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## Priorities for EU soil policy for the new EU mandate

*We are a coalition of diverse environmental organisations at both the EU and national levels, advocating for ambitious EU soil governance. Our expertise spans policy, legal, technical and scientific perspectives on soil health.*

This briefing highlights the **critical role that healthy soils** play in supporting ecosystems, society and the economy, outlines their degraded state and addresses the urgent need for robust EU soil governance, specifically an **ambitious Soil Monitoring Law** and a **roadmap for the implementation of the EU Soil Strategy for 2030**.

### 1. Why healthy soils matter

**Healthy soils are essential for life**, providing the foundation for [95%](#) of the food we eat. They filter and store water, help plants grow and are critical to the long-term resilience and stability of farmer's livelihoods, especially in the face of [increasing extreme weather events](#). Healthy soils are also a key component of the "[One Health](#)" approach, linking soil health directly to human health.

Soil degradation in Europe costs at least [97 billion euros](#) per year, with the **costs of inaction outweighing the cost of action by a factor of six**. These costs are, and will be, primarily borne by [farmers and society at large](#).

Currently, **up to 70% of European soils are in bad condition**, and without significant change, [90%](#) of global soils could be in bad health by 2050. The lack of a dedicated EU legislative framework is one of the major contributors to this, as the failure to protect soils from the pressures of intensive agriculture, urban expansion, climate change and pollution have led to compaction, erosion and loss of biodiversity and organic matter. This needs to change. [Private sector actors](#) as well as a broader coalition of [farmers, scientists, businesses and civil society](#) have called for a strong law on soils. Protecting soils is essential to meet the EU's environmental and climate goals, and to honour international commitments like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the UN's 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

## 2. The Soil Monitoring Law: Overview, progress, next steps

The EU's [Soil Strategy for 2030](#) sets out a framework to protect and restore soils and ensure that they are used sustainably. A key commitment of this strategy was the introduction of the first EU law to protect soil, a Soil Health Law, aiming for healthy soils by mid-century. In July 2023, the Commission published its **proposal for this law, renamed the [Soil Monitoring Law](#)**, which includes a definition of soil health, a framework for monitoring and assessing the health of Europe's soils, principles for sustainable soil management, and requirements for managing contaminated sites. However, the proposal falls short in critical areas, lacking legally-binding targets, robust soil biodiversity descriptors, and the requirement for national soil health plans.

Over the past year, EU lawmakers have worked intensively on this file, with the European Parliament adopting its [position](#) in April and the Council its [General Approach](#) in June. While some improvements have been made, for example on monitoring soil biodiversity, the **institutions did not sufficiently strengthen the proposal and even weakened it further**, for example on sustainable soil management.

As the Parliament, Council and Commission are expected to enter **trilogue negotiations this autumn**, it will be key that these result in the most robust version of the law, on the basis of most ambitious elements in the agreed mandates. In addition, lawmakers must ensure the thorough implementation of the activities outlined in the Soil Strategy for 2030.

## 3. NGO policy recommendations

We urge EU lawmakers to secure an ambitious deal on the Soil Monitoring Law, by:

1. Ensuring the law provides the necessary tools to achieve the overarching objective of healthy soils by 2050, ideally by including legally-binding targets and national soil health plans.
2. Guaranteeing a comprehensive and holistic monitoring and assessment framework that puts soil biodiversity at the core of the law.
3. Guaranteeing the safe and holistic management of contaminated sites and addressing diffuse soil pollution effectively in order to meet the soil pollution objectives of the EU Soil Strategy.
4. Mandating sustainable soil management and enforcing a clear reduction in land take in line with the Soil Strategy's ambition of achieving zero net land take by 2050.
5. Implementing effective public participation processes and ensuring information is transparent and accessible to all.
6. Guaranteeing access to justice and enforcing penalties to uphold compliance and accountability.

Bringing soils back to health is not optional – it is a prerequisite for agriculture, availability of food and water, human health, circular economy and climate stability in the coming decades. Lawmakers must continue to collaborate to ensure that the Soil Monitoring Law meets these essential needs.

## NGO Resources

- NGO analysis: [Assessment of the Soil Monitoring Law proposal](#)
- Position Paper: [EEB position paper on the Soil Health Law](#)
- META articles: [4 things you need to know about soil health](#) and [What the EU is doing to protect soil health](#)
- Letter: [Joint open letter to the Commission with 250+ signatures](#)
- Technical briefings on the Soil Monitoring Law: [Soil biodiversity](#), [governance structure](#), [access to justice](#), and [subsidiarity and proportionality principles](#)

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