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REACTION PAPER ON THE **SOIL** **MONITORING LAW**

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Reaction Paper on the Soil Monitoring Law

[Generation Climate Europe \(GCE\)](#) is the largest coalition of youth-led networks - bringing together 381 national organisations across 46 countries in Europe - on climate and environmental issues at the EU level. GCE aims to represent and incorporate youth voices into EU policy-making to ensure a just and inclusive transition towards a more sustainable and liveable planet.

GCE welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a **Soil Monitoring and Resilience Law (SML)** and urges policymakers to adopt an ambitious and inclusive framework that will pave the path to restored nature and healthier soils.

Considering the above, GCE hereby addresses the following priorities:

1) MORE FOCUS ON YOUTH

- **Address intergenerational justice as a founding argument for healthier soils:**

One of the critical battlegrounds in the fight against climate change is the health of European soils, a fundamental element for our ecosystems that have long suffered from unsustainable practices, contamination, and neglect. **We urge** the Commission to acknowledge the principle of intergenerational justice which aims to protect young people and the generations to come from business-as-usual practices that are set to hinder future livelihoods of those across the EU. Restoring soils fundamentally means safeguarding future generations from issues resulting from biodiversity loss and climate change, such as food insecurity and extreme weather events. Therefore, **we find** that Art. 19 of the SML, which addresses information to the public, must reflect the principle of intergenerational justice.

- **Specifically mention youth as key actors in the SML:**

In its current form, the SML does not include the youth as key players in soil management and assessment plans. **We emphasise** young people's involvement, knowledge, and skills in soil restoration and **urge** policymakers to include them in stakeholder consultation groups at Member States' level. Art. 10.2 currently mentions sustainable soil management plans to be led by advisory groups and external stakeholders. **We highlight** the need to include the youth as part of the advisory groups as well, in order to promote the uptake of restorative practices among young people and include their views and knowledge on soil management. In addition, **we urge** the Commission to include the youth in decision-making processes regarding sustainable land practices, as this will provide young people with new job opportunities and increase the number of green jobs across the EU.

- **Establish an integrated youth engagement strategy:**

Building on our previous point, the SML should include targeted educational programs that inform young people about the critical nexus between soil health and environmental sustainability. **We propose** to leverage digital platforms and social media tools to launch impactful communication and outreach campaigns that will ensure a widespread understanding of the SML. Young people must take stewardship in implementing sustainable soil practices and powering the sustainable land use transition, and this must be achieved by giving them access to knowledge platforms, trainings and skill sets.

2) MORE AMBITIOUS TARGETS

- **Establish legally binding targets & soil health plans:**

The SML establishes the goal to “achieve healthy and resilient soils everywhere across the EU by 2050” (Art. 1). However, the SML makes no specific mention of intermediate targets for achieving soil health (i.e. by 2030), and does not apply specific targets on increasing soil biodiversity. Member States are also not required to present soil health plans on how to achieve healthy soils by 2050. **We call** for the implementation of legally binding targets, both short- and long-term (i.e. by 2030 and 2050), to raise ambition at Member States’ level and ensure that the goals set by the EU Soil Strategy for 2030 are effectively achieved.

- **Establish a set of specific and mandatory soil biodiversity descriptors:**

In line with Target 10 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 on “addressing land take and restoring soil ecosystems” and the objectives of the Nature Restoration Law, **we believe** that the SML should set clear links and goals aligned with nature restoration. The SML outlines a series of soil descriptors and specific measuring criteria that must be met to assess soil health. Yet, no measuring criteria are given to assess the descriptors related to loss of soil biodiversity (Annex 1, Part C). Member States are also not required to consider these particular descriptors when assessing soil health. The SML therefore lacks mandatory, specific and science-based criteria for measuring loss of soil biodiversity, and **we recommend** that the Commission defines an adequate and more scientifically robust set of soil biodiversity descriptors with reference values that are context-specific to soil ecosystems (i.e.: climate, soil type, land use)¹.

- **Establish a set of mandatory sustainable soil management principles for all land and soil users:**

The SML ensures healthy soil management by encouraging Member States to define sustainable soil management practices taking into account the programs, plans and measures listed in Annex IV (Art. 10). To restore soil health, **we believe** that these sources should be treated as a set of mandatory sustainable soil management principles for all land and soil users. Furthermore, the SML **should state** that these requirements are the bare minimum for Member States to achieve sustainable practices. To implement these principles in the farming sector, Member States should promote awareness of the medium and long-term benefits of said principles while providing farming unions and other advisory services with the needed support to enable this transition.

¹ See: Anthony, M. A., Bender, S. F., & van der Heijden, M. G. (2023). Enumerating soil biodiversity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 120(33). <https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.2304663120>

3) TARGETED FINANCING

- **Incorporate financial schemes for young professionals:**

The SML currently lacks specific guidelines on how to incentivise sustainable soil management practices among landowners, especially young farmers. **We believe** that young farmers must take stewardship in applying sustainable land practices. **We encourage** the Commission to require Member States to adopt soil management plans that will identify financial schemes to assist young stakeholders with implementing healthy soil practices. These financial schemes should cover training opportunities, professional development task forces and awareness programmes for young generations. Access to finance is key in providing youth with the right capacity and knowledge to play an active role in the green transition.

- **Link professional development strategies and soil health to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans:**

The aforementioned recommendation should be linked to CAP Strategic Plans that seek to fund these training programmes for young people. **We encourage** Member States to include soil health as a key component of their monitoring and evaluation efforts within CAP programs. This will be reflected in regular assessments of the impacts of CAP-funded initiatives on soil health. Overall, this suggestion will promote a more dynamic approach to CAP initiatives and effectively support the principle of intergenerational justice.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that soil health deserves increased attention, as formally stated in the EU Soil Strategy for 2030. **We emphasise**, once again, the importance of engaging the broader public, especially the youth, to effectively and sustainably protect our soils and reintegrate nature into our lives.

We eagerly await your feedback on these recommendations tailored to enhance youth engagement and raise the ambition of the SML. Our sincere hope is that this reaction paper serves as a foundation for further dialogue and collaboration.

Sincerely,



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