

## A European Green Deal that serves the Oceans

Recommendations to rescue the oceans based on BirdLife's proposals for saving biodiversity

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Nature at sea is in crisis. Recent global reports show that we are changing our planet beyond recognition and losing ocean biodiversity at unprecedented rates, and the European Union is no exception. Climate change is interwoven with, and exacerbates, the catastrophic loss of biodiversity: we cannot address one issue without considering the other, as they are intrinsically linked. Habitat degradation from the way we manage our oceans is a major cause of biodiversity loss and a key driver of climate change. Understanding these threats, we must act now. The future European Green Deal needs to be ambitious if we are to genuinely address the crisis.

European efforts to curb and halt biodiversity loss at sea in the last two decades have failed miserably. This is mainly due to a lack of commitment to change the status quo that is destroying ocean life. The EU has a huge budget that could start funding this systemic change to a society that respects the rule of law and nature. Misguided incentives and investments in the EU lock us onto a path of destruction. We can no longer afford the status quo. This change must be transformative, and will need to overcome the economic growth paradigm. Change also needs to achieve social justice and socio-economic fairness.

Saving biodiversity is about saving species, their habitats, and their interactions. This can only happen with a coherent set of actions needed to deliver ambitious targets. For the European Green Deal to deliver on ocean commitments, it needs to ensure:

1. Delivery of an **EU Biodiversity Strategy** that encompasses a restoration agenda and addresses the drivers of biodiversity loss, in particular fishing and aquaculture production, throughout the commercial chain from extraction and production, to trade and consumption.
2. A **food to fork strategy** that recognises the unsustainability of current food systems and the fact that fisheries and aquaculture are still a major driver of biodiversity loss, waste production, ocean degradation, and a key emitter of pollutants. It should reflect the need to reduce fish consumption.
3. A **Climate Neutral Strategy** that delivers actions to make the oceans more resilient to climate change. In particular, this should ensure that habitats at sea are restored and maintained to support adaptation policies to climate change. These should prioritise nature-based solutions, consider and avoid impacts on biodiversity, build resilience, be in synergy with ecosystem restoration.

Furthermore, the European Green Deal needs to ensure that civil society is empowered as a central part of a thriving democracy. It should explicitly mention the positive role that civil society must play in scrutinizing the delivery of the Green Deal's objectives, and in ensuring the transparency of its implementation. The EU must guarantee the right to information, with participation and justice for all. For that, the EU must end its own non-compliance with the Aarhus Convention and start preparatory work for a proposal for a new Directive to provide access to justice in environmental matters in national courts.

## Key Asks for the “EU Biodiversity Strategy”

1. By 2030, 30% of EU Sea areas are primarily managed for nature and biodiversity, with the primary objective of any activities, if needed, geared to natural processes taking over. Natura 2000 and National Protected Areas managed in this regard would contribute to the target.
2. Actively pursue legal action against Member States who are not protecting their Marine Natura 2000 Network as well as Member States who actively veto measures to manage fishing activities in their neighbours’ Marine Natura 2000 sites. This means putting in place a Natura 2000 surveillance system by 2025.
3. Deploy at least €1bn EUR/year from the EU budget for marine-based N2000 network management to ensure that the EU can act effectively to address the biodiversity crisis at sea.
4. Adopt legislation with a target to restore 15% of EU Member States’ sea areas, by designating them as permanent no take zones or with regulated access<sup>1</sup> to restore and recover oceanic life.
5. Attain zero contribution to marine plastic pollution from the EU<sup>2</sup> including plastic waste at sea generated by cargo loss during transport, passengers and crew on vessels, fisheries and aquaculture (e.g. gear loss)<sup>3</sup>, which are damaging biodiversity<sup>4</sup>.
6. Pursue an ambitious robust treaty for the High Seas that addresses a Court System that governs the law in High Seas

## Key Asks for the “Food to Fork Strategy”

1. Reduce by 40% the consumption of fish and seafood eaten in the EU. Consumption of all types of proteins need to be brought down to sustainable and healthy levels, including from fish and seafood. Most Member States recommend eating about 300g of fish per person/per week, for a healthy and balanced diet. However, current average EU consumption of fish and seafood is currently 500g on average per person/per week. The EU must therefore put in place policies encouraging this reduction.
2. Make EU extraction of fish and seafood compatible with oceanic life. The EU must therefore:
  - a. Eliminate destructive fishing practices by achieving zero bycatch of endangered, threatened and protected species; by banning non-selective fishing gear (including bottom trawling, and deep sea trawling); by not permitting the fishing of stocks that are not scientifically assessed; and by ensuring that fisheries are fully disclosed and surveilled with 100% monitoring and control of all fishing vessels (including Remote Electronic Monitoring e.g. through cameras, GPS loggers).
  - b. Limit forage fish catch to 2/3 of fishing mortality to leave fish for ocean predators.
  - c. Recover the historical range of top predators, including seabirds, as indicators for recovery of marine food chains
3. Make EU aquaculture sustainable and independent from wild-caught fish. Member States should:
  - a. Carefully spatially plan aquaculture development, in particular with respect to marine protected areas.
  - b. Forbid permitting of aquaculture fed with wild caught fish instead of vegetarian and insect-based feeds.

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<sup>1</sup> Excluding fishing, off-shore windfarms, anchoring, sea mining, etc

<sup>2</sup> For further details, see BirdLife Europe position on “Tackling Marine Litter for Ocean Protection”, Sept 2019.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-marine-010816-060409>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.marineornithology.org/PDF/32\\_2/32\\_2\\_187-189.pdf](http://www.marineornithology.org/PDF/32_2/32_2_187-189.pdf)

- c. Support the development of extensive aquaculture in inland wetlands that are beneficial to biodiversity.
  - d. Invest in the development of more sustainable aquaculture practices, including integrated multi-trophic aquaculture<sup>5</sup> and recirculating systems.
4. Drastically reduce the use of pesticides in agricultural landscapes by reducing the average number of pesticide applications per hectare by at least 30% from a 2020 baseline, by 2030<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the EU should achieve full nutrient balance at farm level by putting in place a system of controls that halts the discharge of sources of eutrophication to the ocean.

### Key Asks for the “Climate Neutral Strategy”:

1. Support the active restoration of ocean habitats to contribute to carbon sequestration. This includes restoration of kelp forests in Europe and ensuring any financing for climate action delivers active restoration of habitats at sea.
2. Resilience of ecosystems and species to climate change needs to be assisted through addressing other stress-factors (such as availability of space, availability of food and water, impacts of Invasive Alien Species), as well as by specific biodiversity adaptation measures that seek to optimise nature with the trajectory of climate change.
3. Renewable energy and related infrastructures must be pursued in the most biodiversity friendly manner possible, including through careful development that ensures spatial planning, technical mitigation and balanced deployment of technologies, in line with ecological carrying capacity.

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<sup>5</sup> Integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) involves the integrated cultivation of fed species together with extractive species (marine invertebrates and/or algae) that feed on detritus from the fed species. This conversion of particulate waste and dissolved waste into secondary raw materials addresses key environmental impact concerns related to open-water systems.

<sup>6</sup> The EU is still developing a Harmonised Risk Indicator, however, this target should ensure that both, the number of applications, and the toxicity of the pesticide are reduced. Studies show that such a reduction would not reduce yields: <https://www.nature.com/articles/nplants20178>