

Environmental News, Research & Analysis (ENRA)

March 2022

Agriculture/ Food

[Designing environmental regulation of agricultural imports: Options and considerations for the UK](#)

The UK is developing an ambitious agri-food strategy based on a liberalised approach to trade policy tempered with safeguarding important standards. This Think Piece commissioned by WWF UK examines the potential for designing Core Environmental Standards to agri-food products, including those imported to the UK, and aims to offer new impetus and some practical ideas to bring environmental standards into UK trade policy.

[Farm to Fork: EU increases the availability of biological pesticides](#)

As part of the EU's transition to sustainable food systems and the work to reduce the use of chemical pesticides under the Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU has taken another important step to ensure access to biological plant protection products for use in fields across member states.

[Building robust and coherent soil protection by 2050](#)

The new EU Soil strategy offers a policy framework to achieve good soil health in Europe by 2050. To reach this goal, there is a strong need to ensure an effective legal framework for soils coherent with other key EU policies such as the proposal for a nature restoration law, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Land Use Land Use Change and Forestry regulation.

Air Quality

[Emissions from road traffic and domestic heating behind breaches of EU air quality standards](#)

Breaches of EU air quality limits for nitrogen dioxide across Europe were predominantly due to road traffic, while domestic heating lay behind the majority of exceedances for particulate matter, according to a European Environment Agency (EEA) assessment on air quality plans.

Biodiversity

[Projected extinctions due to invasive species may threaten ecological diversity](#)

Invasive alien species are expected to contribute to significant numbers of global extinctions in the coming decades. This study assesses vulnerable bird and mammal species according to their contribution to global biological diversity and considers the consequences of projected species loss.

Circular Economy/ Waste

[Circular business models/ smarter design can reduce environment and climate impacts from textiles](#)

Textile consumption in Europe has on average the fourth highest impacts on the environment and climate, following consumption of food, housing and mobility. Ahead of the expected EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles, the European Environment Agency published two briefings that look at measures to reduce those impacts, including on resource use, greenhouse gas emissions and microplastic pollution.

Climate Action

[Clarion call from IPCC to accelerate efforts to adapt, build resilience to climate risks and slash emissions](#)

The latest UN report outlines the reality of current and future climate impacts and risks - and how much is still within our power to change, if we act now. World leaders must heed the alarm bells and deliver on their climate promises, said WWF as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its new report with the starkest warning yet on the catastrophic effects of climate change on human society and the natural world.

[WWF statement: Nature-based Solutions Definition Agreed at UNEA](#)

At the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) governments formally agreed a definition of nature-based solutions, and recognised the important role they can play in the global response to climate change. This is the first time that the concept has been discussed and agreed by states in a multilateral forum. At the recent COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, the role of nature in achieving the Paris Agreement's temperature goal was recognised, but the concept of 'nature-based solutions' was removed from the final text.

[Carbon farming: EU ministers find the devil in the details](#)

While France's Julien Denormandie lauded member states' enthusiasm on low-carbon agriculture, the informal meeting of EU agriculture ministers in Strasbourg revealed tricky technical questions on the matter that still lie ahead. Despite national advances, there is currently no European framework for recognising and promoting carbon farming.

[Economic losses from weather and climate-related extremes in Europe reached around half a trillion euros over past 40 years](#)

Extreme weather events like storms, heatwaves and flooding accounted for economic losses of around half a trillion euros over the past 40 years and led to between 85 000 and 145 000 human fatalities across Europe. Less than one-third of these losses were insured, according to a European Environment Agency analysis of economic losses and fatalities from weather and climate-related events.

Energy

[Oil firms' climate claims are greenwashing, study concludes](#)

Accusations of greenwashing against major oil companies that claim to be in transition to clean energy are well-founded, according to the most comprehensive study to date. EURACTIV's media partner, The Guardian, reports. The research, published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, examined the records of ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and BP, which together are responsible for more than 10% of global carbon emissions since 1965. Data over the 12 years up to 2020 and concluded the company claims do not align with their actions, which include increasing rather than decreasing exploration.

