

To: Mr. Pascal Canfin. President of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, of the European Parliament

CC: Mr. Virginijus Sinkevicius (Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries)

Ms. Florika Fink-Hooijer (Director General DG ENV)

Mr. Peter Liese (Political Group Coordinator for the EPP)

Ms. Jytte Guteland (Political Group Coordinator for the S&D)

Mr. Nils Torvalds (Political Group Coordinator for Renew)

Ms. Silvia Sardone (Political Group Coordinator for ID)

Mr. Bas Eickhout (Political Group Coordinator for the Greens/EFA)

Mr. Alexandr Vondra (Political Group Coordinator for the ECR)

Ms. Silvia Modig (Political Group Coordinator for GUE/NGL)

Brussels, April, 8th 2022

N. Ref.: CSO coalition committed to defending Doñana against the recent threats on its integrity and survival

Dear Mr. Canfin,

As a coalition of 30 CSOs we contact you about a new, serious and imminent threat to the Doñana National Park, one of the most iconic protected areas in Europe. This threat not only affects the conservation of key habitats in Spain, but also poses additional pressure on the survival of hundreds of thousands of birds that use this wetland area to breed, winter and rest on their migratory path to and from Africa.

Via this letter, we invite the European Parliament to make use of its powers and denounce publicly the severe attack on this wetland and the threats it poses to the implementation of key EU environmental laws and policies.

Over the past decades, the main threat to Doñana has been the overexploitation of the aquifer that feeds the rivers and marshes shaping the wetland. Intensive agriculture has dramatically contributed to the decrease of the water in Doñana. An estimated 1,000 illegal wells and 3,000 hectares of illegal farms are contributing to unsustainable water use. Unfortunately, actions for addressing this problem have not been effective so far.

In this context, since the beginning of 2022, the People's Party with the support of Vox and Ciudadanos in the Andalusian Parliament have been promoting a

legislative proposal¹, presented as a solution to several issues concerning access to water by local farmers. In reality, this law proposal intends to repeal the main measures of the current management plan². If approved, an area up to 1,900 ha of illegal crops (mainly strawberries in greenhouses), which are currently exploiting the aquifer in the buffer zone around the Doñana National Park, will be legalised. This will mean the amnesty of 85% of the current illegal crop area in that part of the basin.

On the 9th of February 2022, the Andalusian Parliament voted in favour of going ahead with the legislative procedure, ignoring the serious environmental consequences that it will have on Doñana's Outstanding Universal Values recognized by UNESCO, as well as the deep social and institutional breach that this initiative has already brought to this territory. We consider that it is unacceptable and deeply concerning that all the voices against this law proposal have been ignored by the promoters. Alerts from UNESCO, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, IUCN, the European Commission, the Spanish Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, the Guadalquivir River Basin Authority, researchers, civil society organisations, european retailers³ and even part of the farmers around Doñana has been completely obviated.

It is worth mentioning that the European Court of Justice has recognised that the "*excessive extraction of groundwater*" in the Doñana Natural Area violates the EU law, in particular the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive⁴. The ECJ has also pointed out Spain's inaction to effectively address the negative impacts of water over abstraction up to date, and has requested the authorities to tackle these issues urgently.

If this legislative proposal is adopted, other large wetlands in Spain, such as Delta del Ebro, Delta del Llobregat, as the Mar Menor, Mar de Campos, Laguna de Antela and La Janda, might face similar threats.

This coalition of 29 CSOs will remain extremely vigilant for the coming months about the future of Doñana. We invite the European parliament to join us in this endeavour and denounce the severe attack on this unique wetland which might constitute a negative precedent for the implementation of the EU environmental acquis.

¹ The legislative proposal, titled "*Improvement of the management of irrigated areas in the county of Huelva, in the municipalities of Almonte, Bonares, Lucena del Puerto, Moguer and Rociana del Condado (Huelva)*" can be found here: https://wwfes.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/2201_texto_propuesta_de_ley_modificacion_peocfd_y_ley_forestal.pdf

² Plan Especial de Ordenación de las Zonas de Regadío, ubicadas al Norte de la Corona Forestal de Doñana (the Special Management Plan for the Irrigation Zones Located to the North of the Forest Crown of Doñana) (Decree 178/2014. BOJA n°254 of 30/12/2014)

³ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.wwf.es/informate/actualidad/?60301/Los-principales-supermercados-europeos-piden-al-Presidente-Juan-Manuel-Moreno-Bonilla-que-abandone-el-plan-para-legalizar-el-regadio-ilegal-en-Donana&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1648039021071743&usg=AOvVaw2ZoM1KkiNWKqRyNpnjqHM3>

⁴ The sentence of the European Court of Justice "Sentencia en el asunto C-559/19 Comisión/España (Deterioro del Espacio Natural de Doñana)" can be found here: <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2021-06/cp210113es.pdf>

Yours sincerely and in the name of the following CSOs:

(For further correspondence, please contact Ester Asin, Director of the WWF EPO, easin@wwf.eu)

WWF European Policy Office

European Angles Alliance (EAA)

European Rivers network (ERN)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Wetlands International Europe

Coalition for Rivers, Czech Republic

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, UK

Polish Society for Protection of Birds (OTOP/BirdLife Poland)

Society of Wetland Scientists Europe chapter

Centro Ibérico de Restauración Fluvial, Spain

Fundación Global Nature, Spain

BirdWatch Ireland

CIRF - Centro Italiano per la Riquilificazione Fluviale (Italian Centre for River Restoration)

Plataforma Ciudadana per el Riu Serpis, Spain

Society for the Protection of Prespa

Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua

Vogelbescherming Nederland

Czech Society for Ornithology

Albanian Ornithological Society - AOS

Center for Protection and Research of Birds - BirdLife Montenegro

Natuurpunt, Belgium

Lipu-BirdLife Italy



BirdLife Denmark

BirdLife Cyprus

Riverwatch

Biom Association

Asociación Española de Operadores Públicos de Abastecimiento y Saneamiento

Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Athropos

Rewilding Europe

Euro Nature Foundation