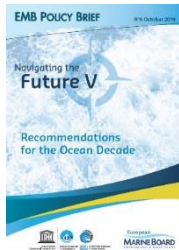




Key environmental challenges & the role of the Sustainable Development Goals

Event Summary Report

Tuesday 19 November 2019 – European Parliament



This event was hosted by Miapetra Kumpula-Natri MEP and brought together policy-makers, researchers, the private and NGO sectors to engage in an informed debate on the topic of ‘*Key environmental challenges and the role of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals*’.

Panel one, chaired by Miapetra Kumpula-Natri MEP, discussed “Water Management, Sustainable Forest Management and Clean Energy and Transport” and featured:

- Luc Bas, Director of the European Regional Office, IUCN
- Clara Chiaretti, Head of Policy, EurEau
- Elsi Katainen MEP
- Simone Schmiedtbauer MEP
- Fanny-Pomme Langué, Secretary General, CEPF
- Katalin Cseh MEP
- Roby Biwer, Vice-Chair of ENVE Commission of the Committee of the Regions

Panel two, chaired by Gilles Lericolais, European Marine Board, addressed “Sustainable Food Systems, Circular Economy and Bioeconomy, and Ocean Governance” and featured:

- Sarah Wiener MEP
- Ms. Veronika Juch, Liaison Officer, FAO Liaison Office
- Mohammed Chahim MEP
- Dirk Carrez, Executive Director, Bio-Based Industries Consortium, European Bioeconomy Alliance
- Pierre Karleskind MEP
- Ben Boteler, Strong High Seas Project Co-Leader, IASS

The event concluded with the launch of the European Marine Board’s Policy Brief: “*Navigating the Future V: Recommendations for the Ocean Decade*”, presented by Dr. Anne-Marie Treguier,



'Navigating the Future V' Author & CNRS Research Director, University of Brest, as well as a discussion with the audience and a video-message by Petros Kokkalis MEP.

In her opening address, the **chair of the event, Miapetra Kumpula-Natri MEP** welcomed all stakeholders present and noted the timely organization of this event, while a new European Commission takes office and a new European Parliament settles into the new mandate, in the face of an ongoing environmental crisis. The EU is ready to tackle the climate and environmental crisis both with the President-elect Ms. Ursula von der Leyen's proposed "New Green Deal", and further action plans on Circular Economy, Biodiversity and the implementation of the United Nations' SDGs. In addition, the European Parliament, MEP Kumpula-Natri stated, has a crucial role to play in ensuring effective environmental protection, the conservation of ecosystems and climate change mitigation. However, as the MEP argued, in order to do so, MEPs must include all stakeholders, experts and policy-makers to facilitate the creation of informed science-based policies. Therefore, the **Intergroup on Climate Change Biodiversity and Sustainable Development** is a central platform for MEPs, as now is the time to step up action and utilize this longstanding multi-stakeholder, cross-party and cross-committee platform. Ms. Kumpula-Natri MEP therefore concluded by encouraging all present MEPs to support the Intergroup's re-establishment.

The keynote speech of the event was delivered by **Mr. Luc Bas on behalf of the IUCN European Regional Office**. As underlined by Mr. Bas, IUCN is a proud co-initiator of this Intergroup and remains a delighted partner to work with. Mr. Bas further noted that it is essential to confront climate change and biodiversity loss alongside sustainable development, as they are intricately inter-connected. Mr. Bas praised the Intergroup for recognizing this by integrating the SDGs into 12 thematic Working Groups, ranging from Water Management and Circular Economy to Climate Change. The SDGs, Mr. Bas noted, are where it all starts, providing the overarching policy framework for addressing the greatest challenges of our times. It is the SDGs that should guide the Commission's Green New Deal, not just on climate but also on biodiversity and nature, which have been explicitly mentioned by President-elect von der Leyen, as underlined. The EU knows what needs to be done, Mr. Bas stated, now is the time for action and implementation. This means, he asserted, not simply creating policy, but effectively implementing, integrating and enforcing it at national, regional and local levels across the EU. Policies must not just address avoiding negative impacts, but also investing in solutions for a sustainable future. The biggest challenge Europeans face is addressing Europe's ecological footprint by changing consumption patterns. Developed countries need to not just change but reduce their demand, consumption and most importantly their waste. Mr. Bas then moved to the issue of budget and finance as without funding the EU cannot "walk the talk" on environmental policy. This includes reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), increasing funding for climate mitigation, biodiversity and nature, as well as creating a just transition fund to ensure the transition to a green economy is socially fair. Mr. Bas concluded with a sense of urgency as there is little time left, while expressing his hopes for very ambitious biodiversity



targets from the EU, which must be world-leading. Finally, he welcomed all stakeholders present at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, taking place in Marseille in 2020.

