

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

NIEL's monthly roundup of the latest international research information and policy analysis relevant to Northern Ireland.



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*Sustainable
Development*



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Woodland/Forestry

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Agriculture

[Securing greater environmental and climate performance from EU agricultural funds](#)

Moving towards agricultural systems that are sustainable and resilient is in the long-term interest of land managers as well as wider society. Although the 2023-27 CAP has adopted a new performance-based delivery model, initial evidence suggests that the overall environmental and climate ambition of Member States' CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) has not increased as much as is necessary to meet the goals and targets set out in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies or climate-related legislation. There are a range of reasons for this. This briefing examines some of the reasons for the failure to embed a transition to more sustainable farming practices more fully within the CSPs and explores how to increase their ambition going forward.



Air Quality

[Commission welcomes provisional agreement for cleaner air in the EU](#)

The Commission welcomes the provisional political agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the revised Ambient Air Quality Directive. Once adopted, the new law will set 2030 EU air quality standards aligned more closely with the WHO global air quality guidelines. This is an important step to better protect our health and move forward on the path to zero pollution in our environment by 2050.



Biodiversity

[New biodiversity policies demanded for EU's green, prosperous growth](#)

Ambitious new nature and biodiversity policies are needed, say environmental stakeholders. Activists are calling for the European Commission's proposed Nature Restoration Law to set strong biodiversity targets, just as the Green Deal set robust climate targets.



Circular Economy

[Better links between waste management, circular economy and climate change mitigation measures can boost greenhouse gas emission reductions](#)

Recycling, repair, re-use or reducing material consumption through circular business models can provide important additional reductions in greenhouse gas emissions helping to boost Europe's climate change mitigation efforts, according to a European Environment Agency (EEA) briefing.

[Deal on strengthening consumers' right to repair](#)

EU negotiators reach a provisional deal on a bill that aims to reduce waste and bolster the repair sector by making product repairs more accessible and cost-effective.

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- Measures to boost repair after the legal guarantee has expired
- Incentives to use products for longer, such as repair vouchers and funds
- Online platforms will help consumers find local repair and refurbished goods shops



Climate Action

[Gamechangers: the sports stars speaking out on the climate](#)

From betting to bling, sport can appear a last haven of rampant unsustainability. But now athletes are sticking their heads above the podium to speak out on everything from global travel to greenwashing

[Beyond borders: how can the EU become a leader in consumption-based emissions reduction?](#)

The EU has made strides in its quest to curb domestic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by setting clear goals and binding targets in legislation packages such as Fit for 55 aiming to reduce GHG by 55% by 2030. The EU also published on 6 February a communication on its future Climate targets for 2040, calling for a 90% net GHG emissions reduction compared to 1990 levels. To remain a leader in effective climate policy, the EU, however also needs to address emissions generated abroad resulting from the EU's appetite for imported goods in the same way.

[Commission sets out how to sustainably capture, store & use carbon to reach climate neutrality by 2050](#)

The EU is committed to reaching 'net zero' CO₂ emissions by 2050. While the major part of this effort will come from reducing current emissions levels in the coming years, we will also need technologies that can capture CO₂ or remove it directly from the atmosphere and then store or utilise it.

[Carbon Capture and Storage: Dos and Dont's](#)

The hype around carbon capture and storage is not showing signs of stopping. But limited time and money mean we need climate action now. Here are the dos and don'ts of this technique that, if not used as a last resort, can simply be another mask for inaction

[New LIFE Environment and Climate Strategic Projects - Project short summaries](#)

MPA-LIFE-IRELAND (MPA LIFE IRELAND)

Aiming to establish a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) across Ireland's marine territory, this project targets 30% coverage by 2030 in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy. It focuses on achieving and maintaining good environmental status through the expansion and improvement of Ireland's MPA network. This will be achieved through a participatory ecosystem-based management process, involving co-design, co-production and co-delivery of outcomes with marine stakeholders and citizens.

LIFE Strategic Nature Project for Ireland (LIFE SNAP Ireland)

This nine-year project (2024-2032) is aimed at implementing the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) 2021-2027 for Natura 2000 sites across Ireland. The project will address challenges to conservation data management and funding integration, and barriers to successful bid writing. It will build an integrated data platform, implement restoration measures on afforested peatlands and lagoon habitats, and establish a national complementary funding unit to secure additional funding. The project is a collaboration between the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Coillte (a forestry, nature and outdoor recreation company part-owned by the Irish state).

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Economy

[Resource management and polluter pay for the Climate 2040 targets](#)

Global economy relies fundamentally on the use of material resources – biomass, fossil fuels, metals, and minerals – for everything from food, agriculture and buildings to mobility. The extraction, use and discarding of materials cause critical environmental pressures, since they are responsible for over 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress, and around 50% of greenhouse gas emissions. There is therefore a profound link between circular economy initiatives and climate, notably with regards to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reaching climate neutrality with circular economy solutions.

