

Brussels – 2 February 2016

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

European Parliament Votes for Nature

The European Parliament's stood up to defend key EU nature laws in a vote at its plenary session in Strasbourg.

MEPs this lunchtime overwhelmingly approved a report on the Mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy, which calls for the protection of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The report stresses that full implementation and enforcement of these laws, and adequate financing, are needed to achieve the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy^[1].

The vote was 592 in favour, with only 52 against, a decisive result for nature conservation.

The call to save the laws has come about due to the 'Fitness Check' process currently being carried out by the European Commission on the laws, known collectively as the Nature Directives. There are fears they could be re-opened, and potentially weakened.

Today's result comes after a number of national governments showed their support for the directives, with the EU Environment Council opposing their re-opening back in December.

A huge level of public support has also been demonstrated, with more than half a million people, a record-breaking number, showing their support for the laws during a consultation which ended last July. Further, in the lead up to the vote, thousands of people across Europe Tweeted to MEPs urging them to back the report.

Ariel Brunner, BirdLife Europe Senior Head of Policy, said: *"The Parliament has today sent an unequivocal message to Timmermans and Vella: you have no mandate to re-open the Birds and Habitats Directives, but you do have a strong mandate to get them enforced and implemented.*

"With such an unprecedented majority backing this message, it would be inexcusable for the Commission to choose to ignore it."

The vote in Parliament is another milestone for the Nature Alert campaign, led by BirdLife and other conservation organisations, calling on the European Commission to protect the Nature Directives and improve their implementation, rather than re-open them.

Results from the Fitness Check are expected in April.

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Notes:

[1] - The European Union Biodiversity Strategy runs until 2020, by which time the EU has to halt biodiversity loss and achieve six targets. These targets cover EU legislation on nature, agriculture, fisheries, and invasive alien species, and also initiatives for restoring and connecting nature areas and action for biodiversity outside the EU.

More information on the Mid-term review report is available here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&mode=XML&reference=A8-2016-0003&language=EN>

For more on the Nature Alert campaign, click here: <http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia/project/nature-alert>

More information on the Twitter action in the lead-up to today's vote is available here:

<http://www.vote4nature.com>

BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.