

# HOW WILL NATURE RESTORATION HELP FULFIL EU ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OBJECTIVES?

## Publication date:

December 2022

## Authors:

Gabrielle Aubert (IEEP), Rebecca Noebel (Ecologic Institute)



Institute for  
European  
Environmental  
Policy



**Nature restoration can deliver significant progress on key EU environmental policies – for biodiversity but also for climate mitigation and adaptation, water quality, air quality, and marine environmental status. It is important that nature restoration is integrated into other plans and has an equal policy weight to other objectives.**

Implementing restoration measures will accelerate the pace of implementation of EU laws and policies for air, climate, water, and marine. In their National Restoration Plans (NRPs), member states will need to identify synergies with the objectives and planning tools of EU environmental policy:

## BIRDS AND HABITATS DIRECTIVES

The NRL sets binding **deadlines and targets** for achieving good condition of Annex I habitats of the HD as well as of the habitats of species listed in Annexes II, IV and V of the HD and of wild birds (BD).

- The NRL requires the recreation of lost Annex I habitat area and creates **more explicit restoration obligations** for habitats outside the Natura 2000 network.
- Member states will need to identify **restoration measures and quantify areas** for terrestrial and marine habitat areas not in good condition.
- National restoration plans will need to consider and support **Natura 2000 plans and conservation measures** and the actions listed in the **Prioritized Action Framework** for funding Natura 2000 & green infrastructure.



Habay, Belgique, Photo by Coralie Meurice

## EU CLIMATE LAW AND LULUCF REGULATION

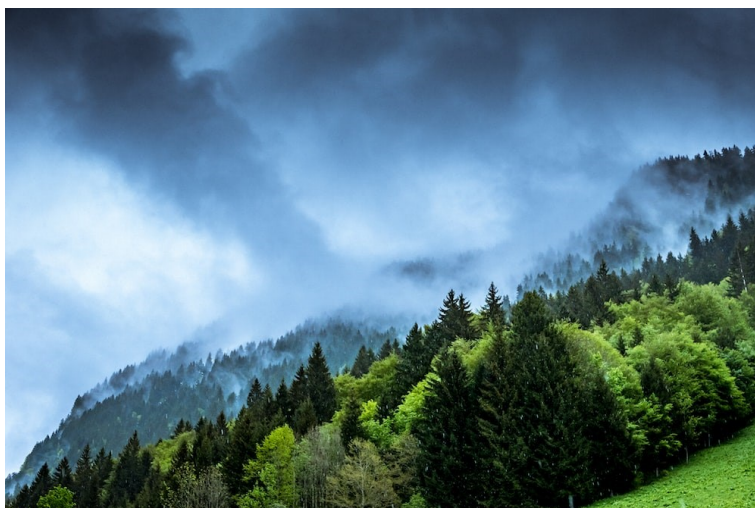
**It will be impossible for the EU to meet its climate neutrality goal set in the EU Climate Law by 2050 and the LULUCF land sink target in the LULUCF Regulation without a significant scaling up of nature restoration.** The NRL puts a strong emphasis on restoring ecosystems with a high potential for climate mitigation and will significantly scale up nature-based carbon removals.

- The EU GHG inventory of LULUCF sector emissions under the UNFCCC shows a net GHG sink of 249 million tCO<sub>2</sub>eq in 2019. Integrated scenarios estimate that **the sink could be increased to anywhere between 400 million tCO<sub>2</sub>eq and 600 million tCO<sub>2</sub>eq by 2050** [1]. Nature restoration is so far the most promising solution to live up to this potential.
- **Restoring peatland** is recognised as a key GHG mitigation measure [2]. Peatlands cover 3% of the agricultural area in the EU yet emit 25% of the annual agricultural emissions [3]. Rewetting peatland stops emissions from degraded peat, avoiding the loss of their huge carbon stocks and, under some circumstances, converts them into carbon sinks.
- National restoration plans will need to consider and work with **the National Energy and Climate Plan** and the **national long-term strategy on climate**.

## CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGY

The restoration measures adopted under the NRL will contribute to the EU's adaptation to climate change by **reducing the vulnerability of ecosystems to the impacts of climate related hazards** (such as floods, droughts, and forest fires). Restoration also enhances their natural capacity to resist these hazards and reduces impacts on carbon stocks, by preventing the release of large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

- Across Europe, enhancing floodwater retention in river catchments can decrease flood exposure by up to 70%. Under the Dutch 'Room for river' programme, restoring the floodplains along various rivers provides enhanced flood protection for 4 million people [4].
- National restoration plans will need to consider and work with the national climate adaptation strategy and disaster prevention plan.



Morzine, France, Photo by Guy Bowden

## WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD)

The restoration of freshwater Annex I habitats will contribute to reaching the WFD's objective to have all water bodies in good status or potential.