[Political agreement on EU-wide certification scheme for carbon removals](#)

The Commission welcomed the provisional agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the first EU-wide voluntary framework for the certification of high-quality carbon removals. This certification will boost innovative carbon removal technologies and carbon farming which contribute to the EU's climate, environmental and zero-pollution goals. This new framework will help the EU to reach climate neutrality by certifying carbon removals and carbon farming to ensure that they are transparent and trusted, preventing greenwashing and creating new business opportunities.



Energy

[The Comfort Zone: Green Heat Is Effective and Convenient – New Analysis](#)

Green, effective, and convenient: renewable heating can be a way to do good by you as well as the planet. The latest consumer analysis from Coolproducts shows that the switch to heat pumps is keeping 85% of European users well within their comfort zones – physically, financially, and environmentally.



Environmental Justice

[Potential Breakthrough For Global Mineral Resource Governance](#)

The EEB attended the 6th session of the UN Environmental Assembly, where the ingredients for a breakthrough on minerals and metals management look set to come together. As global trends such as the energy transition, urbanisation, and militarisation are driving demand for these materials, the global community has recognised the need for two new resolutions for cooperation and coordination so these resources don't come at the cost of sustainable development goals.



Food

[COP28 – What comes next for sustainable food systems?](#)

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In this podcast IEEP talk about the United Nations Climate Change Conference – COP28 – which took place in Dubai last December, and which marked a the latest milestone in the global effort to address climate change and put our societies on a path towards a sustainable future. The conference was held against the backdrop of increasingly alarming scientific reports, emphasising the need for immediate and decisive action to limit global temperature rise and protect the planet's ecosystems.



Freshwater

[Wetlands and Human Well-being](#)

Wetlands, often overlooked and undervalued, are, in fact, one of the most vital and productive ecosystems on our planet. They serve as the world's natural sponges and water purifiers, playing an indispensable role in climate regulation, maintaining the global hydrological cycle, and safeguarding ecosystem diversity.

[Commission welcomes provisional agreement for more thorough & more cost-effective urban wastewater management](#)

The Commission has welcomed the provisional political agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the Commission's proposal revising the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive. This revised directive will substantially strengthen the protection of human health and the environment from harmful discharges of urban wastewater. It will also lead to cleaner rivers, lakes, groundwater and seas all around Europe.

[Water and Floods](#)

The European Commission has decided to refer Bulgaria, Ireland, Spain, Malta, Portugal and Slovakia to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failure to finalise the revision of their river basin management plans, as required under the Water Framework Directive and/or of their flood risk management plans as required under the Floods Directive.



Marine

[IUCN metric to help quantify progress towards global ocean biodiversity targets](#)

In partnership with other organisations, scientists and experts from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have developed a metric that will give governments, businesses, civil society, and financial institutions the ability to measure whether their actions can help halt biodiversity loss and reduce global species extinction risk in oceans and seas.

[Commission welcomes provisional agreement on tackling ship-source pollution to help make European seas cleaner](#)

The Commission welcomes the political agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the amendment of Directive 2005/35/EC on ship-source pollution and on the introduction of penalties for pollution offences. The co-legislators agreed to align the Directive with the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (Marpol) and to extend the scope of the directive to cover more types of polluting substances discharged into the sea, such as sewage and garbage.

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[One year anniversary of the High Seas Treaty Agreement](#)

On 4 March 2024, the High Seas Alliance celebrated the one-year anniversary of the historic High Seas Treaty¹ being agreed at the United Nations (UN), after almost 20 years of negotiations. It will take stock of the progress made over the year towards enshrining the agreement into international law and will call on world leaders to redouble their efforts to ratify the Treaty swiftly so that it can enter into force by the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France



Planning

No new stories this month



Sustainable Development

[What does a just transition to sustainability look like and how do we deliver?](#)

What do we mean by a 'just transition' to a sustainable future? A European Environment Agency (EEA) briefing, looks into how a shift to a greener, climate-neutral, circular economy will impact our society and describes how policies must be informed by concepts of justice and fairness if they are to succeed.



Transport

No new stories this month



Woodland/Forestry

[How Can Forests Be Reforested in a Climate-Friendly Way?](#)

Only a few tree species are flexible enough to survive a century of rapid climate change. Europe's forests have already been severely affected by climate change. Thousands of hectares of trees have already died due to drought and bark beetles. Scientists from the University of Vienna and the Technical University of Munich have now investigated which trees can be used for reforestation.