

To: President Ursula von der Leyen

Cc: Vice-President Teresa Ribera, Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra, Commissioner
Jessika Roswall

Brussels, 14 September 2026

Subject line: Make nature-based solutions the first line of defence against climate disasters

Dear President von der Leyen,

As climate extremes intensify across Europe, we as a group of professional associations, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and financial service providers, urge you to use the upcoming European Framework for Climate Resilience to make nature-based solutions the first line of defence against the worsening effects of climate change. While we acknowledge and fully support the focus on improving climate resilience by design, nature-based solutions are missing from the Commission's approach¹, despite the fact that they would contribute to strengthening the natural foundations of long-term resilience while delivering multiple co-benefits in a cost-effective manner.

Europe's climate risks are increasingly driven by the destabilisation of the water cycle itself. Floods, droughts, wildfires, heatwaves (including marine), water scarcity, storms, coastal erosion and ocean acidification are occurring with greater frequency and intensity, imposing growing costs and challenges on communities, farmers, fishers, water service providers, healthcare systems, energy producers, businesses and public authorities across the continent. Therefore, this is no longer simply an environmental, but a massive economic and societal threat. Strengthening Europe's resilience to these interconnected risks must become a strategic priority now.

Many of these risks are being amplified by the degradation of Europe's landscapes, soils and water systems. Wetlands, floodplains, peatlands, healthy soils, coastal ecosystems and forests - the systems that naturally store water, recharge aquifers, regulate temperatures and buffer extreme events - have been progressively lost or degraded. This has created structural vulnerabilities across the continent: water flows too rapidly during rainfall, becomes scarce too quickly during dry periods, and leaves communities exposed to increasingly volatile cycles of flooding, drought, wildfires, storms, coastal erosion and rising sea levels.

¹ as communicated through the public consultation which ran between 1 December 2025 and 23 February 2026.

Current adaptation approaches often address such events as separate challenges requiring isolated responses. Yet these risks are increasingly interconnected manifestations of a destabilised water cycle. Addressing them effectively therefore requires a systems-based approach that prevents the shifting of burden between areas and sectors and restores the capacity of landscapes, soils and water systems to retain, store and regulate water. Nature-based solutions, combined with infrastructures when needed, are among the few measures capable of reducing multiple climate risks simultaneously while contributing to other EU, global and national policy goals, such as climate mitigation, public health, and national security. Upscaling them is not only an environmental necessity but also a responsible investment strategy.

In your mission letter to Commissioner Hoekstra, you tasked him to lead the work on a European Climate Adaptation Plan, and to also look at incentives for nature-based solutions. We welcome this commitment. We also note that responses to the Commission's recent Call for Evidence highlighted nature-based solutions among the strongest priorities for the future framework, mentioned in ≥ 60 % of the responses.² The European Water Resilience Strategy likewise recognises the importance of restoring and protecting the water cycle and scaling up natural water retention measures, as stable water cycles are fundamental to Europe's economic resilience, food production, health, public safety, energy security and long-term competitiveness.

The forthcoming European Climate Resilience Framework provides a critical opportunity to translate these ambitions into action but is at risk of severe failure if it does not embed legislative measures to fix these growing risks to our landscapes and water systems.

We therefore urge you to:

- Drive the systemic integration of nature-based solutions for climate adaptation as a key priority in the legislative part of the European Framework for Climate Resilience,
- Provide legal incentives and financing mechanisms for Member States to manage landscapes and water systems in a way that prioritises water and climate resilience and the preservation of key ecosystem services. This should include national targets for additional natural water retention in landscapes to be achieved through locally driven approaches that reflect territorial needs and capacities, and mobilising and aligning public and private investment to scale up nature-based solutions.

² Factual Summary report, Stakeholder consultation on the European Climate Resilience and Risk Management - Integrated Framework, published 18 May 2026, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14770-European-climate-resilience-and-risk-management-integrated-framework/public-consultation_en

Sincerely yours,

Achmea

Aqua Publica Europea

BirdLife Europe and Central Asia

CAN- Europe

Care-Act-Terre

Climate Alliance

Climate KIC

Council of European Municipalities and Regions

ECOS

European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture

EurEau (European Water Services a.i.s.b.l.)

Eurocities

EuroHealthNet

European Anglers Alliance

European Environmental Bureau

European Rivers Network

European Water Association

EU-Umweltbüro

Fédération des maisons médicales

Fern

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe

ICLEI Europe - Local Governments for Sustainability

IFOAM Organics Europe

Natural Mineral Waters Europe

Natuurpunt

Österreichischer Fischereiverband

Partnership for Policy Integrity

SGI Europe

Surfrider Foundation Europe

The Great Lakes and Wetlands Association (Nagy Tavak és Vizes Élőhelyek Szövetsége)

The Nature Conservancy

Triodos Bank

Wetlands International Europe

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