
Initial analysis of EU Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies

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The left column consists of excerpts from the two strategies, and the right column has BirdLife's initial analysis on the topic.

Agriculture

BirdLife analysis:

Biodiversity strategy:

- "the Commission will take action to reduce by 50% the overall use of – and risk from – chemical pesticides by 2030 and reduce by 50% the use of more hazardous pesticides by 2030."
- "No chemical pesticides are used in sensitive areas such as EU urban green areas."
- "there is an urgent need to bring back at least 10% of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features."

The Commission is showing unprecedented ambition to significantly reduce inputs of deadly chemicals into nature. This is an important condition for biodiversity to come back and provide the crucial ecosystem services we need such as pollination.

If correctly implemented at farm-level, and not just at "sub-EU level", 10% of biodiversity elements can be a real game changer not only for nature, but also for our ability to produce food sustainably as this is vital for pollinators and pest control.

Farm to fork strategy:

- “The Commission will act to reduce nutrient losses by at least 50%, while ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility. This will reduce the use of fertilisers by at least 20% by 2030.”

If implemented this means taking serious action in restoring our soils to a healthy state and cutting water and air pollution, paving the way towards an agriculture that is less harmful to biodiversity and more sustainable.
- “The Commission will also make recommendations to each Member State on the nine specific objectives of the CAP, before they formally submit the draft Strategic Plans. The Commission will pay particular attention to addressing the Green Deal targets, and those stemming from this strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. It will ask Member States to set explicit national values for those targets, taking into account their specific situation and the above mentioned recommendations. Based on these values, the Member States will identify the necessary measures in their Strategic Plans.”

Setting concrete targets for the CAP based on the EU Green Deal and allocating more money to environmental measures is a huge step forward to bring European agriculture in line with planetary boundaries. For the eco-schemes to be impactful, their budget should be at least 50% of the CAP’s Pillar I and they must be accompanied by an improved environmental baseline for all CAP payments.
- “the Commission will put forward an Action Plan on organic farming ... This approach will help to reach the objective of at least 25% of the EU’s agricultural land under organic farming by 2030”

This target will help to significantly boost organic production in the EU, the only sustainable form of production with a legal basis, and the Action Plan will help to also increase demand for these products.
- “The Commission is committed to halving per capita food waste at retail and consumer levels by 2030 (SDG Target 12.3).”

In its Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission shows that our way to consume food matters even after reaching our plates. We welcome the Commission’s target to reduce the highly problematic issue of food waste. Less waste means less primary demand for land and resources

Climate change

BirdLife analysis:

Biodiversity strategy:

- "...The use of whole trees and food and feed crops for energy production – whether produced in the EU or imported – should be minimised."
- "The overall objective is to ensure that EU regulatory framework on bioenergy is in line with the increased ambition set out in the European Green Deal".

Acknowledging that burning many forms of biomass for energy is actively damaging, the Commission is finally accepting what thousands of scientists have been saying for years. A full root and branch review now needs to lead to a transformative revision of all bioenergy regulation .

Farm to Fork strategy:

- "Farmers should grasp opportunities to reduce methane emissions from livestock by developing the production of renewable energy and investing in anaerobic digesters for biogas production from agriculture waste and residues, such as manure."

Good if focused on wastes and residues, but must avoid burning of food for energy crops or incentivising intensive livestock

Nature protection

BirdLife analysis:

Biodiversity strategy:

- "...at least 30% of the land and 30% of the sea should be protected in the EU. This is a minimum of an extra 4% for land and 19% for sea areas as compared to today"
- "...at least one third of protected areas – representing 10% of EU land and 10% of EU sea – should be strictly protected."
- "As part of this focus on strict protection, it will be crucial to define, map, monitor and strictly protect all the EU's remaining primary and old-growth forests"

With these ambitious targets, the Commission positions the EU as a strong world leader for nature protection. Serious implementation by Member States of such targets in line with biodiversity needs will not only be the key to put an end to "paper parks" but also to stop nature's collapse. For the first time, the Commission recognises the need for strict nature protection, meaning not everything can be "sustainably exploited", we actually need to leave some areas for nature to develop undisturbed by human exploitation.

