

To: Environment Ministers of EU Member States
Cc: Commission President, Executive Vice-President for the Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, and Commissioners for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, Energy and Housing, Health and Animal Welfare and the Chair of the European Parliament Environment Committee

Meeting of the Environment Council Meeting, 12 October in Luxembourg Recommendations from environmental citizens organisations

Brussels, 6 October 2026

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the **European Environmental Bureau, Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations**, we are writing to share our recommendations ahead of the upcoming Environment Council meeting in Luxembourg.

This Council takes place in the immediate aftermath of what European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described in her State of the Union address as **Europe's "Summer of Truth"**. After the hottest summer on record, devastating wildfires across large parts of the continent, worsening droughts and growing water stress, Europeans are once again experiencing firsthand the reality of the climate crisis. We therefore welcome the Commission President's **reaffirmation of the EU's climate targets** and her recognition that **climate resilience and the transition away from fossil fuel dependency** are essential to Europe's future.

The upcoming **COP31 in Antalya and CBD COP17** will be critical tests of whether the international community is prepared to move from commitments to implementation. Europe must arrive at both conferences with **credibility and ambition**. On climate, this means accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels, strengthening climate resilience, supporting a just transition, and ensuring that the EU's own policies, including the EU Emissions Trading System, remain fully aligned with the Union's 2040 climate objectives. On biodiversity, it means demonstrating leadership on nature protection and restoration, closing implementation gaps, and recognising that healthy ecosystems are indispensable for climate resilience, water security, food security and long-term prosperity. At a time when climate impacts and biodiversity loss are accelerating simultaneously, Europe must champion ambition both at home and internationally.

Yet the lessons of this summer extend beyond climate alone. **Heatwaves, droughts, fires, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and pollution are not separate challenges but interconnected symptoms of a deeper crisis** that threatens our environment, and our economy and society who depend on healthy ecosystems. We are therefore concerned that nature restoration, biodiversity protection and zero pollution were absent from the State of the Union debate. **Water**, in particular, risks being viewed primarily as an economic or industrial resource, when resilient water cycles

depend on healthy ecosystems, restored rivers and wetlands, living soils and thriving forests. Europe cannot build climate resilience while neglecting the nature on which that resilience depends.

The “Summer of Truth” also delivers a **clear message on regulation and investment**. As climate impacts intensify and their economic costs mount (for example, this summer, according to Triodos, cost 180 billion), Europe needs **stronger implementation of environmental legislation, greater regulatory certainty and increased investment** in climate adaptation, nature restoration and pollution prevention. This also requires preserving and strengthening the policy instruments that drive emissions reductions at scale. In this regard, the EU Emissions Trading System remains one of the Union's most important tools for reducing industrial emissions, mobilising investment, and supporting Europe's clean industrial transformation. Efforts to weaken its ambition or dilute its carbon price signal would risk delaying decarbonisation precisely when Europe needs to accelerate it.

Europe is increasingly confronted with the **costs stemming from insufficient climate and environmental action**. Wildfires, floods, droughts, water pollution and ecosystem collapse are imposing mounting costs on public budgets, businesses and citizens. The **costs of non-implementation** of environmental law are much larger than the limited administrative savings promised by deregulation of agendas. **PFAS pollution** alone may ultimately cost European societies hundreds of billions, if not trillions, of euros in health impacts, water treatment and environmental remediation. In this context, presenting environmental protection as an obstacle to competitiveness is economically indefensible. The lesson of the Summer of Truth is clear: **prevention costs less than repair, and resilience costs less than collapse**.

In parallel, negotiations on the EU's next **Multiannual Financial Framework** have entered a decisive phase. At a time when the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss are becoming increasingly visible across Europe, the next EU budget must provide the resources necessary to strengthen resilience and deliver on the Union's political commitments. We therefore call on Member States to uphold **at least the proposed 35% climate and environment spending target** and to ensure that this is translated into real and measurable outcomes. This must include a **dedicated biodiversity spending target**, recognizing the essential role of healthy ecosystems in addressing climate risks, water scarcity, food security and human wellbeing. We also urge Member States to safeguard and strengthen the **LIFE Programme as the EU's only dedicated funding instrument for environment, climate action and nature restoration**. A credible response to Europe's climate, nature and pollution crises requires not only ambitious legislation, but also the financial means to implement it effectively. At a time when the costs of inaction are mounting rapidly, weakening environmental investment would be both economically short-sighted and strategically irresponsible.

The real burden on Europe's economy comes not from environmental legislation, but from pollution, biodiversity loss, resource depletion and climate disruption – and from chronic underinvestment in the transition, nature restoration and climate adaptation.

