THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT
Will you vote, for them?

LET NATURE BLOOM
What can the EU Parliament do?

THE LAST STRAW?
The EU vows to rethink plastic

Greta Thunberg's Climate Strike has gone global, what does this mean for the EU elections?

See inside for a round-up of environmental news from Europe

VOTE FOR ME?

WASTE NO MORE

SOMETHING IN THE AIR?

BABY STEPS IN NAIROBI
NEW LEADERS, NEW LEADERSHIP?

It is not uncommon to hear our politicians trumpeting Europe's status as a world leader in environmental protection and climate action. And it is true that the EU was at the centre of efforts to agree the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change, and has recently signed-off a ban on single-use plastic items. Yet it is no longer our elected leaders that are showing true leadership when it comes to protecting nature and our climate.

While politicians tamely acknowledge the situation, it is teenagers that seem to be taking the warnings of scientists seriously - and demanding we all respond with sensible force and urgency. The global school strike for climate, inspired by Swedish student Greta Thunberg, has captured the imagination of millions of young people (and adults!). It is this generation that has shown the leadership we need as we approach elections across Europe in May. It is this generation that deserves new political leaders. Because it is not too late to act to prevent catastrophic climate breakdown, nor to save bees and other threatened species from extinction, nor to stem the flood of plastic into our oceans. And the EU's role will be crucial. In the past five years the EU has stepped in when governments failed to improve air quality (page 10), recommitted itself to protect our precious nature (page 8) and taken urgently needed action on single use plastic (page 6). The big question for this election is whether or not the EU will emerge in a stronger position to face these critical, even existential, challenges.

As Europeans go to the polls to choose a new set of parliamentarians, they should listen to the inspirational voices of that new generation, including those too young to vote, who are speaking up for nature. Because passing on a cleaner, greener and safer world to the next generation is not just a political objective, it is a moral imperative.
Do you remember being a teenager? Feeling injustice so strongly that you couldn’t understand why no one was doing anything about it?

It’s a perfectly natural part of growing up. Teenagers are programmed to question and challenge, in order to begin loosening their dependence on their parents and prepare them for adult life.

Sometimes the pioneering spirit of adolescence sweeps across the world and changes it forever. Throughout history much of our culture – music, fashion, media - has been driven by teenagers.

Right now, something even more exciting is happening. Teenagers are uniting for humankind.

Since late 2018, not just teenagers but young people of all ages, have been mobilising in weekly strikes for the climate. Led by Nobel Peace Prize nominee Greta Thunberg, demonstrations have taken place in over 120 countries.

On 15 March alone it was estimated that over one million young people took to the streets around the world to demand their leaders take action on climate.

Students in Belgium were among the first to organise massive protests. In January more than 30,000 young Belgians missed classes to march together in Brussels - we spoke to some of these students at the time.

Young people like Sarah, Kobe and Brit may be incredibly impassioned about our planet and the wellbeing of those we share it with, but they cannot yet vote.

One of the major responsibilities we have as adults is to elect politicians who stand not just for us but for our communities, our planet, and – of course - our children.

We need to vote carefully – for those that will hear what young people, scientists and the natural world are telling us, and who will then act.

This May, we need to vote for a European Parliament that will uphold and enforce the Paris Agreement, take the decisions needed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees and ultimately learn to listen to our inner teenager!
Europe vows to rethink plastic

A ban on plastic straws, cutlery and other single-use items could soon become “one of the EU’s proudest achievements.”

Rarely has any EU-wide proposal been reviewed and adopted as quickly as the laws against single-use plastic pollution.

But pressing issues require quick decisions, and Europe has assumed global leadership on one of the most important and visible environmental challenges of the past few years. “This could soon become one of the EU’s proudest achievements,” says Jean-Pierre Schweitzer, a policy officer at the European Environmental Bureau.

“Marine litter, like many forms of pollution, knows no borders. All countries must commit to finding solutions.”

The economic impact of plastic pollution is also considerable as millions of people in the EU depend on marine and coastal biodiversity or tourism for their livelihoods. One of many reasons that helped convince EU lawmakers to act.

So, is it all good now? Not exactly. Activists and policy experts warned that the plastics lobby, backed by some governments, was still able to weaken the ambition of the laws.

Those who are familiar with the EU lobbying machine may not be surprised. But popular support for action against plastic pollution has grown alongside research showing the damage it can cause. It’s going to be difficult for governments to step back now the EU has taken the lead.

What was agreed?

Last December, after just seven months of negotiations, EU institutions and governments agreed that by 2021 all countries must:

• Ban several single-use plastic items including plates, straws, beverage stirrers, cutlery, expanded polystyrene food containers and beverage cups;
• Ensure manufacturers pay for waste management and clean-up of several single-use plastic items, including cigarette butts and fishing gear;
• Ensure all beverage bottles are produced from 25% recycled content by 2025;
• Separately collect at least 77% of plastic bottles by 2024 and 90% by 2029.

