

Taoiseach Simon Harris TD
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

11 April 2024

Subject: Meeting request to discuss the Strategic Agenda and Climate, Nature and Social Priorities, ahead of the Brussels informal Council Meeting of 17-18 April 2024

Dear Taoiseach,

Congratulations on your appointment. It is a huge honour and privilege to lead our country and we wish you every success. We welcome the commitment in your nomination speech to create an Ireland that protects our children's future by acting decisively on the climate crisis.

The Environmental Pillar shares your concerns about the climate crisis and we're looking forward to working with you closely to ramp up the response to the State's declared climate and biodiversity emergency.

Therefore, we are writing to you with a sense of urgency on behalf of our supporters and member organisations to seek a meeting in relation to the European Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, which will define EU priorities for the next five years, steering its work and providing guidance for EU institutions.

We are conscious that you will no doubt be attending the informal EU Council of Heads of State next week, 17-18 April in Brussels. This will be a key moment in the formulation of the core skeleton of the Strategic Agenda – a document with profound implications for the direction of travel and priorities of the EU for the next 5 years, and as a consequence for Ireland's future and the future of our youth and environment, and all who depend on it for their health and wellbeing. The people of Ireland will be watching you closely, as will the people of Europe watching the outcomes of this meeting. We are seeking an urgent meeting with you in regard to this.

We are deeply concerned by reports suggesting that the core priority of creating a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe is removed from the new Strategic Agenda. While we understand the importance of creating a strong, prosperous and democratic union, this simply cannot be achieved if we do not address the climate and biodiversity emergency now. We are already seeing the destructive impact of climate and biodiversity breakdown across Europe, including on our own farming community. Climate and biodiversity breakdown is also inseparable from the security of the EU, given its potential to create significant de-stabilising events and shocks, the effects of which will only get worse if the EU fails to prioritise action on climate and biodiversity within its own Strategic Agenda. The EU needs to be seen to do so at home, to be a credible leader on these matters on a global stage, driving an essential wider response.

All the evidence suggests that the benefits of ambitious action to establish a climate neutral, nature positive and zero pollution European Union will far outweigh any costs.

On 17-18 April, the European Council will be informally gathering in Brussels to discuss the European Union's general political directions and priorities for the years to come. After the Granada Declaration of last October, this will be a pivotal moment for the future of Europe, and civil society organisations across the EU are watching closely.

Now is not the time to abandon the core priority of a “climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe”. The voices calling for leaders to walk away from these ambitions are the same familiar voices of disunion that wish to see the EU and its Member States thrown off course. False solutions and fossil fuel dependency will only worsen the climate and environmental crises we face.

Rather, this is the time to redouble efforts to ensure a transition which is fair for all, with an economy that cares for its people, protects and restores nature, tackles the climate crisis, and ensures a healthy, thriving and peaceful European community.

The next Strategic Agenda must:

- Radically increase public climate, environment and social investments, while aligning all public and private investments with the objectives of the green transition. It must ensure big polluters are fully held accountable, including in support of partner countries in line with the EU's global responsibility.
- Accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal and address the ambition gaps on both nature and climate as well as pollution by further establishing robust legally binding targets and new ambitious protection standards based on the latest science available. Only with continued efforts can Europe safeguard our health, nature, safety and economy, and recognise the crucial links between them.
- Strengthen EU governance, democracy and the effective participation of civil society. The role of citizens at national and EU levels needs to be strengthened, equal access to decision-makers as well as justice across Europe needs to be ensured.

The choices made over the next months will have profound consequences for decades to come. Europe's failure to deliver on international commitments under the Paris Agreement and the UN's Global Biodiversity Framework in particular, would threaten the EU's global standing as well as international efforts to address climate breakdown and ecosystem collapse. A socially just transition will significantly improve the quality of life and health of all Europeans, in terms of improved public health, energy security and independence, protection from toxic chemicals, and a circular and decarbonised economy with social dialogue at the core. These are matters we know as a former Minister for Health are close to your heart, and you also know the cost, financial and human, of neglecting them.



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As voters, we will have our say at the European Parliament elections in June. At the European Council meetings that precede the elections, we urge you and the Irish Government to put your support behind these priorities, together with other progressive voices in the Council.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to the opportunity for a more in-depth discussion and are requesting an urgent meeting with you in advance of next week's EU Council.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Ciesielski
Coordinator, Environmental Pillar

Environmental Pillar Members: An Taisce. Bat Conservation Ireland. BirdWatch Ireland. CELT- Centre for Ecological Living and Training. Coastwatch. Coomhola Salmon Trust. Cultivate. Eco-Advocacy. ECO-UNESCO. Feasta. Forest Friends. Friends of the Earth. Global Action Plan. Gluaiseacht. Good Energies Alliance Ireland. Green Economy Foundation. Green Foundation Ireland. Grow It Yourself. Hedgelayers Ireland. Irish Cycling Campaign. Irish Peatland Conservation Council. Irish Seed Savers Association. Irish Whale and Dolphin Group. Irish Wildlife Trust. Leave No Trace Ireland. Native Woodland Trust. Talamh Beo. The Organic Centre. The Rediscovery Centre Ireland. Sonairte. Sustainable Projects Ireland, Vincent Wildlife Trust. VOICE. Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland. Zero Waste Alliance Ireland.