EU MATTERS
NIEL's Monthly European Environmental News

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Agriculture

[Soil NOx emissions can now be tracked with chemical-signature method](#)

A recent study demonstrates, for the first time, a method for tracking nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions and applies it specifically to soils. The 'chemical fingerprinting' method allows soil NOx to be distinguished from other sources of NOx, such as vehicles and power plants. It, therefore, paves the way for a more precise understanding of agriculture's contribution particularly to air pollution, climate change, ecosystems and environmental damage.

Air Quality

[Most EU governments failed to file air pollution plans by April deadline](#)

EU officials are still waiting to receive crucial air pollution reduction programmes from fourteen EU governments, including France, Germany, Poland and Spain. National governments were supposed to detail how they planned to reduce emissions of harmful air pollution in 'National Air Pollution Control Programmes', which should have been sent to the European Commission this month. However, only 13 of the EU's 28 Member States had filed their plans by the end of April.

Biodiversity

[An overwhelming majority of Europeans are concerned about the loss of biodiversity and support stronger EU action to protect nature](#)

In an overwhelming consensus, 96 % of the more than 27.000 interviewed citizens said that we have a responsibility to protect nature and that this is also essential for tackling climate change. The Eurobarometer survey reveals awareness is generally increasing on the meaning of biodiversity, its importance, threats and measures to protect it. Citizens' opinions are in line with the goals of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 that aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem service, and with the objectives of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, that form the backbone of the EU's policy to protect nature.

[EU must prioritise biodiversity and climate change, as UN sounds alarm](#)

The EU must place biodiversity at the top of its agenda, together with efforts to radically cut carbon emissions, the President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) said on 7 May in response to a UN report that warns that "our life-support system" – the natural world – is at ever-greater risk, with one million species facing extinction. The CoR President described the report as an "emergency call to all levels of government" to work together.

[World Bee Day: what is the EU doing to help pollinators?](#)

World Bee Day on 20th May is a recognition of the vital role wild bees play in our ecosystems to keep the rich diversity of our flowers blooming and to produce the fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds we eat every day. It is also a celebration of beekeeping, honeybees and honey. More than two-thirds of the world's leading types of crops rely to some extent on animal pollination, mostly by bees but also by hoverflies, moths and butterflies and other insects.

Circular Economy

[Preventing food waste, promoting Circular Economy: Commission adopts common methodology to measure food waste across the EU](#)

Each year around 20% of food produced in the EU is lost or wasted, causing unacceptable social, environmental and economic harm. EU is committed to solving this problem and putting its food system onto

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

a sustainable path. To be able to take effective action, we need more data on food waste than we currently have.

[European cities have circular plans for plastic](#)
The idea of a circular economy for plastic waste is taking shape in three European cities, including two ICLEI Members. Citizens in these municipalities in Spain, the Netherlands and Romania will be the first to benefit from real improvements in waste collection, transport, sorting and recycling.

[EU's Circular Economy Package in a nutshell](#)
Video: European packaging legislation easily explained
The EU's Circular Economy Package, including the revised packaging legislation, has introduced a fundamental shift in policy. It is a crucial starting point for a successful transition to a circular economy, in which the value of products, materials, and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible. The legislation encourages an entire re-think on the use of packaging materials that are not recycled or very difficult to recycle. Packaging strategies will need to be reassessed to be acceptable for the market going forward.

Climate Action
[Youth spell out five demands to tackle climate breakdown](#)
Youth striking for climate action do not need standing ovations from politicians. They need action. And they are determined to continue until politicians start acting decisively. Climate change is threatening the future of younger generations, but decision makers are still not taking it seriously. To get them started, youth organisations have joined forces with partners across Europe to come up with a set of five demands for how to solve the crisis.

[Use 25% of budget on climate change, urge EU states](#)
A group of EU member states are demanding to set aside 25 percent of the next EU budget to tackle climate change. The proposal, floated at a gathering of EU heads of state and government in Romania on 9 May, comes amid a separate report showing how people living in the EU over-consume resources. It also follows wide-spread climate protests led by Swedish teenager and climate activist Greta Thunberg and recent United Nation revelations that one million species of animals and plants face extinction.