Marine litter knows no borders. All countries must commit to finding solutions.

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How many different chemicals are we talking about here?

REACH had generated knowledge on nearly 22,000 substances in over 90,000 registration dossiers by the third registration deadline on 31 May 2018.

Wow, that’s a lot, what are these chemicals used for?

Everything! Chemicals are used in all kinds of everyday products, from plastic toys to paper, adhesives, textiles and even food. Many substances are perfectly safe, but for others we’re not yet sure. It’s when the precautionary principle should apply.

What’s the ‘precautionary principle’?

It’s part of the foundation of European environmental law. To simplify it a bit: it’s the idea that if there’s any doubt about whether something is safe or not, it should be banned until it’s proven safe.

So what’s the problem?

Well, at the moment you could say REACH is ‘precautionary in principle, but flawed in fact’. The rules are good but when it comes to putting them into practice, there is a lot of work still to be done.

For example?

Consider the time it takes to regulate harmful chemicals. At the moment that’s an average of 16 years. Meanwhile, there and other chemicals are causing a silent pandemic of cancers, birth defects and other horrible diseases. Babies born today are ‘pre-polluted’ with over 100 substances that didn’t exist in their grandparents’ time.

So it’s just taking too long?

It’s not just that there’s also powerful lobby groups influencing decisions that should be based on scientific facts. There was a clear case of this recently when French authorities found Titanium Dioxide not to be a probable carcinogen, they recommended its link to cancer be made clear in labelling. This is a product that is used as a whitener in common foods, paint and plastics. Despite the French recommendation, the decision to add the warning was initially blocked after industry lobbying.

What can be done?

Member states need to invest additional resources to make REACH work properly. Companies that are not complying with the law should be named and shamed. Also, the influence of powerful lobbyists needs to be curtailed. EU chemicals regulation could be the last in the world, hopefully the MEPs elected this May will help make this a reality.

OUT OF REACH?

EU chemical rules should keep us safe

META sat down with Tatiana Santos, EEB’s Policy Manager for Chemicals, to find out more about the EU’s REACH regulation
A European Parliament ready to help nature bloom

Emily Macintosh

On land and sea, the EU’s nature protection laws are second to none. The EU has the largest network of protected areas in the world – the Natura 2000 network – which now covers over one fifth of EU land and nearly a tenth of its seas. The Birds and Habitats Directives have played a major role in ensuring that some of the most valuable and endangered habitats and species in Europe are preserved. And the EU’s water protection law – the Water Framework Directive – is groundbreaking. It recognises that freshwater collected and filtered by lakes, rivers, and wetlands both supports wild plants and animals, and is crucial for our survival.

But laws are no good if they only exist on paper. Across the board too little has been done to implement and enforce these world-leading laws, with wildlife on many protected sites facing a barrage of illegal threats. Kresna Gorge in Bulgaria is threatened by a motorway, Limni beach in Cyprus is at risk from a large-scale tourism development and Lake Koroneia in Greece has been damaged by illegal water abstraction and pollution – to name just a few examples.

This matters because Europe’s nature is facing an extinction crisis, with more than 40% of insect species in decline and a third endangered – so-called ‘insectageddon’, which scientists say could lead to a catastrophic collapse of nature’s ecosystems. Only 40% of EU waters are currently in good health. But it is arguably intensive agriculture that poses the greatest threat to Europe’s nature.

While farming is Europe’s lifeblood, the reality of agriculture today is often a far cry from the rosy picture we see in children’s books and on supermarket labels. Most of the nearly €60 billion of EU taxpayers’ money which is spent on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) every year subsidises industrial farming, with huge amounts of crops grown to feed animals raised in cramped conditions for the ever-growing export market. Not only does industrial farming harm nature by leading to land becoming sterile, but it also plays a huge role in the current climate crisis. Animal agriculture is responsible for around 16.5% of the world’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, equivalent to the emissions from the combustion of all transport fuels. Scientists have issued repeated warnings that significant reductions in meat consumption are essential to avoid dangerous climate change. Campaigners from the environmental movement, health groups, and farmers’ unions have long called for a rethink of how we grow, share and consume our food. Within a month of being launched, a petition demanding an end to the current system of EU subsidies which heavily support damaging intensive agriculture has gathered nearly 100,000 signatures. And hope, too, lies in the form of the 375,386 people who took part in a massive EU-wide online campaign earlier this year calling on the European Commission to uphold strong water protection rules.

What can the MEPs in the next European Parliament do to help Europe’s nature?

