

To:

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Frans Timmermans
Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal

Virginijus Sinkevičius
Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

RE: EHF open letter on the importance and urgency of adopting an ambitious EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy to guide the post-Covid 19 recovery process

29 April 2020

Dear President, Executive Vice President and Commissioner,

We write to you as an informal coalition of non-governmental organisations, under the umbrella of the European Habitats Forum¹ to stress the importance of adopting an ambitious EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy in May, without further undue delay. As the EU plans the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, we strongly believe this is time and opportunity for Europe to show leadership, and to positively alter the development path of the Union, so that the climate and biodiversity crises are effectively addressed.

In line with the recent calls (including a letter by 17 Ministers of the Environment and Climate², and the call of the Green Recovery Alliance³), we stress the urgency of acting now. This is the time to have a sustainable recovery, in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, to help accelerate Europe's transition to a just and sustainable economy. The protection and restoration of ecosystems, our life support system, must play a pivotal role in this.

Experts agree that the emergence of multiple diseases becomes much more likely in situations with high levels of human encroachment into previously untouched nature. Degrading ecosystems by changes in land use and wildlife trafficking substantially increase our globally shared risk. This degradation of nature is closely linked to our current globalised and unsustainable food systems, which, in line with the recent SAPEA report⁴, need to be urgently reformed.

Without resilient and rich biodiversity, coupled with a fair, sustainable and regenerative food system and supply chains, an economic recovery, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, will still be precarious. Saving, enhancing, and protecting biodiversity goes hand in hand with combating climate change

¹ The Forum represents the voice of the environmental civil society organizations which take part in it and coordinates communication between them and the European Commission. It provides advice and knowledge on relevant issues to the Commission and is represented in various fora, including the Commission's Expert Groups, the Coordination Group on Biodiversity and Nature and the Nature Directors meetings. <https://www.iucn.org/regions/europe/our-work/eu-biodiversity-policy/european-habitats-forum>

² <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/09/european-green-deal-must-central-resilient-recovery-covid-19/>

³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j54QxE-QjhrEHjGb5LrKsHuDAKv8LUq/view>

⁴ SAPEA, Science Advice for Policy by European Academies. (2020). A sustainable food system for the European Union. Berlin: SAPEA. <https://doi.org/10.26356/sustainablefood>

and protecting human health. Nature-based solutions are proven, scalable and implementable bringing myriad benefits to both economies and health.

The Farm to Fork Strategy together with the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy are therefore essential components that should guide the recovery process and help implement the necessary measures. A long delay with months rather than weeks could result in these strategies not being used to their full potential as we rebuild the post-Covid economy, and will likely increase the cost of the transition. This could also mean that ambition for biodiversity loss mitigation and climate change resilience tied to the shift to a Green Economy is weakened and possibly lost.

It is crucial that the EU maintains its high ambition to tackle the twin crises of biodiversity and climate change and to lead by example so that others follow, even in these difficult times. The 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy should de- facto be part of any recovery plan from the Commission and Member States.

We look to the European Commission to meet citizens' expectations across Europe and to make sure that the much needed protection and restoration of nature and the transition to sustainable agriculture and food systems both become central and guiding principles of the post-COVID 19 recovery process.