A. COP 31 Council Conclusions

Background

For the first time, a COP Presidency has placed zero waste and resource preservation at the centre of its vision. This is very timely, as material extraction and processing represent 55% of greenhouse gas emissions, and through placing higher emphasis on reuse and repair, it is possible to prevent waste, cut demand for virgin materials, and avoid emissions by keeping products and materials in use at their highest value. In the global climate sphere, reuse and repair remain fragmented, under-resourced, and pooled together with waste management measures, not yet providing the conditions for these prevention strategies to thrive and work together. The alignment of institutions, leadership, and moment at COP31 is a rare opening to move resource management and value preservation from the margins of climate policy into its mainstream architecture.

The agenda specifically names methane, which is responsible for around one third of global warming to date. For the EU, agriculture contributes over 50% of methane emissions and waste within the food system is a key opportunity for reductions. As reuse and repair are upstream prevention tools in the materials economy, reducing food waste and livestock numbers are upstream prevention tools in the food system. The EU wastes as much food as it imports and livestock production represents an inefficiency in food production where 71% of arable land is used for feed production, which could instead be used to produce plant-based food for human consumption at far lower burden to the climate and environment. Currently, commitments on methane largely sidestep agriculture. To achieve real reductions, the sector needs methane reporting within NDC implementation. Ministers should commit to agriculture-specific reporting at the global level and lead through commitments to include methane targets for livestock within the EU.

More broadly, COP31 comes at a decisive moment for international climate cooperation. Climate impacts are intensifying across Europe and globally, while geopolitical tensions risk undermining multilateral cooperation. COP31 must therefore mark a shift from commitments towards implementation: delivering real emissions reductions, accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels, and addressing the barriers that prevent countries from implementing climate action fairly and effectively. The EU should help ensure that the outcomes of Antalya are grounded in science, equity and implementation, while recognising that transformation of energy, industry, food systems and resource use must proceed together.

The EU also has an opportunity to demonstrate that climate ambition can deliver tangible benefits for people. A credible just transition, support for affected workers and communities, and stronger focus on resource efficiency, food-system transformation and methane reduction can help strengthen public support for climate action while improving resilience, energy security and long-term prosperity.

The EEB therefore calls on the Environment Council to:

- **Actively participate in discussions around reuse and repair**, and put emphasis on the importance of these strategies in the Council Conclusions ahead of the COP.
- **Support stronger recognition of resource demand reduction, value preservation, reuse, repair and waste prevention** as climate mitigation measures and ensure these approaches are reflected in COP31 outcomes.
- **Champion stronger global action on methane emissions from agriculture and food systems**, including agriculture-specific methane reporting, stronger food waste reduction commitments, and the integration of methane reductions into NDC implementation discussions.
- **Support COP31 outcomes that accelerate the implementation of the transition away from fossil fuels**, including fossil fuel phase-out pathways, renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency and wider transformation across industry, agriculture, food systems and land use.
- **Support the operationalisation of a credible and inclusive Just Transition Mechanism** that ensures meaningful participation of workers, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth and women, and helps align climate action with decent work and social protection objectives.
- **Support ambitious and predictable climate finance outcomes, particularly for adaptation and implementation**, recognising that effective climate action in developing countries requires adequate public finance alongside action to address structural barriers such as debt burdens and limited fiscal space.

Please also see the [letter sent to Environment Ministers on the preparations of COP31 by Climate Action Network Europe](#).

B. COP17 CBD Council Conclusions

Background

The upcoming Conference of the Parties under the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD COP 17) marks the halfway point of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The CBD COP17 will take stock, review collective progress, and check in on where we stand on the pathway to achieving the global mission of halting and reversing biodiversity decline. Bending the curve of biodiversity loss still requires a significant change from commitment to action at both global and EU level.

COP17 resumes at a time marked by ongoing geopolitical tensions and a rapidly accelerating climate crisis. Heatwaves, forest fires, and droughts that seriously affected Europe during the "summer of truth" have served as a significant reminder that climate change is not a distant threat but a daily reality. We call for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to be central to our collective response to tackle these increasing threats. Healthy ecosystems are our strongest and most cost-effective defence. Strong and forward-looking leadership is essential to ensure that Europe fully harnesses the solutions that are at hand. We call on the EU and its Member States to fully uphold their commitments at COP17 and enact these at home by preventing the rollback of the much-needed

environmental safeguards and stepping up efforts to properly implement and enforce the environmental acquis.

