



To:
Elisabeth Köstinger
Federal Minister of Agriculture, Forestry,
Environment and Water Management
Stubenring 1
1010 Vienna
Austria

27 June 2018

Ref: 018/085

Subject: BirdLife priorities for Austria Presidency

Dear Minister,

BirdLife Europe, representing over 2 million EU citizens, and its Austrian Partner, BirdLife Österreich, are writing to you to share our priorities for the upcoming presidency of Austria in the Council of the EU in the area of environment, agriculture and fisheries.

FUTURE OF EU AND LONGTERM BUDGET

Europe faces several challenges and crises, but not all of them get the political attention they deserve and require – one of them is the ecological crisis. Taking care of our shared environment has been one of the success stories of the European project and according to polling environment is one of the areas where citizens want to see Europe fully engaged. However in many areas, EU's delivery on environmental objectives and their integration into other policies has been badly lagging behind the popular support. So we appreciate that Austria during its presidency is planning to make progress on several important files, including the discussion on the next **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. We realise that the discussion on MFF is not under your remit, Minister, but given its implications for many areas that are under your responsibility, we hope that you and your EU counterpart Ministers responsible for environment and sustainability will play an active role.

With numbers of insects and birds collapsing and our waters contaminated with nitrate and chemicals, mainly due to intensive agriculture, we are losing the basis that sustains us all. At the same time, farmers' numbers are in continued decline and those who want to produce healthy and quality food and manage land in harmony with nature, something EU citizens increasingly call for, are not getting enough support. This was also shown by science review "Is the CAP fit for purpose?" published in

November 2017. It is high time that the EU realigns its long-term budget to bring farmland biodiversity back from brink and facilitate the transition into sustainable future. Therefore we ask you to push for **legally binding ring-fencing at EU level of real and significant resources to deal with biodiversity collapse and the climate emergency. This must include EUR 15 billion per year specifically for the implementation of the EU Nature Directives**, with resources coming primarily from the reformed CAP and LIFE programme that should be boosted much more than foreseen in the MFF proposal so it can provide 1bn EUR per year for biodiversity. LIFE should amount 1% of the entire EU budget.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL

Austria is in the unique position to set a bar for the discussions on the **future of the Common agricultural policy**, in the Agriculture and Fisheries Council following the recent publication of the legislative proposals by the European Commission. The prospect of increased subsidiarity for Member states without setting a clear framework and a bar for an environmental ambition risks setting off a race to the bottom where each country tries to outcompete the other with production subsidies. This would lead to a downward spiral of overproduction, increasingly devastating environmental impacts and collapsing farm viability, particularly in mountainous regions. Minister, you being an advocate of healthy and quality food and strong rural communities, we hope you take a strong stance towards shifting CAP to a more sustainable path than the one proposed by the Commission. In parallel with clearly **ring-fenced budget for climate and environment action, including for biodiversity, we need strong framework ensuring quality spending for environment and biodiversity measures**, by applying the *polluter pays* principle to the whole CAP. Citizens expect that **public money is spent on public goods**, such as the environment. This means that there is strong need for specific objectives related to environment based on EU legislation and appropriate safeguards ensuring that no investment aid or coupled support is granted for measures that harm the natural environment or push the use of natural resources over a sustainable level, which would have to be regarded as **perverse subsidies**. It is also necessary to ensure **honest accounting for climate action based on real on the ground measures** and not fake accounting by automatically considering 40% of direct payments to be climate spending. Such an approach has been criticized by the European Court of Auditors, jeopardises EU's credibility with global partners, and most importantly undermines EU's ability to tackle climate change. We hope that Austria Presidency will ensure an **inclusive debate on the future of CAP** by involving environmental authorities (eg. by including CAP on the agenda of Environment Council), environmental NGOs and other stakeholders representing interests of wider society.

Our oceans are not fairing any better than our agricultural land. In particular, seabirds are dramatically declining due to fishing impacts such as being bycaught. Austria can ensure to end negotiations on the **Technical Measures regulation** and ensuring that there are default rules that all Member States needs to comply with to protect seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles in every sea basing from fishing impacts. Furthermore, Austria will be key to ensuring that **the future of European Marine and Fisheries fund (EMFF) is delivering for societal benefits instead of private interests**. In particular, the Commission's proposal under the label of "cutting the red tape" weakens the environmental ambition of the current fund and removes safeguards preventing Member States from subsidising overfishing and making industries dependent on EU funds. The marine life is already under huge threat, so we call for the complete overhaul of this fund and focus it on tackling challenges at sea. In particular, the fund should be spent on data collection, control and enforcement of rules, supporting spatial planning such

as mapping the sensitivity of species and habitats to different maritime activities, and testing solutions to problems.

ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

At the Environment Council, you will lead important discussions on the orientation of the future **global biodiversity policy after 2020**. It is paramount that the EU and all Member states massively accelerate efforts to achieve 2020 objectives on biodiversity (which are enshrined both in the global CBD and SDG targets), while at the same time under no circumstance miss the opportunity to set the course for post-2020 action by reforming MFF, CAP and other relevant policies now so they can take effect from 2021 as outlined above. Also, time has to be spent well now to prepare an ambitious and fair new biodiversity strategy both globally, to be agreed at CBD COP15 in Beijing 2020 and for the EU level. The Presidency must set up the process for this at the latest by COP14 in November in Egypt. Austria aims to achieve quick and efficient progress on the **LIFE regulation**, which is welcome as this instrument is a key lifeline for advancing nature conservation in Europe, providing highly efficient projects of excellence, enabling experience exchange across the EU and supporting civil society actions for the environment in all Member States. To make it more effective and accessible for the target beneficiary, we request that co-financing should be increased to at least 75% and 90% for poorer regions. We demand that the two-phase selection procedure will continue and be extended to other sub-programmes after an evaluation of this new procedure has proven that it functions well.

Minister, European Union is now seeking to define its future, with the important Summit planned in Romania next year. However, that future will be positive only if European politicians start truly listening to voices of European citizens and will work towards a more sustainable and just Europe. We would be very happy to offer our support to you and your colleagues during this period and work with you towards progress in the above-mentioned areas. The BirdLife Partnership in Europe has a representative in each EU member state and beyond, hence through BirdLife Österreich or directly with our regional office in Brussels, you can always count on our entire network.

Yours faithfully,



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