



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

Brussels, 8 April 2024

Subject: Support the first EU Soil Law

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We are writing to you in view of the Plenary vote on the Soil Monitoring Law on 10 April. **Although we strongly regret the lack of binding targets, mandatory plans and very weak provisions regarding soil management, we would like to ask you to support the first EU Soil Law and the compromise amendments reached in the Environment Committee. Your vote will be essential in taking a first step towards healthy soils in Europe.**

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. Healthy 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 actions³.

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 compromise amendments don't take on legally binding targets or mandatory plans, and that the provisions on sustainable soil management are extremely weak and non-binding. Specifically, a major shortcoming is that the proposal and amendments put forward haven't adequately taken on the monitoring of pesticides and the lack of quality thresholds.

¹ [EU Soil Strategy](#)

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

³ [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, biodiversity and human health⁴. **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 health⁵.** 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 health⁶. In that background, it is incomprehensible that the Soil Law proposal or (compromise) amendments show an overall severe lack of ambition, including regarding sustainable soil management.

Despite the significant shortcomings and lack of ambition, we believe it is essential to support the proposal and negotiated compromise amendments in the Environment Committee, as a first step towards better protection of soils in the EU. We want to ask you to oppose any amendments rejecting the Directive, or further weakening the, already significantly too weak, ENVI compromise amendments. **By supporting the first EU Soil Law, and the outcome of the negotiation process, 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 Schampelaere, Policy Officer Agriculture, PAN Europe

⁴ [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](#)

⁵ [Beaumelle et al. 2023 - Pesticide effects on soil fauna communities](#), [Gunstone et al. 2021 - Pesticides and Soil Invertebrates: A Hazard Assessment](#)

⁶ [ECA, 2023 - Soil protection: EU must roll up its sleeves](#)