

Letter to the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament, members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and members of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on the CAP vote

Brussels, 20 October 2020

Dear Mr Sassoli

Cc: chairmen and chairwomen of the political groups of the European Parliament,

Cc: members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and members of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

We, conservationists, scientists and farmers caring for wetland and peatland protection across the EU, write to express our strong fear that the current **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) would contribute to further degradation of precious ecosystems, like peatlands**. This would mean to fail to align this proposal with the Green Deal, according to which “All EU policies should contribute to preserving and restoring Europe’s natural capital”¹.

You have the major responsibility of ratifying a CAP proposal which is ambitious enough to contribute to the implementation of the Green Deal, thus to make the EU climate neutral by 2050.

To achieve such a climate goal, we are all aware that agriculture and land use plays a huge role. Peatlands are part of this picture as they can contribute extraordinarily to make agriculture more climate friendly.

With this letter, **we strongly urge you to:**

1) **VOTE YES** to amendments n. 866 and n. 1148, §1 c and §1 c (ia) recognising rewetted areas used for paludiculture as agricultural activity and eligible for direct payment and amendments 732 and 1357 linking public subsidies to basic environmental and social conditions.

2) **REJECT amendments 229, 717 and 1141** referring to conditionality and in particular to GAEC 2, whose main objective is “Protection of carbon-rich soils”.

Am. 717: Maintenance of wetland and peatland *in sensitive areas of Natura 2000*

Am. 1141: Effective protection of wetland and *appropriate maintenance* of peatland

Am 229 ... where applicable, appropriate maintenance of wetland and peatland

We disagree on “**MAINTENANCE of peatlands**” because this would support drainage. Peatlands can be **MAINTAINED** as peatlands in a drained state literally as long as not all peat is lost through decomposition, while at the same time undergoing severe degradation and emitting huge amounts of carbon dioxide.

Deliberate degradation of the long-term carbon storage capacity of peatlands should always be penalised and should never result in increased payments from the EU.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf

GAEC 2 needs to be implemented on all wetlands and peatlands. Limiting it to “wetland and peatland in sensitive areas of Natura 2000 will not appropriately fulfil its target (mitigating climate change)².

Why are we strongly recommending for the sustainable management of peatlands in this major CAP opportunity?

Globally the EU is the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) from drained peatlands (220 Mt CO₂eq/year = 15% of total global peatland emissions). This is equivalent to circa 5% of the official EU greenhouse gas emissions total of 4,483 Mt CO₂eq/year in 2017.

Fully functional, healthy peatlands are the most space efficient long-term carbon store and sink in our planet’s biosphere, but they are drained and damaged for agriculture, forestry and energy, releasing huge amounts of CO₂ emissions. Drained peatlands contribute to 25% of total emissions from EU agriculture and agricultural land use (part of LULUCF) while covering only 3% of the EU agricultural land.

To ensure that through a good CAP proposal, you will also reflect the priorities of the EU Biodiversity, and Farm to Fork Strategies and Climate and energies policies, it is imperative to act on three levels with regards to peatlands:

- 1) **Protect and conserve the remaining intact peatlands.** Peatlands make up only around 3% of the world’s land surface, but they contain twice as much carbon as the world’s forests. The importance of their conservation and restoration is increasingly recognised in international climate negotiations³.
- 2) **Rehabilitate and restore degraded peatlands** to prevent not only climate damages, but also fire hazards, (when drained), flooding (due to land subsidence), droughts.
- 3) **Develop and promote sustainable land-use on re-wetted peatlands.** The CAP proposal should incentivize successful peatland conservation measures that promote productive agricultural use of peatlands without draining. Landowners within the EU should be encouraged to maintain and re-establish high water levels in peatlands to maximise carbon storage, minimise greenhouse gas emissions and reduce land subsidence.

No landowner in the EU should be economically or socially disadvantaged by maintaining or developing wet peatlands or rewetting peatlands⁴.

We believe that you fully understand our concerns and that you will make the right choice for nature, biodiversity and people.

Yours sincerely

² Sabine Wichmann, Jan Peters, Franziska Tanneberger (Greifswald University/Greifswald Mire Centre)

³ <https://www.wetlands.org/publications/discover-the-source-of-2019/>

⁴PEATLANDS IN THE EU. COMMON AGRICULTURE POLICY (CAP) AFTER 2020 Policy Brief, March 2020 Wetlands International, Greifswald Mire Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway



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