



Brussels, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019

**Subject: EU needs committed and ambitious MEPs to save our ocean**

Dear Members of European Parliament:

Environmental organisations **BirdLife, ClientEarth, The Fisheries Secretariat, New Economics Foundation, Oceana, Seas At Risk, and WWF** represent millions of citizens through individual membership, groups and networks and advocate at EU level for healthy seas and marine protection. We would like to congratulate you upon your election to the European Parliament and hope that you will actively use your position to save our ocean.

This new political term will be extremely important because Europe must urgently tackle major cross-border environmental crises, such as climate change and biodiversity collapse. The next five years will be decisive in turning the tide. Your ambition and commitment as lawmakers will be crucial for succeeding in this mission.

Protection and restoration of the environment is a cross-party issue that must be at the heart of any political programme. A healthy, biodiverse and productive ocean is the foundation of our existence by making the Earth habitable, counter balancing the effects of climate crisis and providing food and employment to millions of Europeans. However, because of destructive human activities, our seas are currently heavily impacted by pollution, depletion of fish stocks, degradation of habitats and loss of biodiversity. The recent report from IPBES<sup>1</sup> gives a shocking assessment of nature's demise with more than one million species threatened with extinction. People count on you to save our seas and manage them sustainably.

The good news is that much progress has already been made in the EU and we have ambitious environmental laws with clear objectives and tangible deadlines, for example: the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Single-Use Plastics Directive. However, a big obstacle to their effectiveness is short-term thinking and lack of political will to fully implement them. That is why the EU needs a renewed commitment, strong leadership, and an ambitious vision to restore the health of our ocean.

The next five years—your political term—will be full of urgent challenges for the EU and require bold decisions, just to name a few:

- The EU is still lagging behind with the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14: conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, seas and marine resources, when it should be globally leading the way in preparation for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030.

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<sup>1</sup> [Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)

- The EU must meet the 2020 deadline and fulfil a legally binding obligation to end overfishing, as required by its own Common Fisheries Policy. Currently, 40 percent of fish stocks are still overfished in the EU Atlantic waters, while in the Mediterranean Sea the depletion rate reaches an alarming 87 percent<sup>2</sup> and it remains the most overfished sea in the world.
- Also by 2020, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive requires the EU to achieve good environmental status of its marine waters, especially by protecting marine biodiversity from the impacts of overfishing and plastic, chemical, agricultural and underwater noise pollution and by delivering a well-managed, effective and ecologically representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Member States are very unlikely to meet this objective and many MPAs still lack effective fisheries management, appropriate funding and connectivity.
- The EU set a biodiversity strategy to be achieved by 2020 with clear actions including minimising the impact of fisheries on the marine environment. Furthermore, in order to halt the deterioration of all species and habitats protected by the Birds and Habitats Directives, Member States were to complete their Natura 2000 network by 2012, including in the marine environment.
- Brexit and possible changes to fisheries and marine management may pose another challenge to conservation. A sustainable free trade deal and fisheries agreements with the UK, regulating mutual access to markets and waters, will be instrumental in maintaining high environmental standards.

The EU already has the laws, obligations and commitments. Now we call on you to move from words to actions. We count on your determination in this challenge.

We urge all key European political parties to deliver the following concrete EU commitments and crucial actions in the next five years:

- 1. Urgently adopt binding measures to tackle climate change and implement the Paris Agreement.**
- 2. Halt biodiversity loss and protect sensitive species and habitats. Fully designate and manage the Natura 2000 network and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.**
- 3. Stop plastic pollution and champion a global treaty reducing single-use plastics.**
- 4. Fully implement the Common Fisheries Policy: base fisheries management on science and the ecosystem-based approach, end overfishing, recover fish stocks and transition to sustainable, low-impact fishing, minimise and where possible eliminate incidental catches of sensitive species (e.g. seabirds, marine mammals and turtles).**
- 5. Eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and strengthen fisheries control and enforcement; introduce fully documented fisheries.**
- 6. Save the Mediterranean—the most overfished sea of the world—by reducing the excessive fishing effort, minimizing fishing impacts on vulnerable species and habitats and substantially improving the culture of compliance in the region.**

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<sup>2</sup> Data according to the recent report by the [Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries](#)

7. **Protect marine life from the impacts of underwater noise pollution, in particular from shipping and offshore energy construction, and from the impacts of chemical and agricultural pollution.**
8. **Lead by example in international ocean governance: eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies, strengthen the protection of the marine environment, adopt ambitious measures that ensure sustainable fishing, strong management and enforcement in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and by means of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, and coordinate activities such as data collection.**

You are co-responsible for shaping EU policies and law-making, together with the Council of the EU. Ambitious and informed leadership in the fisheries (PECH), environment (ENVI), transport and tourism (TRAN) committees of the European Parliament, as well as appointment of relevant European Commissioners will be crucial in the mission of saving our seas and the many people that rely on them for their livelihoods. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is particularly important in this legislative context for it is an EU exclusive competence, meaning that the EU alone is able to legislate and adopt binding acts in this matter, directly applicable in all Member States.

Apart from the main task of co-legislation, Parliament's role is to ensure democratic accountability over management of the marine environment. Crucially, the European Commission reports annually on the progress in ending overfishing and the situation of fish stocks, and by 31.12.2022 on the functioning of the fisheries policy as such (CFP art. 50 & 49)<sup>3</sup>. These reports give you an opportunity to ask challenging questions and monitor performance on the key CFP objectives and achieving fully sustainable fisheries. In addition, the Commission also has to regularly report on the implementation of the Marine Directive<sup>4</sup>, and the newly adopted Single-Use Plastics Directive<sup>5</sup>. By participating in a Parliamentary Intergroup focused on the marine environment, such as the SEARICA Intergroup, you can help bring up the voice of civil society to the political sphere and contribute to making our seas and ocean healthier.

Environmental organisations are ready to contribute to your mandate with our expertise and experience. There is no more time to waste on "business as usual" –we are faced with an emergency and must act now. The future of European seas and our collective future are in your hands.

Yours sincerely,



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*on behalf of:* **BirdLife, ClientEarth, The Fisheries Secretariat, New Economics Foundation, Oceana, Seas At Risk, WWF**

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<sup>3</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Common Fisheries Policy](#)—the Commission also regularly reports to the Parliament on: fish stock recovery areas, adjustment and management of EU fleets fishing capacity, as well as evaluation of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (CFP art. 8, 22, 31). Furthermore, the Parliament has power to scrutinize delegated acts proposed by the Commission, for example adopting fisheries management for Marine Protected Areas (CFP art. 11).

<sup>4</sup> [Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy](#) (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

<sup>5</sup> [Directive \(EU\) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment](#)