



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

Brussels, 15 May 2024

Subject: Support an ambitious first EU Soil Law

Dear Minister,

I write to you on behalf of PAN Europe in view of the **ongoing negotiations on the Commission's proposal for a Soil Monitoring Law**. Given the significant shortcomings of the Commission's proposal, and the highly concerning weak position adopted by the Parliament on 10 April, **we would like to ask you to support an ambitious position, which can effectively lay the ground for healthy soils in Europe by 2050.**

Approximately 60% to 70% of European soils are in bad condition¹, refraining them from providing essential ecosystems. Soils are estimated to harbour about 59% of Earth's species. For example, 90% of fungi, 85% of plants and 50% of bacteria are living in soils². Healthy soil ecosystems provide a wide variety of functions central to human health, a healthy environment and a healthy economy: biodiversity, nutrient cycling, sustainable plant production, natural pest control, good water quality, water and carbon storage and erosion management. While the importance of larger soil organisms, such as earthworms, has already been known longer, an increasing amount of data shows the essential roles of the soil microbiome. Fungi, bacteria and plants form complex, very specific interactions. Organisms in the root zone of the plant act like an external 'gut' to plants, making nutrients available, facilitating their uptake and fighting off pathogens³. **Healthy, lively soils are the foundation of resilient and sustainable farming, and hence, for providing farmers with a long-term perspective.** In addressing climate change, soils are one of our main allies. Healthy soils can store carbon, and are an essential buffer against intense rainfall, floods and droughts. Soil degradation is one of the major factors of compromised water quality, leading to significant costs. Soil degradation leads to major costs, which will primarily impact farmers and society, and which far outweigh the costs of needed actions⁴.

A vast amount of scientific evidence shows that the EU and member states need to urgently and ambitiously protect soils. Therefore, we deeply regret that the current proposal and Parliament's position don't take on legally binding targets or mandatory plans. An important shortcoming is that the Commission's proposal hasn't adequately taken on the monitoring and assessment of pesticides, and the need for the development of quality thresholds. Moreover, already weak provisions on sustainable soil management have been deleted in the Parliament's position, instead of strengthened.

¹ [EU Soil Strategy](#)

² [Anthony et al. 2023 - Enumerating soil biodiversity](#)

³ [Ramírez-Puebla et al. 2013 - Gut and Root Microbiota Commonalities](#)

⁴ [Soil erosion costs European farmers €1.25 billion a year, EU Soil Strategy for 2030: Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate](#)

Scientists underline that agro-chemical diffuse soil pollution is a major soil threat, and poses risks to the environment, soil health (soil macrofauna and microbiome), biodiversity and human health⁵. **For example, research shows that pesticides have significant detrimental non-target effects on soil biodiversity, degrading a significant part of global biodiversity and threatening ecosystem health**⁶. The European Court of Auditors (ECA) underlined that member states have not been targeting funding towards areas with the most urgent soil problems. The ECA also underlined that the current conditions which farmers have to meet within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, don't go far enough to effectively protect soil health⁷. In that background, it is incomprehensible that the Soil Law proposal and Parliament's position show an overall lack of ambition, including regarding sustainable soil management. Therefore, the Soil Monitoring Law should:

- **at least include the monitoring and assessment of more hazardous pesticides, banned pesticides and other pesticides indicated as a priority based on a scientifically robust prioritisation indicator.** An example of a recently developed prioritisation indicator is the occurrence and hazard-based indicator described by Silva et al. (2023)⁸, which was developed to also inform policy decisions. Monitoring should include residues, metabolites, co-formulants and by-products.
- include clear and **binding provisions on sustainable soil management**, to ensure effective progress towards healthy soils, which is and should be the objective of the Directive. It is essential to preserve Article 10, with its mandatory character, and include a clear roadmap and timeline for implementing soil management practices.
- ensure **inclusion and application of the Polluter Pays Principle**, regarding both contaminated sites and diffuse pollution.

In addition, I also provide you with our **feedback to the Commission's consultation** at the end of 2023, as well as with the recent **joint NGO briefing on the Soil Monitoring Law**, which further detail and clarify important recommendations.

By supporting an ambitious first EU Soil Law, you recognize the far-reaching importance of soil health for current and future generations.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Kristine De Schamphelaere, Policy Officer Agriculture, PAN Europe

⁵ [Stolte et al. 2016 - Soil Threats in Europe: Status, Methods, Drivers and Effects on Ecosystem Services](#), [Silva et al. 2023 - Pesticide residues with hazard classifications relevant to non-target species including humans are omnipresent in the environment and farmer residences](#), [Silva et al. 2019 - Pesticide residues in European agricultural soils - A hidden reality unfolded](#), [Geissen et al. 2021 - Healthy soils are the foundation of resilient and sustainable farming, which depends on lively soils, and hence, for providing farmers with a long-term perspective](#)

⁶ [Beaumelle et al. 2023 - Pesticide effects on soil fauna communities](#), [Gunstone et al. 2021 - Pesticides and Soil Invertebrates: A Hazard Assessment](#)

⁷ [ECA. 2023 - Soil protection: EU must roll up its sleeves](#)

⁸ [Silva et al. 2023 - Pesticide residues with hazard classifications relevant to non-target species including humans are omnipresent in the environment and farmer residences](#)