Ms. Carla Chiaretti, Head of Policy at EurEau, presented the important role of water management in addressing key environmental challenges and achieving the SDGs. Through successful collaboration and dialogue EurEau aims to provide safe drinking water for all, while ensuring that waste-water is returned safely to the environment. Water companies' activities impact a wide variety of SDGs and can thus contribute to their achievement. Core tasks of water companies link most prominently to SDG 6 on Clean Water, SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-Being, and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities.. Finally, Ms. Chiaretti outlined EurEau's policy compass for MEPs building upon art.191.2 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and on the United Nations definition of the human right to water in future European policy, ensuring availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability and safety of water. Although MEPs do not decide on the water price (that is set at national or local level) they should always keep in mind that their decisions at EU level will have an impact on the consumers' water bill and the affordability of the latter. Furthermore, without source-control and the "polluter-pays" principle, it will be impossible to deliver sustainable and affordable water service to future generations, as Ms. Chiaretti argued.

Elsi Katainen MEP discussed the challenges facing forests and forest management. Ms. Katainen firstly outlined the diverse range of roles forests play in our lives from providing materials, to hunting, tourism, serving as a key site for biodiversity, economic activities, as well as providing the oxygen we breathe. When Europe's forests are managed sustainably and sensibly, Europeans can have a constant supply of raw materials generating economic prosperity, while at the same protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. Furthermore, MEP Katainen noted, when it comes to climate change it is important to note that trees only take in carbon when they grow, and this must be facilitated by enhancing and protecting effective forestation schemes. Indeed, she was happy to receive the Communication on Deforestation as it showed that unsustainable deforestation is on the decline in the EU and forests are recovering. MEP Katainen ended with a call for greater co-ordination to resolve the fragmented approach to forest management and conservation across the EU, while looking forward to working within the Intergroup in order promote the above.

Simone Schmiedtbauer MEP continued the discussion on forests, the SDGs and future EU policy. From the MEP's point of view, the role of forests in addressing the climate and environmental crisis cannot be disregarded. Forests provide oxygen, water, biodiversity, and recreation for our citizens and therefore ecological, economic and sustainable forest management is essential. MEPs, she argued, have a key role to play in raising awareness of the benefits of forests and a sustainable forest economy, supporting EU forest management plans and balancing the demands of the climate with those of forest owners, farmers and other stakeholders, particularly in the Green New Deal. Only by achieving this can Europe move towards achieving SDG 15 concerning life on land, while contributing to the achievement of a plethora of other goals such as SDGs 3, 12 and 13. Withn her final remarks, Ms. Schmiedtbauer



also praised the multi-stakeholder approach of the Intergroup and encouraged all to support its re-establishment.

Representing national forest owner organisations in Europe, **Ms. Fanny-Pomme Langue, Secretary General of CEPF**, strengthened the points made thus far from the forest owners' perspective. Forests, she explained, are subject to increasing pressures from society and climate change and yet the benefits of forests are vast. Consequently, it is quite logical they should play a large role in the achievement of many SDGs and the European Green New Deal. Ms. Langue pointed out the key amount of policies related to the forest sector internationally and in the EU as of 2018-2019, numbering well over 40, moreover including policies such as the CAP and Rural Development policy, the EU Forest Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy 2020. To achieve effective forest management, she argued, there must be policy coherence and thus a strong and comprehensive EU Forest Strategy, the success of which depends on due appreciation for environmental, economic and social aspects, a program all CEPF members support.

From the perspective of **Katalin Cseh MEP**, climate and the environment have quickly become central to the newly-elected European Parliament's work. MEPs must ensure the transformation of the three largest sectors contributing to climate change and environmental degradation. Firstly, with regards to agriculture and forestry, MEP Cseh made clear there must be an EU plan for fighting deforestation both in member states and third countries alongside CAP reform. Secondly, as Ms. Cseh highlighted, the transport sector continues to be one of the "dirtiest" industries, with the majority of the industry still based on carbon fuels. Therefore, EU legislation should facilitate the greening of the transport industry, while incentivizing customers to purchase hybrid and electric vehicles. Finally, regarding the housing industry Ms. Cseh asserted that European houses are too dependent on coal and gas. Europe must as a result invest more in seasonal store, interconnectors and boost renewable energy use, taking targeted action with due consideration of local socio-economic and cultural circumstances.

