



Brussels, 12 December 2018

Dear EU Ministers of the Environment,

Clean, healthy and abundant seas by 2020. This is what European countries committed to achieve when they adopted the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in 2008. It is what [over 180,000 Europeans](#) are asking you to deliver on.

With little more than a year until the deadline, all countries of the European Union are failing on their legal obligation to 'take all necessary measures to achieve Good Environmental Status of EU seas by 2020' (Marine Directive, Article 1(1)). In August, the European Commission itself stated that we are unlikely to achieve Good Environmental Status of EU seas by 2020 unless Member States take more definitive action.

We therefore urge you to re-commit to the goal of the Marine Directive at the upcoming European Council of Environment Ministers on 20 December 2018 and in particular to commit to the '20 measures for clean and healthy seas by 2020' the European NGO community proposes in the attached.

What precisely does it mean to say that European countries are failing to meet their legal obligation under the Marine Directive?

For nature, it means that...

- ... our seas are being emptied of fish, which are caught too young and too small because they are too few.
- ... the homes of marine animals have been, and continue to be, wrecked at an alarming rate by destructive fishing gear.
- ... our beaches are covered with plastic waste, which makes its way either into the stomachs of seabirds and animals or to the bottom of the sea, where it will never be retrieved.
- ... hundreds of thousands of seabirds and tens of thousands of turtles die every year when they are accidentally caught in fishing nets.
- ... marine plants and animals are being slowly poisoned by the unnecessary chemicals we use in our industrial processes and in our everyday lives.
- ... our coastlines and their rich ecosystems are suffocated by algal blooms caused by an overload of nutrients coming mainly from agriculture.
- ... marine animals, particularly cetaceans, suffer serious harm and death because of the noise pollution from shipping and offshore constructions.

Our way of life harms the ocean

#OurBlueLung



For society, it means that:

- ... we are hurting our Blue Lung. Our seas and ocean produce over half of the oxygen we breathe.
- ... we are risking our children's lives and futures. By ignoring the decline in quality of our seas and oceans, we jeopardise the foundation on which all life on earth is built.
- ... we are losing money. Fishing unsustainably was directly responsible for €7.1 billion in lost revenue between 2010 and 2015 (New Economics Foundation, 2015).
- ... our poor environmental choices will continue to have significant negative economic effects. The environmental damage caused by single-used plastic items could cost society up to €22 billion by 2030 if they are not banned (European Commission, 2018).

We have to stop the degradation of our seas now! This is all of our fight and all of our responsibility.

By taking these 20 measures now, your governments can still fulfil the promise made to your citizens in 2008: clean, healthy and abundant seas by 2020.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Verbeek', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Monica Verbeek
Executive Director
Seas At Risk

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Twenty measures for clean and healthy seas by 2020

1. Defend and implement the **high standards of the Water Framework Directive** to bring our rivers, lakes, wetlands, floodplains, groundwater and coastal waters to good ecological and chemical status as the main pre-condition for clean and healthy seas.
2. Designate a sufficient number of protected sites in the marine environment to ensure that the **EU's remarkable and vulnerable marine wildlife is preserved**, in line with the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the objectives of the Marine Directive.
3. Offer **true protection to Marine Protected Areas** by systematically banning all high-impact activities, such as bottom trawling, oil and gas exploitation and mining exploration, and authorising other activities in or near protected areas only after an assessment has proven that they will not impact the protected wildlife, individually and cumulatively.
4. Dedicate at least **25% of the national budget from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund** to marine nature protection, including proper management of Marine Protected Areas, put in place marine pollution prevention measures, and conduct adequate baseline and impact monitoring and research activities in the marine environment.
5. Establish a fully-financed national programme to implement, and monitor the effectiveness of, state-of-the-art **measures to minimise and eliminate incidental catch by fish vessels** of seabirds, marine mammals, sea turtles, endangered species of sharks, rays and deep-sea fish and enforce by-catch reduction through **increased monitoring at sea** with remote electronic monitoring or more on-board observers for high-risk vessels.
6. Set annual **fishing limits below the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate** for stocks with sufficient scientific data, and below the precautionary approach reference point for stocks with limited data, at the appropriate European Agriculture and Fisheries Councils in 2018 and 2019 to have all commercially exploited fish and shellfish populations restored above sustainable levels by 2020.
7. Speed-up the transition to **more sustainable fishing practices** by allocating more fishing opportunities to fleets with lower environmental impacts, in line with Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy.
8. Establish **trawl-free areas along all coastal zones** to protect the most productive part of our seas and create a coherent network of fish stock recovery areas for essential fish habitats, in line with Article 8 of the Common Fisheries Policy, with a focus on overfished commercial stocks.
9. Reform the Common Agricultural Policy to shift financial support from polluting livestock operations and intensive farming causing run-off to **sustainable agricultural practices** and restoration of watersheds.

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10. Require that all farms put in place a '**nutrient management plan**' (including nutrient soil-mapping and bookkeeping) and adequate **Ecological Focus Areas** and buffers along all water courses as pre-conditions for allocating subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy.
11. Ensure that funding for aquaculture is directed at activities that do not damage the marine environment, and actively support measures that **reduce the environmental footprint of aquaculture farms**, that promote aquaculture providing environmental services or that facilitate conversion to eco-management.
12. Ensure the proper **implementation and enforcement of the REACH Regulation** and other chemical related laws, in particular the swift identification, restriction and substitution of substances of very high concern, including endocrine disruptors and persistent toxic and bioaccumulative substances, in industrial processes and products.
13. Implement the Minamata Convention on Mercury by applying relevant **restrictions and bans to major sources of mercury emissions**, including Large-Combustion Plants, and banning the use of mercury in dentistry.
14. Require all **emergency plans for oil spills** to include a sensitivity mapping of ecosystem components to ensure the least impact on marine wildlife at the time of a crisis and brief port authorities on the appropriate response to such crises.
15. Put in place a **National Plan to implement the EU Plastics Strategy**, including national targets to reduce plastic consumption, and data collection on the placing on the market and consumption of single-use plastics.
16. Set up **mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility schemes** for the entire supply chain for single-use plastic and fishing gear.
17. Commit to progressively **eliminate sources of microplastic pollution**, taking early steps to end plastic pellet loss and support the restriction of microplastic ingredients under REACH.
18. Impose **ship speed reductions** to reduce noise pollution, strikes with cetaceans and greenhouse gas emissions and start the process of developing binding rules for the quieting of ships, based on existing guidelines of the International Maritime Organization.
19. Mandate the development and use of **quieter technological alternatives** and best available technologies for pile driving (e.g. BLUE piling) and seismic surveying (e.g. marine vibroseis).
20. Require robust, comprehensive and transparent **Environmental Impact Assessments** for all noise-generating activities at sea, drawing on the already adopted guidelines of the Convention on Migratory Species.

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This letter is a call on you by these organisations, all united in the fight to save #OurBlueLung:



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