

Mariann Fischer Boel
Commissioner for Agriculture
DG Agriculture
Rue de la Loi
Brussels

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Impacts on Biodiversity of Changing Set-Aside to 0%

The European Habitats Forum (EHF) is a group of 16 nature conservation organisations working to promote the best implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. We are deeply concerned by the recent announcement that the level of mandatory set-aside will be fixed at 0% for the next planting season. We wish to raise our concern at this decision, which could have significant negative consequences for European biodiversity and jeopardise the EU's commitment to halt biodiversity decline by 2010.

Whilst we fully understand that set-aside is a supply control mechanism and that its justification has been greatly diminished as a result of decoupling and high commodity prices, we believe that the mounting evidence of the positive role it plays for biodiversity and the wider environment cannot be ignored. There is a clear rationale to phasing out market set-aside, but its environmental side-benefits must be captured through a dedicated environmental tool.

Reducing the set-aside rate to 0%, even temporarily, while the debate on finding a long-term solution is ongoing, will not only hinder the EU's efforts to meet the 2010 target of halting the loss of biodiversity, but threatens to undermine the CAP's, already low, legitimacy. Direct payments to farmers are now largely justified on the basis of their role as land managers, but this proposal would allow farmers to continue to receive the proportion of their Single Farm Payment accounted for by set-aside in return for doing nothing positive for the environment. This means that the CAP would deliver even less value for the public's money than before.

We urge you to reconsider this decision and to retain set-aside for 2008. In the meantime, we welcome your suggestion to conduct an analysis of the positive environmental effects of set-aside and how they can continue to be delivered as part of the "CAP health check" process. We look forward to engaging in this process and to developing a way forward that would safeguard our farmland biodiversity and help European farming develop in a truly sustainable way.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further with you.

Yours sincerely,

Zoltán Waliczky
Chairman of the European Habitats Forum



cc. Commissioner Stavros Dimas

NB. The following organisations are members of the European Habitats Forum:

A Rocha International
BirdLife International
Butterfly Conservation Europe
Central and Eastern Europe Working Group on Biodiversity (CEEWEB)
Euronatur
European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
EUROPARC
Eurosites
EUCC – the Coastal Union
Fedenatur
International Mire Conservation Group
IUCN – the World Conservation Union
Planta Europa
Societas Europaeas Herpetologicas
Wetlands International
WWF