Representing the Committee of the Regions (CoR), **Mr. Roby Biwer (Vice-Chair of ENVE Commission of CoR)**, opened his speech by praising the Intergroup and reflecting on the CoR long-standing partnership with it, offering his support towards its re-establishment. Meanwhile, he underlined that the CoR has prepared and is working on many environmental topics, ranging from climate change, to water, energy and transport, and of course the SDGs' implementation. For Mr. Biwer, the CoR has a clear role to play in the delivery of sustainable and zero-emission transport. As underlined, it is only with cities' and regions' co-operation that the infrastructure for electric vehicles, the transition to zero-emission public transport, and a multi-purpose transport model can be achieved. He also noted the importance of the digital vehicles of tomorrow in creating sustainable transport, as it is in the cities' and regions' levels that this transformation will take place. AI vehicles can contribute to a greener transport sector and the CoR calls on other EU institutions to collaborate in the creation of a clear policy plan on this. Mr. Biwer concluded by making clear the importance of not only effective dialogue, but



sufficient financing towards regional and local governance levels, to assist in working together with all political bodies in order to implement SDGs 9, 11, and 12.

While **the second panel** discussed “Sustainable Food Systems, Circular Economy and Bioeconomy, and Ocean governance” and was moderated by Dr. Gilles Lericolais (Chair of the European Marine Board), **Sarah Wiener MEP** addressed sustainable and healthy food, food management and animal welfare. Sustainable food systems and nutrition are involved in many of the SDGs, particularly SDGs 2, 3, 12, and 14. In Europe and across the world, there is a huge nutritional and health divide between those underfed and those obese. Western diets and consumption patterns, she asserted, harm our health. Scientific research continues to show that heavily processed, sugar and fat-based foods present huge health risks and have contributed to the growing health crisis in Europe, especially amongst our youth and future generations. From MEP Wiener’s point of view the biggest problem is the way we in Europe handle animal production and welfare, as animals are fed with respects to economic considerations and not their own needs. European livestock are not made for soya and wheat consumption, so turning to grass and sustainable healthy feed is an important solution. Finally, MEP Wiener pointed out the significance of reducing food waste, both through policy mechanisms, but also through simply encouraging better practices at the individual level; this will not only contribute to more sustainable supply chains, but also to the achievement of, for example, SDG 13 and 15. In summary, MEP Wiener stated that by diversifying our diets, buying more natural food products and reducing our waste, we can have a healthier, brighter and more sustainable future.

Ms. Veronika Juch, Liaison Officer at FAO’s Liaison Office in Brussels, opened by reminding the audience of the call for action raised in the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report released by FAO together with four other UN agencies in July this year. According to this report, more than 820 million people in the world are still suffering from hunger, a negative trend for the third consecutive year. Against, Ms. Juch highlighted the challenge of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. She also pointed to the interconnectivity between the SDGs, noting that progress on SDG2 – Zero Hunger, will accelerate progress across most other goals including (1), health (3), education (4), water (6), economic growth (8). She asserted the need for all actors to work together and develop more integrated programmes to be able to achieve the SDGs. Ms. Juch focused on two environmental drivers that shape our food systems: climate change and natural resources and biodiversity loss. Climate Change affects crop yields, animal and plant diseases and limits food availability, it can also cause an increased severity or frequency of natural disasters, putting food production at a great risk. Biodiversity and natural resources on the other hand are critical for agriculture: we rely on natural resources and on eco-system services to produce food and for our livelihood. Finally, Ms. Juch called for a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to achieve all the SDGs and she insisted on the role of Members of the European Parliament in ensuring effective policies and resources to implement the SDGs and work on making sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems a global reality. Both the Parliamentary Alliance against Hunger and Malnutrition as well as the Intergroup have proven very effective in this regard.



