

Birdlife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau call on MEPs to choose nature over pesticides in critical vote for European Biodiversity!

BirdLife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) call on Members of the Parliament to stand up for nature and public health by supporting a vital proposal made by the European Commission in the Delegated Regulation of 15 February 2017. Though the delegated regulation consists of several amendments, one stands out loud and clear: the ban on pesticides in ecological focus areas (EFA). EFAs were initially designed “to safeguard and improve biodiversity on farms”.

MEPs are being asked a clear question: will they choose nature or pesticides? The answer is simple: MEPs must use this opportunity to save biodiversity such as bees and other beneficial insects for crops’ pollination, ensure that public money is well spent and, affirm the spirit of the legislation: to have a workable tool within the CAP that protects areas dedicated to the conservation of wildlife. If they vote in favour of the resolution; they will jeopardize further the future of farming and the credibility of the whole CAP.

Therefore we call on all MEPs to vote against the resolution in plenary!

What is an ecological focus area?

Ecological Focus Areas or EFAs were introduced as part of the 2013 Greening reforms of the CAP. In order to receive the ‘greening direct payment’, farmers are required to dedicate a modest 5 percent of their arable land to biodiversity. The cost of the ‘Greening direct payment’ amounts to 12 billion Euro, and so far, the ecological focus area has regrettably failed to effectively conserve biodiversity.

Protein production shouldn’t mean the end of European biodiversity

During the 2013 reform of the CAP, changes to the Commission’s proposal allowed for protein crop production in these areas and the use of pesticides in Ecological Focus areas, moving away from directly benefiting biodiversity. Whilst the promotion of protein crops is a valuable objective, it should be supported using different policy tools within the Common Agricultural Policy, without harming nature.

As a consequence of competing objectives within the policy, the EFA measure is currently failing to protect biodiversity, in part due to the use of pesticides in these areas. Several elements of research that BirdLife and EEB have commissioned show that to greatly improve the EFAs, the simple crop options – that farmers have overwhelmingly chosen to fill in this requirement - should as much as possible be avoided and pesticides should not be used.¹ Moreover, protein crops risk to be a biodiversity trap. The crops attract e.g. pollinators and when it is sprayed, or mown too early, all these pollinators are killed.

The commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, has rightly proposed this adjustment to ensure the policy is more effective and correct this unacceptable part of the CAP. This is a final opportunity for the parliament to improve this failing policy and ensure that EFAs can properly be the spaces for wildlife and pollinators that they were intended to be.

¹ <http://ieep.eu/work-areas/agriculture-and-land-management/policy-evaluation/2016/12/ecological-focus-areas-what-impacts-on-biodiversity>

What is the state of EU biodiversity?

Farmland makes up 47% of the European territory. However, for several years, the farmland bird index, one of the most widely used indicators of the health of Europe's farmland, ecosystems and wildlife, showed that common farmland birds like corn bunting, goldfinch, lapwing and skylark, have declined by almost 50% in the past 30 years. Other indicators show similar declines. As an example, the European Environmental Agency showed an almost 50% decline of 17 EU grassland butterfly populations between 1990 and 2011². The ecological focus area was designed as a public payment to establish or maintain habitats to halt these declines. The policy needs reform in order to ensure that pesticides are not used and the habitats are maintained for biodiversity.

European versus global biodiversity?

Those who oppose the ban argue that we need to reduce our reliance on imported protein crops to prevent tropical deforestation. They claim that without the use of pesticides, they cannot grow these protein crops in EFAs. However, the EFAs were not meant to boost protein production, they were meant to boost biodiversity. There is also no evidence to suggest that the current protein crops grown in EFAs are reducing global deforestation. Therefore, promoting protein crop production in Europe and halting tropical deforestation must not be supported through Ecological Focus Areas. The protein deficit should be tackled through a strategic protein plan including basic good agronomic practices such as crop rotation. Stopping global biodiversity loss should be tackled by the full implementation of Target 6 of the EU biodiversity strategy, this includes the need to develop a robust EU action plan on Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

The CAP – value for money?

The cost of the Green Direct Payment, the payment to farmers to deliver three 'green' measures (EFAs, crop diversification and grassland protection), is estimated at around 12 Billion EUR per year. So far, research has shown that this had delivered very little for biodiversity in Europe.³ The main recommendation from a recent report from the Institute for European Environmental Policy is that pesticides and fertilisers should not be used in these EFAs in order for them to be beneficial for biodiversity. In order to bring greater value for money for this expenditure, European institutions must not allow the use of pesticides in areas of land that the public have paid to be an area for biodiversity protection. This ban is urgently needed to bring the key greening measure of the CAP in line with its objectives on biodiversity.

Why the procedural argument does not stick

Some members have used the procedural argument to justify opposition to this Delegated act, contending that it is not typical process to vote on several measures in one block. However, there are several precedents for this in the parliament for example in the delegated acts on rural development or direct payments that proceeded the last CAP reform. With these precedents, the vote should be made on the basis of policy, where it is clear that policy must be improved and the commission proposal supported.

What is the process?

The European Commission has proposed on 15 February 2017, an amendment to the delegated act consisting of several elements (amending Delegated Regulation (EU) No 639/2014 as regards the control measures relating to the cultivation of hemp, certain provisions on the greening payment, the payment for

² [the European Environmental Agency showed an almost 50% decline of 17 EU grassland butterfly populations: http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/the-european-grassland-butterfly-indicator-19902011](http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/the-european-grassland-butterfly-indicator-19902011)

³ <http://ieep.eu/work-areas/agriculture-and-land-management/policy-evaluation/2016/12/ecological-focus-areas-what-impacts-on-biodiversity>

young farmers in control of a legal person, the calculation of the per unit amount in the framework of voluntary coupled support, the fractions of payment entitlements, and certain notification requirements relating to the single area payment scheme and the voluntary coupled support, and amending Annex X to Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council).

Two members of the Committee for Agriculture, Mr. Dess (EPP, DE) and Mr. Agnew (EFDD, UK), lodged a resolution for opposition against the whole Commission proposal based on the one element of the ban of pesticides in EFAs. The AGRI committee voted in favour of this objection on 30 May 2017. It will now go to plenary in the week of 12th of June. Under the rules on delegated act, only a majority of MEPs will need to vote in favour of the resolution to stop the delegated act and hence to allow for pesticides to continue being used on EFA.

Why support the ban of pesticides on areas for nature?

- **It is unacceptable that the EU allows to spray pesticides on areas meant to protect biodiversity**
- **It is an urgent and necessary clarification of the so-called greening part of the CAP that is still the largest spending pot of the EU. Without this clarification taxpayers are, under the greening label, de facto asked to pay for areas that can turn into a biodiversity trap; it undermines further the CAP's legitimacy.**
- **It is vital to halt biodiversity declines- farming remains one of the main threat to biodiversity decline in Europe**
- **It is important to bring back the functional biodiversity that underpins our agro-ecosystem and which is the basis for our food production and hence long term food security in Europe.**

Therefore we ask MEPs to vote against the resolution and hence against pesticides in areas for nature!

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