

Frans Timmermans
First Vice President of the European Commission
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B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

Cc:

Commissioner Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Commissioner Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development
Commissioner Neven Mimica, Commissioner for Development
Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete, Commissioner for Climate Action & Energy
Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President for Energy Union

Brussels, 22nd May 2015

Open letter: Request to include the Land as a Resource Communication in the 2016 Work Programme of the European Commission

Dear First Vice President Timmermans,

We are writing to request that the Communication on Land as a Resource is included in the Work Programme of the European Commission for 2016.

Land is the hidden resource that sustains every aspect of our society, from food to products, buildings and energy. Yet the EU appears unaware of the real scale of its land consumption, as well as the environmental, social and economic impacts.

Previous studies have revealed that in 2004, the EU's land footprint was 640 million hectares, 1.5 times the size of the EU¹, and will increase further if policies that drive an increase in consumption, such as those that promote the intensification of livestock production, are not changed². Our significant land consumption has damaging consequences both in the EU and outside, including loss of forests and biodiversity, soil degradation, land grabbing, community displacements, destruction of peasant family farmers' livelihoods, and reduced EU security due to reliance on imports.

The Commission has a necessary role to play by providing direction and a clear approach on EU land policies. However, in reality what we are seeing is a real incoherence between different policies (such as the Renewable Energy Directive and Resource Efficiency Roadmap), making the EU extremely dependent on having constant access to an ever-increasing amount of land in and outside Europe.

¹ SERI (2011) Europe's Global Land Demand

http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/Europe_Global_Land_Demand_Oct11%5B1%5D.pdf

² Nature 478, pp 337-342 (2011) Solutions for a Cultivated Planet

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v478/n7369/full/nature10452.html>

In 2014, DG Environment commissioned preliminary research to develop a methodology to measure the EU's land footprint and the impact that EU policies have on land, with a view to paving the way for a future Communication on Land as a Resource. That initiative was a follow-up to the Resource Efficiency Roadmap³, a 2011 EC Communication, which included as a milestone "By 2020, EU policies take into account their direct and indirect impact on land use in the EU and globally, and the rate of land take is on track with an aim to achieve no net land take by 2050". We need these topics put back on the agenda, along with measuring carbon, material and water consumption in order to obtain a broader picture of the environmental and social effects of EU activities.

Our organisations strongly support the need to move forward on measuring and setting reduction targets for the EU's land consumption and believe that there must be a commitment to develop this essential area. The Land as a Resource Communication is a key stepping stone to bring this discussion onto the political agenda and increase awareness among the EU institutions, member states and citizens. Tackling our land footprint would also help the EU reach its targets to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and end deforestation by 2030. Furthermore, the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals this year will require efforts from each country to meet the universal goals, and the EU can use this opportunity to pioneer in the area of sustainable land use and consumption.

Therefore, we urge you to ensure that a Land as a Resource Communication is included in next year's Commission's Work Programme. It is time for the Commission to tackle land issues with a high level of ambition, like it has done in many other areas, and to do so with a long-term vision. Taking such steps will deliver European jobs, will make our companies more resilient, will ensure long-term sustainability of global resources, and will have a positive impact on the health of people and the planet.

We thank you for your commitment, and remain available should you like to exchange more details on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Magda Stoczkiewicz

Director – Friends of the Earth Europe

³ European Commission (2011) Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0571>

SIGNATORIES:

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