Prior to addressing the need to work towards a circular economy, **Mohammed Chahim MEP** praised the Intergroup for its cross-party and cross-committee approach to addressing key environmental challenges, which, in his view, should be purely apolitical issues. As stated by Mr. Chahim, the transition from a linear to a circular economy cannot be achieved without a multi-stakeholder approach. Therefore, policy-makers need to facilitate effective change, but also business models need to move away from simply producing and selling, to taking a holistic approach to resources, products and consumption, with re-usability, pollution and recycling in mind. Consumers must also be motivated in not only their consumption practices, but also their waste practices. Mr. Chahim then moved to point out that SDG 12 on “responsible consumption and production”, is the key SDG with regards to the transition to a circular economy. However, there are serious difficulties when it comes to monitoring indicators for SDG 12 and, as such, it is important that policy-makers think of ways to address this gap of information, ensuring companies provide but also understand and have access to information on supply chains and sustainability. In addition, consumers should be provided with much greater information on sustainability and circular economy. All in all, greater co-ordination for SDG 12 is needed, especially better monitoring. Finally, he suggested at a more broader level that the SDGs should be included in the Commission standard impact assessment framework as measures that go “beyond GDP”, which is something he committed to discussing further with other MEPs in the coming months.

Addressing bioeconomy, **Mr. Dirk Carez on behalf of the European Bioeconomy Alliance**, highlighted the key role it will play in the transition to a more circular, renewable and resource-efficient society. Only consistent and holistic, long-term and stable policies, especially for the areas of energy, environment, climate, innovation, forestry and agriculture, will attract the necessary investments and foster the full potential of the bioeconomy, according to Mr. Carez. Towards this direction, EUBA sees the bioeconomy contributing in particular to SDGs 2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15 and 17. Mr. Carez then moved on to providing two specific examples of the role of the bioeconomy in achieving the SDGs. Firstly, in achieving SDG 2, EU agriculture plays a pivotal role in enabling food security, whilst providing sustainable and locally-produced biomass. This is complemented by both working with bio-refineries and through the development of new cross-sectoral bio-based value chains. Secondly, the bioeconomy contributes to SDG 13 and overall climate change mitigation by reducing dependency on fossil-based materials and energy. Renewable raw materials reduce greenhouse gas emissions by sequestering CO₂ in the plants during their growth. In addition, biobased products store carbon during their life cycle and are then either recycled several times or converted into bioenergy. Mr. Carez concluded his statement by informing the audience of the European Bioeconomy Alliance report on the crucial role of the bioeconomy and achievement of the UN SDGs, including concrete examples of how the bioeconomy is helping to deliver each SDG.

Following the above, **Pierre Karleskind MEP** discussed the importance of ocean governance, fishermen and women and aquaculture. Mr. Karleskind agreed with his fellow MEPs that the



event could not have been more timely and that the re-establishment of this long-standing Intergroup should, in his view, be an apolitical issue. MEP Karleskind continued on a positive note, asserting that ocean governance is high on the EU agenda with the new Commission taking a holistic approach regarding our oceans. He asserted that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is a strong foundation for achieving clean, safe and sustainable oceans, that can create economic prosperity, feed the population, and also help us combat climate change. MEP Karleskind also stated that EU policy should be guided by a HOPE model – Healthy Oceans, Productive Ecosystems. Yet, SDG 14 must be a baseline for ocean and fisheries’ work; indeed in his view the upcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy should link indicators and targets for SDG 14, while ensuring food supply and security, alongside tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. The EU, MEP Karleskind concluded, needs to enshrine the link between the Common Fisheries Policies with climate policies and the SDGs to ensure benefits from the ocean, while also leading on the international stage, as solving those issues in the high seas and with regards to migratory species require global action.

Mr. Ben Boteler representing the Strong High Seas Project from the Institute for Advanced Sustainable Studies addressed ocean governance as well, the SDGs and the science-policy nexus at the global level. He opened by stating that the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development calls on states and organizations to address the SDGs as a whole, therefore going beyond single issue policy approaches. The connectivity of the ocean does not respect national boundaries. A holistic approach is needed to address each of the highly inter-connected issues. As such, he argued, one of the major challenges facing ocean governance is the fractured sectoral/policy field approach divided between fisheries, biodiversity, transport and climate change. Therefore, Mr. Boteler asserted, a cross-sectoral approach is essential. In particular he noted the importance of facilitating research and knowledge sharing platforms, such as the Marine Regions Forum, and the involvement of regional governance levels for effective ocean governance and achieving the SDGs. Furthermore, he argued that progress on the SDGs must not only focus on environmental projects alone, but also on establishing good governance indicators and monitoring at all levels. Mr. Boteler concluded by saying that 2020 and beyond are going to be important for ocean governance with the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the International conference on marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, a potential High Seas Treaty and the SDGs’ deadline. The EU, he noted, can lead in all of this, but it must step up its ambitions and act now. He also highlighted that the EU has recently confirmed that it will host an International Ocean Governance Forum in Brussels in 2020, tentatively planned for 21-24 April.

