

## EU MATTERS

### *NIEL's Monthly European Environmental News*



#### **Agriculture**

##### [Farmland abandonment risk highlighted in new UK study](#)

Traditional, high-nature-value (HNV) grasslands are at risk of being abandoned by farmers in the future — in turn, risking the wildlife they support, warns a new UK study. Farmers interviewed by the researchers had weak motivations to protect grasslands, as they felt that financial incentives for conservation are low and that traditional management practices are inconvenient. More dialogue between farmers and conservationists could be part of the solution, the study suggests.

##### [Overhaul of farm policy crucial for EU to meet sustainable development goals](#)

A new study claims that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is not even delivering on its own stated objectives let alone on several of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals that the European Union holds up as its guiding principles.

#### **Biodiversity**

##### [EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy](#)

Following the evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, the European Commission has adopted the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy to improve their implementation and boost their contribution towards reaching the EU's biodiversity targets for 2020. The Action Plan focuses on four priority areas and comprises 15 actions to be carried out between now and 2019. The EU Action Plan will be presented at the conference 'An EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy' on 6 June 2017.

##### [Celebrating and protecting biodiversity](#)

Biodiversity plays a key role in the functioning of ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services essential for human well-being. However, Europe's biodiversity continues to be eroded, and the EU target of halting biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services by 2020 remains a serious challenge.

#### **Climate Change**

##### [The economic impact of climate change on European agriculture](#)

A new study has estimated how changes to climate might affect the value of European farmland. Based on data for over 41 000 farms, the results suggest that their economic value could drop by up to 32%, depending on the climate scenario considered. Farms in southern Europe are particularly sensitive to climate change and could suffer value losses of up to 9% per 1 °C rise. The researchers say policy, on water and land use, for example, will be crucial to help farmers adapt to climate change and mitigate economic losses.

##### [Environmental hazards due to climate change set to increase in Europe – with regional differences](#)

Researchers have modelled the exposure to multiple hazards across different regions of Europe in relation to heat, cold, drought, wildfire, flooding and wind. The study indicated that, over the next century, environmental hazards are likely to increase, particularly along coastlines and on floodplains, and that south-western Europe is likely to be the worst-hit region.

##### [Application of EU's Emissions Trading System rules improving](#)

Application of the rules that underpin the European Union's Emissions Trading System is improving, with more complete data being reported by EU Member States, according to a new assessment published by the European Environment Agency. However, improvements are still needed in monitoring and reporting, both by operators and countries.



**Brexit:** Updates on NIEL's EU Policy work after the UK Referendum decision can be found [here](#).

## Energy

### [Which new low-carbon technologies can be developed and commercialised quickly?](#)

A new study provides clues as to which innovative low-carbon technologies will successfully get onto the market quickly. The historical analysis of 16 energy technologies — from steam engines to wind power — found that the average length of a product's 'formative phase' is 22 years. This important period of innovation in a technology's development is shorter for products which do not need extensive new infrastructure or changes to user behaviour. The findings could help policymakers identify new technologies that can be deployed more rapidly to meet short-term environmental targets.

## Freshwater

### [Nature-based flood management needs joined-up policy approach to manage benefits and trade-offs](#)

Natural water-retention measures, which 'keep the rain where it falls', have great potential to be used as part of flood-risk management plans. But their benefits for downstream urban areas can bring costs to the upstream agricultural areas where they are installed, a recent analysis explains. The researchers behind this analysis suggest that we need new and/or improved policies and institutions to oversee the trade-offs and benefits for agriculture and flood management, and a better scientific understanding of the measures' likely impact on urban flood risk.

## Marine

### [Environmental DNA survey technique for deepwater fish can complement trawl surveys](#)

A survey of deepwater fisheries off the coast of Greenland which used traces of fish DNA has produced similar results to trawl surveys and fishing catches. The 'environmental DNA' (eDNA) technique can therefore complement trawl data, the researchers say. It may be particularly useful for surveying large species — which can often avoid bottom trawls — or cryptic species<sup>1</sup> in inaccessible ocean areas.

### [More European sites meet excellent bathing water quality standards than ever before](#)

More than 85% of bathing water sites monitored across Europe in 2016 met the most stringent 'excellent' quality standards — meaning they were mostly free from pollutants harmful to human health and the environment, according to the annual bathing water quality report.

### [Man-made chemicals present in the Atlantic](#)

A 'health check' of the Atlantic Ocean by the marine research ship Celtic Explorer has found an increased presence of man-made chemicals in the deeper ocean over a 20-year period. The team of international scientists on-board the ship took samples on a 3,200km transect of the Atlantic between Newfoundland, Canada, and Galway, Ireland, over a four-week period. The team found evidence of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) — even though they have been phased out since 1994

## Waste

### [Some EU countries obstructing measures that would bring the EU closer to a circular economy are revealed](#)

NGOs led by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Friends of the Earth Europe and Zero Waste Europe asked member states whether they will support proposals to boost EU waste policy in the negotiations taking place in Brussels in the coming weeks. Their investigation claims that the ambitious reform of EU waste laws is under attack and if a regressive position is to prevail in the negotiations, plans to accelerate the transition to a circular economy in the coming years will most likely stall.

### [Policy Briefing: Circular economy measures to keep plastics and their value in the economy, avoid waste and reduce marine litter](#)

We live in the plastic age (the "plasticene"), producing over 300 million tonnes (mt) of plastic every year globally, 5-15 mt of which flow into already polluted oceans. Plastic remains a key material in the global economy, but low rates of collection, reuse and recycling, emissions of microplastic from product wear and tear, and often insufficient disposal measures are leading to far-reaching environmental, health, social and economic impacts.



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