[The comfort zone: green heat is effective and convenient](#)

Good news: renewable heating can be a convenient way to do good by yourself as well as the planet. Latest analysis by Coolproducts shows that the switch to heat pumps is keeping 85% users well within their comfort zones - physically, financially and environmentally.

[Ensuring the effective integration of hydrogen within the EU's energy system](#)

In December 2021, the European Commission published the Hydrogen and Decarbonised Gas Market Package with the aim to decarbonise the EU gas market by facilitating the uptake of renewable and low-carbon gases, including hydrogen, and to ensure energy security for EU citizens. One of the main aims of the new legislative proposals is to establish a market for hydrogen, create the right environment for investment, and enable the development of dedicated infrastructure.

Freshwater/ Water

[Wetland action to benefit both people and nature](#)

"Wetlands Action for People and Nature" – that was the theme for World Wetlands Day this year, focusing on how to invest our human resources into ensuring the world's wetlands are protected from further loss and restored where they are currently degraded. Best available data suggests that, globally, natural wetlands declined by 35% on average from 1970 to 2015 and that threats to freshwater systems have resulted in, on average, an 84% decline in freshwater vertebrate populations between 1970 and 2016. Despite these gloomy statistics, there are clear signs that freshwater biodiversity issues are finally given the key focus within global development and conservation agendas that they had been previously denied.

Green Recovery

[Improving access to urban green spaces to reduce health inequalities](#)

The associations between the state of the environment and human health are profound and well-documented. However, it is clear from a number of studies that access to green spaces is not equitable. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vital importance of green space in cities for the well-being of residents, as citizens flocked to urban parks for their mental and physical health during the period of social restrictions (IEEP, 2020).

Marine

[World-First Map Exposes Growing Dangers Along Whale Superhighways](#)

A new global report by WWF and the marine mammal science community calls for urgent action to safeguard whales amid mounting threats along their migratory routes. A new report from WWF and partners provides the first truly comprehensive look at whale migrations and the threats they face across all oceans, highlighting how the impacts from industrial fishing, ship strikes, pollution, habitat loss, and climate change are creating a hazardous and sometimes fatal obstacle course for the species. Protecting Blue Corridors, released by WWF, has for the first time, visualised the satellite tracks of 845 migratory whales worldwide. The report outlines how whales are encountering multiple and growing threats in their critical ocean habitats – areas where they feed, mate, give birth, and nurse their young – and along their migration superhighways, or ‘blue corridors’.

Plastics

[The Global “Plastic Flood” Reaches the Arctic](#)

Even the High North can’t escape the global threat of plastic pollution. An international study just released by the Alfred Wegener Institute shows, the flood of plastic has reached all spheres of the Arctic: large quantities of plastic - transported by rivers, the air and shipping can now be found in the Arctic Ocean. High concentrations of microplastic can be found in the water, on the seafloor, remote beaches, in rivers, and even in ice and snow. The plastic is not only a burden for ecosystems; it could also worsen climate change.

[Treated Plastic Waste Good at Grabbing Carbon Dioxide](#)

Here’s another thing to do with that mountain of used plastic: make it soak up excess carbon dioxide. What seems like a win-win for a pair of pressing environmental problems describes a Rice University lab’s newly discovered chemical technique to turn waste plastic into an effective carbon dioxide (CO₂) sorbent for industry.

Transport

[Electric transport: study suggests that battery-swapping technology may be the best solution](#)

One problem posed by plug-in electric vehicles is that battery charge is often not sufficient for driving long distances. Fast charging and increased range – the distance that the vehicle can run on a single battery charge – have, therefore, been given much attention.

[The way ahead for a greener Europe](#)

Road transport operators are at the core of the EU’s green transformation. Fully aware of their responsibility, they are committed to decarbonise. However, technologies for zero-emissions alternatively fuelled heavy-duty vehicles and related infrastructure are still in their infancy.

[Advanced biofuels can replace used cooking oil in aviation, industry says](#)

Pressure is growing on EU lawmakers to ensure agricultural and waste residues are legally required in the production of green jet fuel to prevent a reliance on imported used cooking oil.