



Brussels, 17th May 2019

Subject: EU needs a committed and ambitious leadership to save our ocean

Dear Lead Candidates:

This year's May elections to the European Parliament will be extremely important because Europe must urgently tackle major cross-border environmental crises, such as climate change and ecological collapse. The next five years will be decisive in turning the tide. Your ambition and commitment as decision-makers and 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 breakdown and providing food and employment to millions of Europeans. However, as a result 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 IPBES¹ 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.

We, the environmental organisations **BirdLife, ClientEarth, The Fisheries Secretariat, 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. 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 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.

¹ Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services <https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policymakers-pdf>

- 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 percent² 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). In July 2018, the European Commission acknowledged that Member States are very unlikely to meet this objective as EU marine waters are still heavily polluted and disturbed by human activities. In addition, 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. However, by 2017 only 46% of marine Important Bird Areas were designated as Natura 2000. Far fewer, have effective management and sufficient funding to ensure their protection, mainly due to the lack of political commitment.
- 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 and leaders to deliver the following 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**

² Data according to the recent report by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/reports/cfp-monitoring/-/asset_publisher/oz50/document/id/2484866?inheritRedirect=false

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.**
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 and strengthen the protection of the marine environment by taking appropriate decisions in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and ensuring the coordination of activities such as data collection.**

Whatever the outcome of the election is, you will be co-responsible for shaping EU policies. Appointing ambitious, informed and engaged leaders to the key fisheries and environmental portfolios in the European Parliament and the European Commission will be crucial in the mission of saving our seas.

Environmental organisations are ready to contribute our expertise, experience, and deliver new inspiring projects, as we have done for decades, collaborating with national and EU authorities. There is no more time to waste on business as usual and paying lip service to sustainability. 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
Oceana
Seas At Risk
WWF