While COP17 is taking place, the discussion on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will continue and will have a critical role in ensuring that the next EU budget effectively addresses the significant funding gap for biodiversity. Restructuring the MFF can be an occasion to close the funding gap by raising the climate and environment target to 50% and introducing a mandatory 10% biodiversity spending target. To ensure that the genuine impact of EU spending can be tracked, dedicated funding in future National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) and the EU Facility will be crucial to implement existing targets for biodiversity and the performance framework must be improved to prevent greenwashing, ensure science-based monitoring, and introduce robust indicators. In parallel, it is essential to maintain central management for the LIFE Programme - one of the most successful initiatives in the history of the EU budget - and to continue delivering it through a multiannual work programme. LIFE has supported thousands of innovative, high-impact projects for nature and people, fostering effective collaboration among citizens, companies, and public institutions across Europe. To effectively advance Europe's CBD objectives, it is crucial to allocate dedicated funding for biodiversity and climate action within sectoral policies—particularly in agriculture and marine/fisheries.

According to a [WWF analysis](#), Member States are channeling between €34 billion and €48 billion European subsidies annually into activities that harm nature. While these harmful subsidies span all major sectors of the economy, the bulk of them are allocated to agriculture. This misallocation of funds from the EU countries starkly contrasts with the needs identified in the EU's 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, which requires an estimated €48 billion annually to finance activities by farmers, landowners, rural and coastal communities to effectively protect and restore biodiversity. Currently, the EU and its Member States fall short of this target by more than €18 billion each year.

Investing in biodiversity not only protects Europe's natural heritage but also strengthens the resilience of our communities and ecosystems, helping to buffer the impacts of floods and droughts and providing long-term economic and social benefits. Delivering these ambitions requires a fundamental shift in how the budget is allocated, prioritizing restoration over harm and ensuring funding mechanisms truly serve nature and climate goals.

The EEB therefore calls on the Environment Council to:

- **Oppose the rollback of the EU's environmental rules**, such as the unfounded decision by the European Commission to revise the Water Framework Directive to allow more pollution from the mining sector. At a time when the EU is facing growing environmental and climate challenges, **efforts toward simplification should prioritise safeguarding existing policy frameworks** that protect our nature and the wider environment. Improved implementation could include increased digitalisation and better coordinated, resourced public authorities.
- **Step up efforts on smarter implementation of the EU's nature and water laws**. Strong enforcement and adequate resources at both national and EU levels are essential. These steps are vital for tangible results in safeguarding European biodiversity.
- **Make the national restoration plans under the Nature Restoration Regulation a guiding framework** to implement GBF Target 2. Credible national plans that are science-based, inclusive,

ambitious, empowered and effective enough to drive real restoration actions on the ground can bring nature back with all its benefits for our society.

- **Ensure nature restoration directly contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation**, especially in the upcoming European Climate Resilience Framework and the EU Water Initiative. The EU is well placed to ensure that Nature-based Solutions are at the centre of both initiatives, as the default option (see Annex I for further recommendations specifically for each of these initiatives).
- **Ensure that debates originating from the human-wildlife conflicts prioritise preventive, non-lethal and locally targeted measures** to support co-existence and recognise the need for proper species conservation.
- **Ensure adequate financing and administrative capacity for implementation**, including by ensuring that the 2028–2034 EU budget allocates at least 50% of spending to climate and environment objectives, with a dedicated sub-target of 10% for biodiversity.
- **Reinstate the LIFE funding as a standalone programme for 2028-2034**, following the Commission's proposal to discontinue it, would be essential, considering that many national authorities rely on LIFE funding to support the implementation of EU nature legislation and considering its larger economic impacts.
- **Establish a legally binding framework to guarantee a timely and socially fair phase-out of subsidies that harm biodiversity** and redirect them towards nature-based solutions that could better protect European citizens from climate impacts.

C. ETS1 – Policy Debate

Background

This review of the EU ETS comes at a critical moment for Europe's industrial transition. While some argue that weakening the ETS would protect European competitiveness, the real risk Europe faces is not carbon leakage, but **decarbonisation leakage**: investment in clean industrial production moving to regions that are providing stronger and more predictable incentives for the transition. Weakening the ETS trajectory, set by the linear reduction factor (LRF), would delay industrial decarbonization by diminishing the carbon price signal needed to drive investment in clean steel, green chemicals, circular materials and electrified industrial production. Several analyses also suggest the proposed changes to the LRF seriously jeopardize attainment of the EU's 2040 climate target and would place significant pressure on other sectors, including transport, agriculture and land use, to compensate through much faster emissions reductions.