- Show some love for nature by putting pressure on the next European Commission to intervene where EU environmental laws are being breached. The European Commission’s job is to be nature’s last line of defence and ensure that nature protection rules agreed on by EU governments are enforced properly.
- Rise to the challenge of seeking higher environmental ambition in the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and call for public money not to be used to support agricultural intensification. We need to move away from a farm subsidy system that exacerbates climate change and environmental destruction, damages rural communities, public health, and, crucially, current and future generations’ ability to produce healthy and safe food. The good news is that every seven years there is a chance to change the CAP when it is reformed, and the next policy is set to cover the years 2021 to 2027. The next European Parliament will have a crucial role to play in the negotiations.
A recent European Commission report revealed that the health impact of harmful air pollution could be halved by 2036, if governments respect the full range of EU air quality rules. Campaigners say this is the least that should be done. EEB Clean Air Policy Officer Margherita Tolotto says: “EU rules should be considered as minimum ‘safety net’ protections which governments should strive to go beyond to truly clean up our air”.

The EU has continued to take action against governments that have failed to ensure the minimum air quality standards are being met. A few months after the ‘toxic bloc’ summit the European Commission said Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Romania and Hungary would join Poland and Bulgaria in being sent to court for inaction on air pollution. All face fines for each day they wait before action is taken. More governments may face similar action later this year.

“Polluted air is Europe’s number one health hazard.”

Anton Lazarus explains what the EU is doing about it.

**Something in the air?**

**Waste no more:**

**The fight for better products**

Fridges, TVs and other products are getting more efficient, reducing their impact on the planet while saving people money. Mauro Anastasio explains this revolution is all thanks to two very smart EU policies.

This year may be a turning point in the way we shop and use our everyday products.

The EU is expected to announce new rules to get several home appliances to do the same job with less energy. For the first time, manufacturers will also be obliged to make certain products more easily repairable and therefore longer lasting.

The new standards will come into force in 2021 and will apply to TVs, displays, fridges, freezers, washing machines, wash-dryers, dishwashers, and lighting products. They are part of the EU’s Ecodesign Directive, which pushes the most wasteful products off the market, promoting innovation and sustainability.

“The EU’s Ecodesign Directive pushes the most wasteful products off the market promoting innovation and sustainability.”

Meanwhile, those products will also get new energy labels to pull consumers towards the most efficient products.

The new labelling rules will reintroduce the original A-G scale and will be displayed in online ads and TV commercials, making it easier for consumers to see which products are most efficient.

All this comes at the expense of people and the planet. “We can’t just ignore the growing amounts of electronic waste, the depletion of finite resources and the rising CO2 emissions resulting from wasteful industrial production,” says Stephane Arditi, a policy manager at the European Environmental Bureau: “We’re happy that this issue was brought on the agenda, but the fight is not over yet. Next step will be to make spare parts and repair manuals available to all, not just professional repairers, and to extend the standards to more and more products, including computers and smartphones.”

**The Right to Repair: Do more with less**

Growing protests against planned obsolescence - a practice whereby companies design a product with a limited useful life - have sparked a change of direction in Ecodesign, which had previously only focussed on energy efficiency.

Thanks to the new reparability standards, manufacturers will have to ensure that appliances can be easily disassembled, and key components replaced with readily available tools.

“The proportion of defective devices being replaced by consumers grew from 3.5% in 2004 to 8.3% in 2012.”

While it is hard to assess whether companies are purposely shortening the lifetime of our smartphones or fridges to drive sales, the proportion of defective devices being replaced by consumers grew from 3.5% in 2004 to 8.3% in 2012.

This is because it has become increasingly difficult and expensive to repair our electronic gadgets and replace key parts like a cracked screen or a weak battery.

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5 TIMES THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT STOOD UP FOR NATURE AND CLIMATE

As the European elections approach, Marie-Amélie Brun takes a look at five times the European Parliament played a crucial role in pushing for better environmental laws to protect us all. The Parliament can help to create rules that ensure our rights to clean air, healthy food and a safe climate by jointly adopting laws with EU governments. Once new EU environmental protections are adopted it is then up to national governments to turn words into actions through their own national legislation.

JANUARY 2019
NO MORE ELECTRIC PULSE FISHING IN THE EU
In January 2019, an agreement between the European Commission, the Parliament and the Council was reached to ban the cruel technique of electric pulse fishing.

The Parliament voted in large numbers to support this ban: 402 supported the ban, 232 opposed.

Marine watchers greeted news of the ban of electric pulse fishing with joy. The ban will come into force in 2021.

NOVEMBER 2018
VOTING FOR MORE CLIMATE ACTION
The Parliament plays an essential role in achieving ambitious EU laws, and this is particularly important when it comes to the urgent need for climate action.

In 2018, the Parliament participated in the development of a package of eight different pieces of legislation which are needed to ease and speed up the energy transition – the so-called ‘Clean Energy Package’.