Farm to fork strategy:

- “To reduce the EU’s contribution to global deforestation and forest degradation, the Commission will present in 2021 a legislative proposal and other measures to avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market.”
- “...the Commission will make a legislative proposal for a framework for a sustainable food system before the end of 2023. This will promote policy coherence at EU and national level, mainstream sustainability in all food-related policies and strengthen the resilience of food systems”

Through this strategy, the EU is finally admitting its direct and indirect role in global deforestation. It shows important leadership in committing to reduce its global footprint through seriously regulating what lands on the EU market.

A future sustainable food systems legislation will be important to link the impact of food systems to nature protection and especially for establishing targets to reduce meat, dairy and seafood consumption.

Nature restoration

BirdLife analysis:

Biodiversity strategy:

- “the Commission will put forward a proposal for legally binding EU nature restoration targets in 2021 to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.”
- “...at least 25,000 km of rivers will be restored into free-flowing rivers by 2030 through the removal of primarily obsolete barriers and the restoration of floodplains and wetlands.”

This is a real game changer to not only halt biodiversity loss but to bring back nature and mitigate climate change in the long-term, fully in line with the need for a green recovery benefiting nature and people.

The speedy implementation of a binding legislation on large-scale restoration will be instrumental in achieving the Commission’s ambitious objectives, and will ensure a before and after in the recovery from the current health crisis.

Biodiversity strategy:

- “The Commission will also propose a new action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems by 2021. Where necessary, measures will be introduced to limit the use of fishing gear most harmful to biodiversity, including on the seabed.”
- “The by-catch of species threatened with extinction must also be eliminated or reduced to a level that allows full recovery. This should also be the case for those in bad conservation status or not in good environmental status. Furthermore, the by-catch of other species must be eliminated or, where this is not possible, minimised so as not to threaten their conservation status. To support this, data collection on by-catch for all sensitive species needs to be stepped up.”

The Commission has finally decided to look at fish as part of an ecosystem and not just as a resource to be exploited. It commits to limiting the use of the most destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling.

Although the Commission is reiterating what has already existed in legislation, this sends a signal to the Member States that enough is enough - seabirds, dolphins and turtles need to stop being killed by fishing gear.

Farm to fork strategy:

- “In addition to the significant support by the next European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for sustainable seafood farming, the Commission envisages adopting EU guidelines for Member States’ sustainable aquaculture development plans and promote the right kind of expenditure under the Fund.”

Adding “sustainable” in front of aquaculture does not make it sustainable. The Commission’s support to aquaculture production from the EMFF has been supporting destructive practices. Therefore, we welcome the adoption of EU guidelines for Member States where we hope these guidelines are a step forward to rid the EU of destructive aquaculture practices and support those farmers who are helping restore wetlands, lagoons and coastal areas.

Biodiversity strategy:

- “the Commission will put in place a new European biodiversity governance framework. This will help map obligations and commitments and set out a roadmap to guide their implementation.”
- “...The Commission will assess the progress and suitability of this approach in 2023, and consider whether a legally binding approach to governance is needed”.
- “To meet the needs of this strategy, including investment priorities for Natura 2000 and green infrastructure, at least €20 billion a year should be unlocked for spending on nature.”

This Strategy is only as good as its effective implementation. The annual budget of 20 billion euros dedicated to this strategy is absolutely fundamental in order to see the Commission’s commitments materialise.

We welcome the Commission’s intention to provide further guidance to Member States on implementation and hope this will mean that sufficient financial support and capacity will be provided to the relevant Commission’s services to ensure the enforcement of the Strategy. It is crucial that the Commission sticks to President von der Leyen’s promise of “zero tolerance” with regards to the breach of law, and to its historical ambition on protecting our planet.

For more information, please contact:

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