

BIODIVERSITY

Proposed Regulation on Nature Restoration

EUROGYPSUM's position on the Commission's proposal

5 AUGUST 2022

Healthy ecosystems are of a critical importance for the sustainability of human and economic activities – and the whole survival of our planet. Biodiversity loss and nature degradation are particularly worrying concerns, often overshadowed by other major global challenges, such as climate change, public health or geopolitical issues. All challenges are intertwined, however, which explains the timeliness and significance of the European Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and the recent proposal for a Regulation¹ on nature restoration.

Eurogypsum, the European federation of national associations of producers of gypsum products, welcomes the European Commission's ambitions on nature restoration and biodiversity, and would like to present some considerations on the proposed regulation.

Nature restoration is not only about nature and the environment around us. It also has a very important economic and human-centric dimension, since we use our environment both as a habitat and a source of living, e.g. for food or to produce energy, mobility, housing, other infrastructure or manufactured goods. While we are all aware of the high pressure placed on our environment, the ultimate objective would be to achieve a sound and sustainable interaction with it, allowing for human development and a good quality of life, while minimising the negative impact on ecosystems. Restoring nature to a good and sustainable condition appears as a logical objective for public policies.

In the field of raw material sourcing, **gypsum** supply is at the cornerstone of this challenge, as we have needed and will be needing this mineral for centuries. Whether we have in mind the beauty of Granada's Alhambra in moresque times, the fire safety imperative of covering Paris with plaster in France's 17th century, the challenging structural, acoustic or architectural performance of modern buildings such as Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum or Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, or the societal objective of promoting flexible, adaptable, affordable and energy efficient buildings in Europe, gypsum has been and will remain indispensable in construction and to achieve the European Green Deal's objectives. It is healthy, widely available in many European countries, recyclable, and allows for affordable construction solutions. Hence the importance of allowing sufficient supply of these essential materials, by addressing resource efficiency, encouraging closed-loop recycling of an eternally recyclable mineral, exploring safe

¹ European Commission: Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on nature restoration. [COM\(2022\) 304](#), 22 June 2022.

sources of synthetic gypsum, but also managing the environmental impact of the needed gypsum extraction in the most sustainable way.

Mineral extraction is a **temporary economic activity**, planned over time, to supply necessary resources. The interaction between extractive industries and ecosystems is actually not only about restoring land and habitats *after operations*, but also managing ecosystems *during the operation time*, with usage-integrated protection mechanisms such as the use of temporary habitats. Quarries have proven to provide a **refuge** to endangered species. Often, due to strict regulations in place, the quarry restoration plan results in turning previously degraded land or natural areas poor in biodiversity into richer biotopes. This shows the clear potential for nature restoration played by extractive industries. Numerous examples can be found of good practices in nature restoration and biodiversity management in gypsum quarries, and the European sector has recently committed to a Species Protection Code of Conduct co-signed with NGO BirdLife and other extractive industries and endorsed by the European Commission².

Eurogypsum **welcomes the Commission’s proposal on nature restoration** as an ambitious basis, the first of this kind, which puts forward clear binding targets and demonstrates the EU’s commitment to act on that front. While we believe that a number of elements could be clarified, including the definition of a “good condition” for an ecosystem, the legislative proposal, its annexes and impact assessment demonstrate a thorough analysis of the EU’s habitats and the extent of the challenge.

An important key to the success of this proposal will be the ability for Member States to develop the most adequate Restoration Plans, reflecting the huge variety of ecosystems and challenges faced locally. We fear that the exclusive focus on EU and Member State levels would neglect the **high potential non-state actors can make** in contributing to nature restoration. As exemplified in the case of quarrying activities, some economic players have powerful levers to support the EU’s goals, in close cooperation with other actors, such as environmental NGOs or scientists. Clear messages in the Regulation, supporting **multi-stakeholder involvement** in delivering the targets, would be particularly welcome, to ensure that this potential is really included in the respective National Restoration Plans.

There is a common responsibility and clear interest in facilitating cooperation between expert parties from industry, environmental organisations, academics, and other, to better deliver on restoration. This should be properly recognised, facilitated and promoted throughout the EU with an adequate framework.

A good understanding of the local context is essential to place restoration plans within the framework of current environments which are all very different and evolving over time. **Effective collaboration** between industrialists, NGOs and scientists at a local level can prove essential to ensure the coherence and success of actions within territories which are engaging their own dynamics. We take note of the challenges outlined in the Commission’s impact assessment when it comes to special areas of gypsum extraction, such as salt and gypsum steppes. Here, our industry has been playing an active part in restoring areas covered under extractive operations – and will therefore be a major partner to achieve the European Union’s restoration targets in the respective ecosystems.

² You can navigate our Europe map of biodiversity good practices, download our best practices report and find out more on the Extractive Sector Species Protection Code of Conduct [here](#).

We look forward to discussing the industry's contribution to achieve the EU nature restoration objectives – and will be exploring this further with other relevant organisations. The extent of the challenge is such that it requires a clear commitment and concrete delivery by all interested parties. We are particularly committed and more than willing to play our part in this endeavour.

Eurogypsum is a European federation of national associations of producers of gypsum products (i.e. plaster and plasterboard). It is one of the few fully integrated industries (from cradle to cradle) within the construction products field. The companies which mine gypsum also process it and manufacture the value-added products and systems used extensively in construction and other industries.

With a turnover of EUR 7 billion, the European gypsum and anhydrite industry operates some 160 factories and 154 quarries and generates employment directly to 28,000 persons and indirectly for 300,000 persons. The Gypsum industry provides jobs to 1,100,000 plasterers and plasterboard installers. It trains around 25,000 persons per year across Europe.

Contact: Tristan Suffys, Secretary General - t.suffys@eurogypsum.org ; +32 491 34 07 90