

WILL YOU LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR NATURE?

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, EEB (European Environmental Bureau), Friends of the Earth Europe and WWF European Policy Office call on Commissioner Karmenu Vella to take decisive action in his remaining time as EU Environment Commissioner to improve the implementation and enforcement of the EU's world-leading nature laws – the Birds & Habitats Directives¹.

Intensive agriculture: threats to the implementation and enforcement of the EU Birds & Habitats Directives

The #NatureAlert Countdown is on! But there is still time to take action to save threatened wildlife and habitats across Europe, such as Greece's Lake Koroneia!

European biodiversity is in freefall. Major gaps in the implementation and enforcement of our nature laws is leaving nature dangerously exposed to serious threats from intensive agriculture – one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss in Europe. Bees, birds and wildflowers are disappearing as intensive farming ploughs over grasslands, drains wetlands and rivers, pumps lakes with toxic chemicals and pollutes the air with greenhouse gas emissions from livestock. And even protected nature sites are not spared this senseless destruction. But agriculture and nature can peacefully coexist – when farmers work in harmony with nature, biodiversity bounces back. The EU must support farmers to practice nature-friendly farming in accordance with our nature laws.



SAVE LAKE KORONEIA, GREECE



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In the heart of the Thessaloniki region in northern Greece lies Lake Koroneia. This was once one of Greece's great lakes, in the past covering an area of about 45 km² and reaching depths of several metres. Though it has been recognised by the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international importance, this has not been enough to keep it safe. For years, the lake has been shrinking due to illegal water abstraction for intensive agriculture and what is left has suffered from heavy pollution from nearby industries.

Since Lake Koroneia has no outflow – it is essentially Europe's "Aral Sea" – pollutants concentrate in the lake and abstraction has seen the water level fall dramatically. In the last 30 years, the lake has lost a third of its surface area. In 2009, water levels dropped so low it became possible to walk across the lake. While improvements have been made, these issues have not been resolved entirely. A nearby landfill also leaked effluents into the lake's tributary which lead to a mass die off of fish. There have also been multiple cases of corruption, which lead to high level convictions.

In 2013, the European Commission decided to take the Greek Government to the European Court of Justice because of their inaction. On 7 February 2013, the European Court of Justice ruled against the Greek government and ordered it pay fines. Currently, the fine of €100,000 a day is still pending, while Greece attempts to implement new measures to rescue Lake Koroneia to avoid the fines. Most importantly, the landfill, which was also funded by the European Investment Bank, is subject to recent court cases.

¹ January 2019. 'Joint Policy Brief on the Implementation and Enforcement of the Birds & Habitats Directives'

**The #NatureAlert countdown is on!
Will you, Commissioner Vella, leave a lasting legacy for nature?**

Please support our call for the European Commission to put pressure on Greece to stop the pollution and illegal water abstraction that is currently devastating Lake Koroneia.

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