[Report reveals compelling evidence of the effectiveness of community-led responses to climate and ecological breakdown](#)
ECOLISE has published a new scientific report that provides powerful evidence of the critical role of local community-led initiatives in bringing effective solutions to the global threats of climate and ecological breakdown. 'The First Status Report on Community-Led Action on Sustainability and Climate Change in Europe' draws together data from multiple sources, providing a comprehensive state-of-the-art of current knowledge regarding community-led initiatives (CLIs) across Europe.

[European stakeholders call for immediate action in face of climate emergency](#)
In an unprecedented Climate Action Call a broad coalition is urging European leaders to take decisive action to respond to the climate emergency. Hundreds of European cities, regions, businesses, youth and faith groups and civil society organisations working on climate, human rights, litigation, mobilization, sports and health call upon leaders to profoundly alter the way we run our societies and economies to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C.

Energy
[Small-scale solar and decentralised clean energy solutions' full potential must be realised to deliver EU 2050 climate targets](#)
Small is Beautiful coalition calls for decentralised clean energy solutions to be further explored for a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. Following a successful outcome for the Small is Beautiful campaign, safeguarding priority dispatch for small-scale renewable installations in the EU's new electricity market design directive

and regulation, the Small is Beautiful coalition will now work to promote the benefits of decentralised clean energy solutions' contribution towards the EU 2050 climate strategy.

Academic: Gas storage has 'big potential' in Europe's low-carbon future
Boasting 1,200 terawatt hours (TWh) of existing capacity, gas storage sites can be a formidable asset for Europe in the transition to a low-carbon economy, providing much-needed flexibility to a future energy system where gas and electricity will be more closely integrated says academic.

The evolving role of gas storage in Europe
With the declining price of gas, there are fewer incentives to replenish storage sites in the summer when prices are low. Departing from its usual supply security role, gas storage is vying for a central position in Europe's vision of a hybrid energy system combining renewable electricity and low-carbon gases like hydrogen. But getting there won't be a smooth run and regulators are watching closely.

Environmental Governance
'We can really talk about a green wave'
Projections following the EU election point to success for green candidates.. Jeremy Wates, EEB Secretary General said: "The big story of the 2019 European elections is the substantial increase in the green vote. Environmental issues have had a more central role this year than in any previous European election. A clear trend is emerging of success for parties calling for greater European action on climate and environmental issues. In several countries, for example Germany and Ireland, where the Greens have greatly exceeded expectations, we can really talk about a green wave".

Freshwater
The future of EU rivers: New paper exposes business lobbies' wish list of destruction
Unsustainable industries, including industrial agriculture, hydropower, and coal mining, are lobbying for devastating changes to the EU water law – the Water Framework Directive (WFD). A new paper shows that, if ever put into effect, such changes would give these sectors the green light to undertake even more destructive activities, potentially causing havoc on our rivers and lakes. But, far from obliging these sectors to clean up their act, some Member States have compiled a strikingly similar wish list, raising serious questions as to where their true interests lie.

Marine
Contamination of European seas continues despite some positive progress
There is a shared vision to achieve clean, non toxic seas but their contamination with synthetic substances as well as heavy metals continues to be a large-scale problem in Europe. According to a new European Environment Agency (EEA) report, between 75 and 96 % of the assessed area of Europe's regional seas have a contamination problem.

More coordinated legislation needed to ensure the Good Environmental Status of European seas
A range of legislation, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive(MSFD), is designed to ensure the 'Good Environmental Status' (GES) of EU seas by 2020. Researchers have assessed the MSFD in relation to existing maritime policies, concluding that coordination between directives is important to achieve GES.

Plastics
Where microplastics come from … and where they end up.
Look almost anywhere — in your food, in your water, in your body — and you're likely to find microplastics. These tiny particles, ranging in size from microscopic to 5 millimeters long, are infused in cosmetics and fertilizers. They're released unintentionally when we wash clothes made from polyester and nylon, or when the rubber hits the road as we're driving. And they are produced when plastic products like bottles or packaging break down into smaller and smaller pieces.

Northern Ireland environment link

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