Following the end of the second panel, **Dr. Anne-Marie Treguier launched the European Marine Board’s policy brief “Navigating the Future V: Recommendations for the Ocean Decade”**. The report outlines the science needed for the upcoming UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainability which aims to ensure that ocean science guides and supports the SDGs. The research priorities were formulated by 19 leading European marine science experts who identified key topics that will significantly advance our understanding of marine, earth, and climate systems



while securing future societal wellbeing. A holistic, solutions-oriented marine research agenda is recommended that should be co-designed amongst all stakeholders with sustainability at its core. Five key knowledge gaps include the four-dimensional and connected ocean, on a multi-stressed and rapidly changing ocean, ocean hazards, novel technologies and sustainability science that integrates natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities. Urgent action must as a result be taken before 2030, in order to avoid irreversible damage to our oceans such as radical sea surface temperature changes. To achieve a **clean ocean**, we must measure and minimize all marine pollutants while understanding their cumulative and interacting synergies and risks. For a **safe ocean**, policy should improve anticipation of ocean hazards including storm surges, marine heat waves, meteo-tsunamis, submarine earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions and their associated tsunamis. Achieving a **healthy and resilient ocean** requires comprehensive overview of marine biodiversity functioning and its economic and societal value for which interdisciplinary research on ocean connectivity is needed. Furthermore, ensuring a **sustainably-harvested ocean** can be addressed by integrating trade-offs and ethics into policies and determining safe and sustainable thresholds for ocean industries to operate within, with reference to fisheries, aquaculture, biotechnology or energy. Achieving a “**predicted ocean**” will improve the management of marine ecosystems, climate forecasting and prediction of ocean hazards and their impacts. Data sharing, artificial intelligence, cloud computing and modeling are priorities. Finally a **transparent ocean** can be delivered by ensuring ocean data and information is provided to all stakeholders to enable informed decisions, including the development of a virtual reality ocean platform for access to data processed in real time. This policy brief will enrich the science-based policy process on ocean governance.

During the Q&A session with the audience, **Ms. Olga Kuzmianok of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime** stated that without strong governance and the rule of law, the efforts to protect biodiversity and mitigate climate change at scale will likely fail. UNODC has consistently found evidence of criminal activities and corruption behind illegal logging, biodiversity loss and wildlife trafficking in various parts of the world, driven by high profits and low risk. As such, a strong prevention and criminal justice response must be part of a comprehensive approach to achieving the SDGs 13, 14 and 15, linking it with SDG 16 on the rule of law. Therefore Ms. Kuzmianok asked the panel for their perspective on how to integrate SDG 16 into the sustainable management of natural resources. **Dr. Gilles Lericolais, Chair of the European Marine Board**, answered that by achieving all of the SDGs in a holistic manner, SDG 16 can be achieved to the benefit of environmental issues. But SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals, is also particularly essential for addressing the transboundary issues featured in each of the SDGs.

Last but not least, **Mr. Chan Aye from the Myanmar Mission to the EU** brought up the importance of the developing world’s perspective, mentioning that achieving the SDGs will require practical and feasible solutions, with a particular focus on awareness and confidence-



building at local levels. He also highlighted the willingness of the national missions in Brussels to work with the EU to achieve the 2030 targets. In response, **MEP Mr. Chahim** welcomed the role of national missions facilitating progress on the SDGs at a global level.

Within his closing remarks' video-message, **Petros Kokkalis MEP** thanked the organizers for the event's timely occurrence, apologizing for not being able to physically attend. As a member of European Parliamentary Delegation to the United Nations Climate and SDGs summit of this past September, Mr. Kokkalis stressed that all the delegations they met from across the globe were looking to Europe as a place for innovation and bold political action to the climate crisis. Therefore, the discussion about the SDGs in Europe could not be more important as they are the only globally-accepted and politically-agreed-upon humane and enlightened framework to address key environmental challenges. Summing up his intervention, Mr. Kokkalis mentioned he is very much looking forward to working with the Intergroup in the new mandate, in order to deliver the 2030 Agenda alongside all stakeholders.

This event was co-organized with the European Marine Board:

