity: missed targets and a post-2010 vision



2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Sadly it is also the year the EU failed to meet its target to halt biodiversity loss. In 2001, European leaders pledged to stem the haemorrhaging of biodiversity by 2010, recognising that this priceless resource is essential to human well-being and economic prosperity. However, the catastrophic decline in biodiversity continues apace, despite the existence of powerful conservation

tools such as the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

When one looks at the situation up close, both lack of enforcement of existing legislation and perverse policies which reward environmentally destructive practices, seem to have fuelled the loss of our natural capital. Habitats linked to agriculture are in a particularly bad state with only seven percent in favourable conservation status, compared to 21 percent of 'non-agricultural' habitats. Farmland accounts for almost half of EU land area and is crucially important for biodiversity - as wildlife has evolved around agriculture for centuries many species depend on traditional extensive farming. However, the exclusive focus on increasing production, often driven by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has led to large-scale loss of biodiversity and important habitats. High Nature Value farmland is often at risk from abandonment, as well as intensification, due to unprofitability and social change.

BirdLife has recently released its own [assessment of the 2010 biodiversity target](#), analysing the performance of different Member States and the causes of the failure to meet the target, and suggesting concrete steps that must be taken in order finally reverse biodiversity loss.

Undervaluation of the services provided by healthy ecosystems has been identified as a main driver of biodiversity loss. According to a study by TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity), the loss of ecosystem services under a business-as-usual scenario is estimated to be around 50 billion Euros a year. This research demonstrates that biodiversity is key to combating the economic crisis, promoting job creation and generating long-term benefits, as well as allowing adaptation to climate change. It is essential that the benefits of biodiverse and resilient ecosystems are properly valued when setting priorities for the EU budget reform.

The European Council has now set an ambitious new target of halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restoring them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss. It has also agreed a long-term vision that, by 2050, biodiversity will be protected, valued and appropriately restored. However, these goals will be meaningless if the political will to implement them is lacking as it was for the 2010 target.

The EU is designing a post-2010 Biodiversity Strategy which is expected to set sub-targets for different sectors. A profound change is needed to place biodiversity at the heart of other EU policies. For example, the CAP must be fundamentally reformed to reward farmers and land managers for practising more sustainable methods and delivering public goods. Ahead of this October's international biodiversity conference (CBD-COP10) in Nagoya, Japan, it is paramount that the EU demonstrates strong leadership and a willingness to take rapid, decisive action to turn the tide of today's biodiversity crisis.

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What are we really paying for in agricultural policy? – The latest BirdLife Reality Check



On 7 July, BirdLife International launched its report entitled: '[Reality Check – Are Common Agricultural Policy subsidies paying for environmental quality?](#)' This new report presents case studies from Spain, Germany and the Czech Republic using CAP subsidy data and environmental performance indicators to answer the question: "Does the current CAP support farmers engaged in sustainable practices and delivering environmental public goods?"

The main result of the study is that subsidy intensity has never been found to reflect conservation values or level of public goods delivery in the three countries analysed. To the contrary, in the countries where subsidies are allocated on historical reference basis (Spain and Germany) funding is often correlated to environmentally harmful practices and sustainable farming systems are often heavily penalised.

During the launch event, stakeholders discussed the report and its implications for the upcoming CAP reform. Although opinions were mixed, the message of the report was not disputed: real reform is necessary in order to improve the targeting of measures which secure public goods and to increase their level of support in the future CAP.

The release of CAP beneficiaries' data is finally allowing a proper investigation into the quality of CAP spending and this report is one of the first attempts to measure the environmental performance of the EU subsidy system. Unfortunately as it stands, the quality of data released by Member States is often poor and not homogenous enough to allow for proper EU wide analysis performed by civil society. BirdLife has therefore urged the European Commission and other institutions to follow its example and perform similar research on a broader scale to understand the real environmental impact of agriculture policy in the EU.

Download the report [here](#).

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CAP subsidy data under pressure by the European Court of Justice

Just above, you read about the launch of BirdLife's 'Reality Check'- report and the importance of making subsidy data transparent. However, the data which informed the report's case studies is now under threat because of a court case initiated by two German farmers. The case was taken to court in Wiesbaden on the grounds of human rights / privacy issues

related to the release of the CAP payment data.

The German court forwarded the case to the European Court of Justice where the Advocate General issued an opinion that data should not be released without a clear link between the payment, the project and the individual. The Advocate General compares farm subsidy data with fish subsidy data where this link is more clearly established. However, there is a risk that her conclusion that the subsidy transparency regulation is invalid will be misused to roll back the transparency initiative, rather than strengthen it.

For BirdLife, the Advocate General's opinion does not come as a surprise as most data is currently being published with just the name of the beneficiary and the sums paid, with no information about the purpose of the payments. It is difficult to avoid the thought that authorities' reluctance to disclose the clear objectives and conditions under which payments are made are really due to the fact that for most payments no clear objective actually exists. However, this is exactly why we need more, not less, transparency.

Civil society organizations, like BirdLife International, need this data to be able to scrutinize public policy and its effects. BirdLife wants to continue to evaluate and help improve the use of EU funds, including the CAP, however we can not do this without real accountability. If the more retrograde elements of the farm lobby were to be proven successful in pushing farm subsidies back into the darkness of anonymity, meaningful and constructive debate will become harder and the CAP's legitimacy will only be eroded further- something farmers and rural communities should fear much more than openness and public scrutiny.

You can read more about the case [here](#).

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EP report on CAP reform – no appetite for change

This month sees the release of the European Parliament's first major report on the Common Agricultural Policy after the Lisbon Treaty gave the institution co-decision powers on farming matters. Despite being subject to hundreds of amendments from other MEPs, the report, drafted by Scottish MEP George Lyon, strengthens a remarkably common view that the Parliament really doesn't want the CAP to change that much and is even willing to use misleading arguments to try to keep it the way it is.

The report's key objective appears to be maintaining direct payments at all costs and tries to justify them in several ways. According to the report, direct payments help provide food security, income support for farmers and basic environmental services, despite the fact that there is clear evidence that none of these arguments stack up. Direct payments are decoupled and are not supposed to influence food production at all- at least this is what the EU is telling the WTO and developing countries. Direct payments also currently fail to support farmers who specifically need financial help and who are delivering most for society through environmental service delivery. Nor can direct payments be justified on environmental grounds as there is no link between sums paid and farming practices carried out, while current cross compliance obligations are mostly failing to secure meaningful benefits due to poor design, implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

Rather than rising to the challenges facing society today – climate change, water and soil depletion and continued biodiversity declines – the Parliament is instead trying to retain an outdated policy which will intimately fail farmers in the long term. If the CAP is not fundamentally reformed to reward the delivery of environmental public goods and drive EU farming to become more sustainable, the natural resource base upon which we all depend for food, clean water, healthy soils and wildlife will be placed in jeopardy, and so will the public's support for continued subsidies to farmers.

Read the report [here](#).

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EC Conference on CAP reform – a real appetite for change?

On July 19-20, the European Commission – Directorate General for Agriculture – hosted a major conference entitled: 'The CAP post 2013 – conference on the public debate'. This was the summit of the public debate which Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Ciolos launched in April in the European Parliament. With this discussion, Mr. Ciolos sought to gather the views of citizens, research institutes, think tanks and different stakeholders in the agriculture debate. This public discussion is leading up to a Communication to be issued later in the year that will prepare the ground for legislative proposals for the CAP post-2013.

In general the outcome of the discussion stresses the need for a common EU agriculture policy which delivers safe and healthy food at affordable prices, ensures sustainable land use, the provision of environmental public goods and provides Europeans with long term food security. Tied to this is what the Commission dubs the 'vitality of rural areas'. There is however, significantly less agreement on how all this could be achieved through a reformed CAP. (to read the full report, click [here](#))

For BirdLife and other like-minded organizations, this conference was a welcome opportunity to again voice our concerns and present our vision for a new CAP. Despite the obvious exclusion of key critical voices, we think that this initiative shows a real commitment from Commissioner Ciolos to deliver real reform. We at BirdLife have great expectations for the Communication, expected in November this year, and hope that Mr. Ciolos will grab the opportunity to transform the CAP into an effective and efficient policy in step with our time.

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Bioenergy – a carbon accounting time bomb



On 30 June, BirdLife International together with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and Transport & Environment (T&E) launched a policy report casting further doubt on the EU's policy of promoting biomass as fuel for heat and power generation, and biofuels for transport. The report is based on two new independent studies which the three NGOs had commissioned.

The [first study](#), carried out by Joanneum Research, identifies a major flaw in the way carbon savings from forest-derived biomass are calculated in EU law as well as under UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol mechanisms. It concludes that harvesting trees for energy creates a 'carbon debt': the carbon contained in the trees is emitted upfront while trees grow back over many years. While some biomass feed stocks, such as waste and residues, do offer important climate mitigation potential, the true climate impact of

much current and future woody biomass can, in the short to medium term, be worse than the fossil fuels it is designed to replace.

The [second study](#), by CE Delft, examines the full climate impact of the main biofuels used in Europe. In particular it looked at the impact of the expansion of agricultural land into environmentally sensitive areas when food production is displaced by fuel crops, a process known as indirect land use change (ILUC). The report, based on analysis of several EU Commission-sponsored research projects and other international modelling studies, found that most current biofuels are as bad as fossil fuels for the climate once ILUC is taken into consideration.

The three groups are calling on the EU to come forward with mandatory sustainability criteria for biomass and to incorporate indirect land use change calculations into the existing sustainability criteria for biofuels and to incorporate indirect land-use change and carbon-debt calculations into sustainability criteria for biofuels and bioenergy.

To summarize the report using the words of one of the participants: 'The current bioenergy policy of the EU is not part of the solution to climate change, in fact it is standing in the way between us and real sustainable renewables which will benefit the climate.'

Download the report [here](#).

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How EU policy drives worldwide land use change

In June, the BirdLife European Division had the pleasure of hosting the BirdLife Global Council in Brussels. The Council meets every year to discuss the direction of the global partnership. Inspired by the studies BirdLife, EEB and T&E commissioned, we interviewed some of the BirdLife Partnership directors to gain a better understanding of how EU policies are driving or impacting land use and land use change abroad (the interviews will be available on our website shortly). While many of the interviews showed that there was a real impact, nothing highlighted the seriousness of the situation better than the Dakatcha case in Kenya.

The Dakatcha Woodland is a real biodiversity hotspot and is located between 25 and 50km from the Kenyan coast. It is home to some rare and globally threatened birds such as Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus gollandi*, Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis*, Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae*, Fischer's Turaco *Tauraco fischeri* and Southern Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens*. Dakatcha Woodland is one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) – sites internationally recognized as vital for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity. Despite its importance as one of the last patches of relatively intact coastal woodland, Dakatcha has no formal protection status.

Dakatcha is also the ancestral land for the indigenous minority Watha community. The Watha gain invaluable ecosystem services from the forest such as clean stream water for drinking, and a sustainable supply of firewood for cooking and lighting.

Today, the greatest threat to the woodland is a proposal by an Italian-owned company (Kenya Jatropha Energy Ltd) to convert 50,000 hectares, including the entire woodland and surrounding areas, into *Jatropha curcas* plantations for biodiesel production. This would spell disaster for both local biodiversity and indigenous and rural communities which would be displaced from their land.

This example shows again how European's (and other big energy consumers') continued hunger for more energy, regardless of its sustainability or real carbon footprint, is driving the rest of the world into an untenable environmental quagmire. BirdLife International will keep on fighting for real sustainable alternatives and energy savings so that these valuable areas do not have to be lost.

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