

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission

By electronic mail

Brussels, 15 July 2024

RE: The Pantanal wetland and its people need Europe.

Dear President,

First of all, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the European Council's endorsement for a second term as President of the European Commission. We hope that this week you will receive full support from the European Parliament and continue the excellent work you have done for nature and people in Europe and globally.

Under your Commission, two pieces of landmark legislation have been approved to accelerate the end of global deforestation and restore our natural ecosystems which have signaled your strong concern and commitment to these issues.

For this reason we are writing to bring your attention to the dramatic situation Brazil is experiencing in the Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetland .

Currently the Pantanal is in the news every day as huge fires destroy its nature and biodiversity, release huge amounts of stored carbon into the atmosphere and reduce the security of local and indigenous communities. This is a climate and biodiversity disaster happening right now. It deserves Europe's attention and support to help step up efforts, mobilise investments and confirm Europe's global climate and biodiversity leadership.

The Pantanal Biome, the largest contiguous freshwater wetland on Earth, a transboundary floodplain shared across Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, is suffering devastating fires. For the past few years, the Pantanal has experienced prolonged drought with river levels well below average, which, together with the fires and drought are raising experts concerns of desertification risks at most vulnerable ¹areas. In 2020, fires consumed over 27% of the wetland provoking severe biodiversity loss and affecting the health, lives and economies of thousands of people. **The 2024 Pantanal fires are surpassing the figures from 2020**, and the dry season has only just started. More than 760,000 hectares have already burned across the Brazilian Pantanal in 2024. From January to July, blazes increased by 1,500% compared with the same period last year according to the country's Institute for Space Research².

The conservation of the Pantanal contributes directly to global climate goals, sustains life, is rich in biodiversity with more than 4,700 species. More than 1.2 million people depend on it for clean

¹ <https://www.gov.br/cemaden/pt-br/assuntos/noticias-cemaden/estudo-do-cemaden-e-do-inpe-identifica-pela-primeira-vez-a-ocorrencia-de-uma-regiao-arida-no-pais>
² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/09/devastation-as-worlds-biggest-wetland-burns-those-that-cannot-run-dont-stand-a-chance-brazil-pantanal>

water, income and food security, in addition to millions more downstream who rely on it for extensive wetland flood control.

With our help local government, civil society and private sector actors are dialoguing on solutions. Furthermore, communities in and around the Pantanal have mobilized efforts with scientists, decision-makers, governments, NGOs, and landowners, to design and incorporate more efficient fire prevention and firefighting practices.

Civil society organizations from Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay recently [wrote](#) to the newly elected members of the European Parliament to ask for help to save and restore the Pantanal.

We call on your leadership to act for this unique, iconic and globally important wetland. As your first action once confirmed next week, please show the strength of Europe's commitment and leadership on the international stage by agreeing to an **EU Wetland Partnership for the Pantanal**.

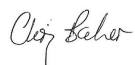
The EU and Brazilian Government should work together for the benefit of the Pantanal and its communities by signing an **EU Wetland Partnership for the Pantanal** through a Memorandum of Understanding (if possible at UNFCCC COP29, or even before at CBD COP16), and start working on a roadmap to be presented at COP30 where key actions are in place to:

- 1) Implement measures to reduce pressures on the Pantanal;
- 2) Foster sustainable practices;
- 3) Benefiting indigenous and local communities wellbeing and sustainable economies;
- 4) Provide assistance and resources for fire and drought prevention and management efforts;
- 5) Promote restoration and rehabilitation of degraded landscapes .

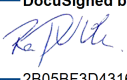
The EU strategic agenda 2024 -2029 calls for continued protection of nature and reversal of ecosystem degradation. Acting on the Pantanal would not only contribute to addressing the triple planetary crisis, but would also send an extraordinarily powerful message to the world about Europe's values and leadership ahead of upcoming international moments: CBD COP16 in Colombia, UNFCCC COP29 in Azerbaijan and UNCCD COP15 in Saudi Arabia.

We count on you to act on the Pantanal with an [EU Wetland Partnership](#).

Best regards



Dr Chris Baker
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