

To: EU Ministers of Agriculture

OPEN LETTER

Subject: 19 February Agriculture Council

Dear Ministers,

Ahead of the Agriculture Council on 19 February, we, BirdLife Europe and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), would like to stress that if the CAP is to become a policy that can address environmental challenges, ensure farmers' long-term ability to farm and provide the EU added-value that citizens ask for, **the discussion on direct payments, the environment and rural development must be brought together and discussed in a more strategic way.** The informal lunch organised to coincide with the Council meeting on 19 February could be an opportunity to hold such a strategic discussion.

There is clear consensus amongst citizens, scientists and environmental NGOs that the current CAP is failing to deliver on today's challenges and needs a radical overhaul. Otherwise, the current share of the EU budget the CAP receives can no longer be justified.

Therefore, while we welcome the commitment you showed to do more for the environment in the future CAP at the last Agriculture Council meeting on 29 January, these commitments contradict the strong emphasis you put on **direct payments** during the same debate:

- Most (70 %) of the CAP budget is spent on area-based direct payments—which mostly reward the wealthiest landowners—despite the lack of a clear link to the CAP's overall objectives. It's time to replace this antiquated system with targeted support based on the guiding principles of 'public money for public goods' and 'polluter pays'.
- Recent assessment of the CAP using the Commission's own Fitness Check methodology [1], highlighted the **inefficiency and inequity of direct payments in terms of income support**, and their **ineffectiveness and inefficiency for delivering environmental public goods**, in worst cases even undermining the targeted environmental measures. Further, the European Court of Auditors report on the 'greening' also showed that it was not possible to 'green' a dysfunctional structure [2].
- Contrary to claims made by the European Commission, EU citizens did not support the continuation of direct payments in the public consultation on the future of the CAP; rather they demanded a fundamental transformation of the CAP.

A modern, results-based CAP must respond to today's challenges, namely the **environmental crisis** on Europe's farmland:

- In order to achieve a high level of environmental ambition while ensuring a level playing field in the internal market it is **paramount that strong and very clear objectives are set at the EU level and that these are based on relevant EU legislation.** These should be accompanied with measurable targets and common indicators at EU level. There is a need to set separate and non-tradable objectives on biodiversity, soil, water, air and climate change.
- Achieving each and all of the environmental objectives requires, as a minimum, ring-fencing money for environmental action. This is particularly the case for biodiversity where we estimate the required amount to be at least 15 billion EUR per annum, with the main beneficiaries being the land-managers.

On **rural development**, the policy should focus on facilitating the transition to a sustainable food and farming system, by supporting farmers to change practices and infrastructure.

- On top of the above environmental objectives, economic objectives should include the sustainable management of natural resources, which is the basic foundation for generational renewal and economic sustainability.
- Transition should combine measures including one-off investments, knowledge transfers, innovation and advice—all based on a whole farm approach, supporting local supply chains, organic production and diversified production methods.

We are running out of time to save the ecosystems on which we depend for food and life [3]. **Ignoring both overwhelming scientific evidence and citizens' demands would undermine the legitimacy of CAP spending and alienate a significant amount of traditionally pro-European constituencies.** You have a responsibility to take decisions now which do not benefit narrow groups of interests but that are in the long-term interests of the whole farming community, the whole of society, and the future of Europe.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Wates
EEB Secretary General (On behalf of the EEB and BirdLife Europe)

References:

- [1] G. Pe'er et al. (2017). [Is the CAP Fit for purpose? An evidence based fitness-check assessment.](#)
- [2] ECA (2017). [Special Report n°21/2017: Greening: a more complex income support scheme, not yet environmentally effective](#)
- [3] Steffen et al. (2015). [Planetary Boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet.](#)