



Brussels – 28 November 2016

Greening measure to protect nature on farms will be environmentally ineffective, new study shows

EU Member States' demand for flexibility undermines key CAP measure

A new [study](#) has revealed that 'Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs)' - a flagship Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) nature protection measure - will deliver negligible benefits for Europe's wildlife. This is particularly worrying given the low level of nature on arable landscapes. (1)

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) & BirdLife Europe & Central Asia (ECA) are calling for a significant overhaul of the CAP to make it beneficial for the environment. The stated aim of EFAs - one of three CAP 'greening' measures introduced at the last CAP reform in 2013 - is to ensure that at least 5% of total EU arable land (2) is dedicated to nature protection. However, research commissioned by the EEB and BirdLife ECA shows that while farmers more than met this target on paper, in practice crops which have negligible effects on biodiversity are being grown on 75% of land declared (3) as an EFA .

The analysis, carried out by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), looks into the ecological impact of the options available to farmers in 13 EU countries and regions (4) to comply with the EFA requirement. Member States are allowing farmers to count commercial crops with no proven biodiversity benefits towards their commitment to dedicate land to nature.

The study also shows that unless the use of pesticides is also limited in these areas, wildlife in them will remain limited. These findings come as 18 Member States (5) recently attempted to [block](#) a Commission proposal to ban the use of pesticides on EFAs. The Commission will decide whether to uphold its proposal for a ban when it publishes its draft Delegated Acts on greening simplification within the next few weeks. 33 MEPs voiced their support for the Commission's plan to ban pesticides on EFAs.

EEB Senior Policy Officer for Biodiversity and Ecosystems, Leonardo Mazza, said;

"Paying farmers to make space for nature is about ensuring that part of our farmed landscape is a safe haven for wildlife such as birds, bees and butterflies. It is therefore scandalous that some of the options EU Member States have made available to farmers to meet their EFA requirement have close to no ecological value."

BirdLife ECA Senior EU Agriculture and Bioenergy Policy Officer, Trees Robijns, said:

"The European Commission's proposal to exclude the use of pesticides on EFAs deals with

a glaringly obvious fault with greening measures. Member States should consider the scientific basis of their opposition to this logical proposal from Commissioner Hogan. 12 billion Euros is spent annually on greening payments; this money should not be spent on maintaining the status quo. The EFA measure, and indeed the CAP as a whole, needs a major overhaul.” ENDS

Notes for editors:

(1) Farming relies on natural resources and the environment, yet as a sector it has one of the [biggest](#) impacts on our environment and poses a grave threat to biodiversity in the EU. An Institut für Agrarökologie und Biodiversität (IFAB) [study](#) from September 2015 found that 95% of all investigated arable landscapes had low levels of biodiversity even in regions where it was expected to be high.

(2) Some farms (e.g. small-scale farms) are exempt from the obligation.

(3) 14% of EU arable land was declared as an EFA. 10.5% of total EU arable land (75% of EFA) is covered by crop options. Approximately 3.5% of EU arable land is dedicated to nature protection – falling short of the 5% target.

(4) France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, the UK (all four regions) and the Flanders region of Belgium.

France and Scotland have not declared their data to the European Commission. EU Commission data was the basis for the assessment to be done.

This new research builds on [previous work from the IEEP](#) which showed that the flexibility afforded to Member States during the political negotiations means they tend to choose the least environmentally ambitious options at the implementation stage. EU Member States bowed to political pressure from large farm unions who fought to reduce the environmental ambition in the final political agreement. The elements they can design themselves via quite extensive flexibility introduced into the text have either not been used in favour of biodiversity or in certain cases, actively undermine the biodiversity benefits of these elements.

(5) Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom

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*BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is a [partnership of 48 national conservation organisations](#) and a **leader in bird conservation**. Our **unique local to global approach** enables us to deliver high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of **nature and people**. BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is one of the six regional secretariats that compose BirdLife International. Based in Brussels, it supports the European and Central Asian Partnership and is present in **47 countries** including **all EU Member States**. With more than **4100 staff** in Europe, **two million members** and tens of thousands of skilled volunteers, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, together with its national partners, owns or manages more than **6000 nature sites** totalling 320,000 hectares.*