- Article 7 NRL will require Member States to **provide an inventory of barriers and identify those to be removed, along with a plan for their removal.** Barriers are one of the main reasons for rivers failing to reach good ecological status [5].
- National restoration plans will need to consider and work with the **Programmes of Measures of the River Basin Management Plans** for 2027.

## MARINE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (MSFD)

The marine restoration targets under Article 5 will contribute to the MSFD objective to achieve good environmental status in the marine environment by reducing negative impacts of fishing activities on marine ecosystems, restoring fish spawning and nursery areas, restoring seagrass meadows, and more. The NRL targets reinforce the MSFD framework and put a stronger focus on the maintenance of ecological functions.

- The NRL goes **beyond the scope of the MSFD** by targeting specific habitats for restoration, particularly those that support a wide variety of species. It will also allow for more **granular monitoring of data on marine species**, which can then be used to set specific restoration measures.
- National restoration plans will need to consider and work with the national **Marine Strategy for achieving good environmental status** and any **conservation measures under the Common Fisheries Policy.**



Chalkidiki, Greece, Photo by Benjamin L. Jones

## NATIONAL EMISSIONS CEILINGS DIRECTIVE (NECD)

The urban targets under Article 6 will contribute to the NECD's objective to reduce air pollutants to 2029 by increasing green spaces and trees in cities, with many benefits for human health.

- Air pollution is the main environmental risk factor for health in Europe – the EEA estimates that long-term exposure to fine particles was responsible for 379 000 premature deaths in the EU in 2018 [7]. Green infrastructure can effectively reduce exposure to air pollution. For example, simple hedges mixed with trees can reduce exposure to particulate matter by 50% [8].
- National restoration plans will need to consider and work with the **National Air Pollution Control Programme.**

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PREPARING NATIONAL RESTORATION PLANS?

Under the proposed Nature Restoration Law (NRL), Member States will be expected to submit Nature Restoration Plans (NRPs) to the Commission within two years of the Regulation's entry into force. The NRPs will show how Member States are planning to deliver on the targets, and how they will monitor and report on their progress. The preparation and adoption of NRPs can have the following targeted benefits:

- Restoration efforts at the national level, which are currently highly fragmented, will be **synergised**. NRPs will be key planning instruments to prioritise and implement large-scale restoration action.
- NRPs will also be key instruments to **channel financial resources to fund restoration measures**. They should provide a financial plan giving an overview of available EU, national and private funding and how to access it. It should be a systematic plan of public and private funding for restoration measures.
- NRPs will allow for **new and increased cooperation, both horizontal and vertical**.
  - **Horizontally**, transboundary member states should foster synergies between their plans.
  - **Vertically**, the plan should coordinate actions at the national, regional, and local levels by engaging relevant stakeholders in the planning process.
- The NRPs will provide **additional monitoring systems and assessments of progress** towards targets. Additional targets and baselines will be set for ecosystems for which data and monitoring mechanisms are not yet fully developed. An EU-wide methodology will be developed for assessing the conditions of ecosystems beyond the Annex I habitats of the Habitats Directive.
- The **administrative burden** generated by the preparation and adoption of the NRPs could be **minimised** by using mechanisms for monitoring and reporting under existing frameworks, such as for the Nature Directives, LULUCF Regulation, WFD and MSFD. In the plans, member states should present linkages to other EU regulations and environmental objectives, demonstrating synergies and potential joint perspectives for national and regional implementation.
- Member States will need to develop their plan using **participatory approaches** –identifying additional important actors and stakeholders that need or want to be engaged in the process
- The development of NRPs might **uncover existing structural, organisational, and financial gaps and challenges** that need to be considered in the implementation of the law.

## References

1. Böttcher, H., J. Reise, and K. Hennenberg, Exploratory Analysis of an EU Sink and Restoration Target. 2021, Oeko-Institut e.V.: Germany.
2. Hiraiishi, T., et al., 2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands. 2014, IPCC: Switzerland.
3. Greifswald Mire Centre, Peatlands in the EU. Common agricultural policy (CAP) after 2020. 2020, Greifswald Mire Centre: Germany.
4. EEA, Nature-based solutions in Europe: Policy, knowledge and practice for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. 2021, European Environment Agency: Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
5. EEA, Tracking barriers and their impacts on European river ecosystems. 2021.
6. European Commission, Pathway to a Healthy Planet for All EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'. 2021, European Commission: Brussels.
7. EEA, Air quality in Europe — 2020 report. 2020, European Environment Agency.
8. Kumar, P., K.V. Abhijith, and Y. Barwise, Implementing Green Infrastructure for Air Pollution Abatement: General Recommendations for Management and Plant Species Selection. 2019.



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor CINEA can be held responsible for them.

These policy briefs were written by IEEP and Ecologic Institute in the Think Sustainable Europe Network in response to the proposed EU nature restoration law.