The European Commission proposed setting an objective of producing at least 27% of our energy from renewable sources by 2030. But during the negotiations between the Commission, the Parliament and EU governments, MEPs managed to find a majority for increasing that target to 32% - a big difference in practice!

While the final target was still seen as insufficient to meet the goals set in the Paris Climate Agreement, the negotiations highlighted the critical importance of the Parliament during EU climate negotiations.

MARCH 2018
STANDING UP FOR PRECIOUS BEES!
In March 2018, 86 MEPs urged the European Commission to convince EU governments to back a proposal extending a temporary ban on three controversial bee-harming pesticides.

A few months later, the Commission, supported by member states, adopted regulations that completely banned the outdoor use of the three neonicotinoids: imidacloprid, clothianidin and thiamethoxam.

DECEMBER 2015
PUSHING FOR ENERGY SAVING MEASURES
The European Parliament can’t draft laws from scratch, but it can make changes to proposed new laws and draw attention to subjects it considers important.

In 2015, the Parliament highlighted the important role of energy efficiency for both energy security and meeting the Paris Climate Agreement. While the European Commission and national governments initially favoured a 27% energy efficiency target, the Parliament pushed for a far more ambitious binding target of 40%.

One year later, the Commission’s energy efficiency proposal contained a binding 30% target – thanks to the Parliament advocating for more ambition.

NOVEMBER 2015
OPPOSING DANGEROUS CHEMICALS
Chemicals used in the EU are monitored by a regulation called REACH (see page 7).

Substances are tested and evaluated and can be prohibited if they are found to be harmful.

DEHP (a chemical found in plastics, toys, building materials, medical products etc.) was subject to the REACH ‘authorisation’ procedure, overseen by the European Commission’s REACH Committee – a body made up of representatives of national governments.

In 2015, the European Parliament objected to authorisation proposals to use DEHP. The Parliament argued that alternative chemicals should be used instead of DEHP, which poses risks to reproduction and is an endocrine disruptor (a type of chemical that interferes with our hormone systems). The objections set a precedent and are already triggering positive measures from other EU institutions.
What I learnt at the United Nations Environment Assembly

Patrizia Heidegger, EEB’s Director of Global Policies and Sustainability, travelled to Nairobi to attend UNEA4.

Just imagine the crowd at the 4th UN Environment Assembly: over 4,000 delegates, 100 environment ministers and selected heads of state, including French President Emmanuel Macron.

The Assembly, also known as UNEA, is the world’s highest decision-making body ever established to solve the most pressing environmental challenges.

Governments had tabled 27 resolutions to address a broad range of burning issues, from tackling plastic pollution to managing chemicals, from recognising the role of women in solving environmental challenges to halting deforestation.

“UNEA is the world’s highest decision-making body, established to solve the most pressing environmental challenges.”

The negotiators were confined in small, hot meeting rooms from morning till late in the evening as they dealt with controversies and heavy push-backs by some states.

As part of the frenzy, environmentalists and NGOs from around the world were trying to get a hold of delegates in the coffee breaks, in the hallways, in the queue to lunch, or wherever there was a chance to press for real change and convince a government to support ambitious solutions.

In the end, the governments adopted twenty-five resolutions. To the great disappointment of activists and activists working to preserve the world’s forests, the resolution on deforestation had to be watered down after pressures from countries such as Brazil and Indonesia.

A resolution tabled by the European Union on the circular economy was agreed. However, wording was heavily watered down with certain governments – amongst them the US – clearly opposed to the project, which is really about reducing resource waste in absolute terms. Unfortunately, some governments also deleted any reference to getting rid of hazardous chemicals in everyday products.

Despite momentum around the globe to tackle plastic pollution, states assembled at UNEA missed the opportunity to agree on a big step forward to curb the production of plastics. Some governments were ready for it, but they were eventually persuaded to take baby steps instead, which will not be enough to save the planet from drowning in plastic.

On a positive note, civil society celebrated the adoption of a resolution that recognises the role of women in finding solutions to environmental challenges.

To sum it up, after a week, I was glad to see civil society’s growing presence at UNEA, as activists did all they could to make an impact on the negotiations. Among these, I was impressed by the women’s rights activists who staged a stunt on the main stairway leading to the conference rooms on International Women’s Day. I was also happy to see youth activists from Nairobi and elsewhere organising a march for the climate. All this helped restore a genuine sense of diversity and inclusion, which we desperately need.

“I was glad to see civil society’s growing presence, as activists did all they could to make an impact on the negotiations.”

We have worked hard to make small steps forward – on global chemicals management, on gender justice, on solving the plastics crisis, on promoting a circular economy. However, these baby steps are way too small to tackle the challenge that humankind is facing. The fight is not over yet, and we all need to make sure that at the next UNEA global leaders feel the political heat and deliver real solutions.
VOTE FOR A CLEAN, GREEN FUTURE

EU ELECTIONS - 23-26 MAY 2019