The Commission's proposal to slow down the phase-in of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) would see between 3.3 and 3.8 billion free allowances distributed up to 2040. This would undermine the business case of industrial first movers, weaken the carbon price signal, and reduce ETS revenues available to drive industrial decarbonization and wider climate action. The previously agreed timeline for phasing out free allocation for CBAM sectors by 2034 must therefore be respected.

Until free allocation is phased out, it should be made genuinely conditional on investment in cleaner production processes, particularly in sectors outside the current scope of CBAM that are failing to invest in industrial transformation. The current Critical Chemicals Alliance initiative, for example, has demonstrated the chemical sector's intention to preserve current emission-intensive production processes, including hazardous, carbon-intensive and fossil-dependent chemicals, rather than driving the transformation Europe needs. Conditionality is therefore an essential part of the framework needed to ensure industries invest in Europe's clean industrial future. Moreover, free allocation should increasingly depend on the implementation of decarbonization investments, not merely the existence of investment plans.

Meanwhile, the proposed introduction of international credits and carbon dioxide removals (CDR) into the ETS would weaken incentives to cut emissions at source while shifting costs and risks onto public budgets. The ETS should not become a mechanism for substituting offsets or removals for industrial emissions reductions that can already be achieved through commercially available decarbonization technologies. As such, international credits and CDR should not be integrated into the ETS.

Better use can also be made of ETS revenues. At a time of fiscal constraints, these revenues are becoming an increasingly important source of funding for Europe's clean transition. As well as financing decarbonization projects within ETS sectors, the Commission should ensure ETS revenues support broader climate action and a just transition, including reskilling and upskilling workers, supporting affected communities, and strengthening resilience and adaptation.

The EEB therefore calls on the Environment Council to:

- **Maintain a linear reduction factor of 4.4% from 2031 to 2035 and at least 2.7% from 2036 onwards**, ensuring the ETS remains aligned with the EU's 2040 climate target.
- **Maintain the phase-out of free allocation by 2034 for CBAM sectors**, and ensure remaining free allocation is conditional on the implementation of industrial decarbonisation investments in Europe.
- **Reject the inclusion of carbon dioxide removals and international credits within the ETS.**
- **Ensure ETS revenues drive effective climate action**, with revenues earmarked for industrial decarbonisation, Just Transition measures, resilience and adaptation, including support for workers and affected communities.

Please also see the [joint letter sent to Ministers](#) together with **Climate Action Network Europe and Carbon Market Watch concerning ETS1**.

D. Ministerial lunch on “Birds and Habitats Directives: Balancing Nature Protection and Competitiveness

Background

Nature is the foundation of the EU's economy since it is healthy ecosystems that underpin water availability, food production, climate resilience, and supply chain stability. A narrow focus on simplification of the EU's environmental acquis that has dominated the EU's agenda risks

overlooking the underlying conditions that enable a healthy and thriving economy, particularly in a context of supply chain disruptions, resource scarcity, increasing climate-related risks, and the continued degradation of nature. In addition, regulatory stability is a condition for competitiveness. Businesses require predictable and coherent frameworks that enable investment, innovation, and long-term planning. Regulatory volatility undermines confidence, increases uncertainty, and raises system-wide costs.

The recent [survey commissioned by WWF](#) has explored how senior business leaders view the relationship between competitiveness and the transition to a low-carbon, environmentally sustainable economy; how they assess recent policy developments; and what they see as the EU's top priorities for delivering a competitive, resilient and sustainable economy. The [survey](#) findings point to a clear conclusion. Europe's business leaders overwhelmingly view sustainability and competitiveness as mutually reinforcing. While they recognise that the transition entails short-term challenges, many report that the recent wave of sustainability-related legislative revisions, presented as simplification, has had negative or mixed effects on their companies, largely because it has increased policy uncertainty (see Annex II).

Unfortunately, the EU continues a wave of legislative revisions aimed to "simplify" rules for businesses. What began as a review of Green Deal legislation has increasingly expanded to encompass long-standing environmental legal safeguards, signalling a broader reconsideration of the role of sustainability regulation in Europe's economic model.

Thus, on 30 September, the EU ambassadors approved the **Council's position on the Regulation on speeding-up environmental assessments**. The Council proposes a significant weakening of the EU's flagship nature laws, with potentially detrimental impacts on people and nature, while leaving the real causes of permitting delays, such as lack of staff, funding or coordination, untouched. Under the text, protected species could increasingly be killed or disturbed as a routine consequence of development, if developers take some mitigation measures. The Council also explicitly allows the damage and destruction of nests and eggs, putting the survival of protected species from one generation to the next at risk, and extends these free passes to forestry operations and recurring maintenance work. Moreover, the Council created a long list of "strategic" sectors, with a "public interest" label, from airports and ports to data centres and AI factories, with no clear conditions for the designation of such projects. These projects would be fast-tracked, at the expense of nature and water resilience, while experience from the Critical Raw Materials Act shows that this label pushes authorities to rush decisions with environmental and safety risks unresolved. This also risks broadening the notion of "strategic" to the point where it entirely ceases to fulfil its intended purpose. Rather than accelerating projects that are genuinely critical for the Union's energy transition, the designation would dilute already limited administrative resources and reduce the effectiveness of the acceleration regime itself.

Overall, the Regulation on speeding-up environmental assessments risks creating lasting damage to Europe's ecosystems, while delivering none of its promised benefits. Together, these proposed changes would weaken the Birds and Habitats Directives, the cornerstones of EU nature law, at their very core. They would also make it harder to detect risks to ecosystems and human health before they materialise and shift the financial burden onto citizens and local authorities. The changes would complexify and potentially slow down existing systems, generalise derogations and

heighten legal risk and uncertainty for Member States, public authorities and project developers alike. While these changes would be extremely far-reaching, they come without any impact assessment, while the stress test of these same directives is still underway.

The BHD stress test by the Commission aims to assess whether they remain relevant, proportionate, and fit to achieve their objectives in a cost-efficient manner, including identifying opportunities to reduce unnecessary administrative burden. The 2016 Fitness Check of the BHD already concluded that both directives were fit for purposes. That conclusion remains valid today. As both public and stakeholder consultation showed, the primary challenges continue to lie in implementation, financing and effective delivery. In this context, the stress test should focus on identifying remaining implementation barriers, resource needs, and examples of good practice, rather than reopening the legislation itself. While reducing unnecessary administrative burdens is a legitimate objective, an assessment framed narrowly through this lens risks overlooking the broader role of the directives in safeguarding natural capital, reducing environmental risks and supporting long-term economic resilience. It would reinforce a flawed narrative that portrays environmental and nature legislation as “red tape”, rather than recognising it as an essential safeguard and foundation for the EU’s long-term competitiveness (see Annex III with the NGO reflections on the BHD stress test as well as specific concerns with the Council position on speeding up environmental assessments).

The central challenge for EU policymakers is therefore not to weaken environmental ambition, but to improve implementation so that policies deliver effectively, consistently and predictably across Member States. This requires shifting attention from repeated legislative revisions towards stronger delivery, enforcement, and administrative capacity.

The EEB therefore calls on the Environment Council to:

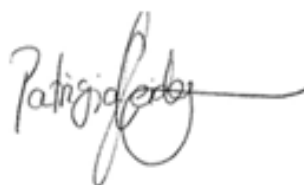
- **Stand up for the EU’s environmental assessment rules** and the laws that protect people and nature.
- **Insist on the use of the stress tests as an implementation exercise** rather than a legislative review that will most likely result in the weakening of the environmental safeguards protecting people and nature.
- **Oppose attempts to revise or weaken the Birds and Habitats Directives as well as Water Framework Directive**, including their objectives, or key legal safeguards.
- **Ensure adequate financing and administrative capacity for implementation**, including by ensuring that the 2028–2034 EU budget allocates at least 50% of spending to climate and environment objectives, with a dedicated sub-target of 10% for biodiversity.
- **Reinstate the LIFE funding as a standalone programme for 2028-2034**, following the position of the European Parliament to put earmarking for LIFE, while the Commission’s proposal is to discontinue it. Reinstating funding would be essential considering that many national authorities rely on LIFE funding to support the implementation of EU nature legislation and considering its larger economic impacts.
- **Push for stronger integration of biodiversity objectives** across the relevant EU policies.

- **Establish a legally binding framework to guarantee a timely and socially fair phase-out of subsidies that harm** biodiversity and redirect them towards nature-based solutions that could better protect European citizens from climate impacts.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick ten Brink
Secretary General



Patrizia Heidegger
Deputy Secretary General

Annex I: [Open letter: Make nature-based solutions the first line of defence against climate disasters](#) and [NGO Briefing on EU water policy at the time of climate extremes](#).

Annex II: [Results of the WWF commissioned survey](#) of 350 senior business leaders across Europe, spanning a wide range of sectors, markets, and company sizes (carried out by the independent insights and advisory firm GlobeScan).

Annex III: [NGO's initial reflections on the BHD stress test](#) and [EEB Letter to EU Ambassadors on the Regulation on speeding-up environmental assessments](#).