

Commitments made at the hearing of

VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS

Commissioner-designate Environment, Oceans and Fisheries



The commissioner-designate, Virginijus Sinkevičius, appeared before the European Parliament on 3 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committees on ENVI and PECH. During the hearing, he made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to his portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to him by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- Conserving Europe's natural environment; and
- Prosperous and sustainable fishing and a thriving blue economy.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioner-designate hearings website](#). The Commissioner-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#).



Conserving Europe's natural environment

Delivering the new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

"In my mission letter it's clearly stated: deliver the EU biodiversity strategy. It is important that, working together with Frans Timmermans, we will make sure that it's actually included in other legislation: agriculture, energy, transport and so on, basically everything that is causing trouble today and leading to the sixth mass extinction."

"[...] we will definitely have targets and they will be ambitious—because there is no other way—for 2030. [...] They have to be measured and monitored. It is important to have a review mechanism."

"[...] targets for protected areas can be increased. For the oceans and sea basins, they can be increased, for example, to 30%. But I think I'll definitely be flexible here regarding biodiversity 2030 targets, and I'll be open to discuss these also with the committee."

"[...] it is of the utmost importance, talking about major causes, because it's land and sea use change. [...] So we have to fight the causes and [...] that will need funding – especially recreation of species, Natura 2000 areas and proper protection, that will need funding."

"I will definitely be vocal about the need for an increased budget [...] strategic goals have to be funded sufficiently."

"We'll have to check and see whether Member States are using all of the means that are granted to them [for the implementation of the Habitats Directive]."

"[...] we have to reassess our footprint [concerning deforestation], and I will definitely be working closely with the other Commissioners. It is important that resources – funding – that we are allocating to other countries won't actually lead to deforestation. [...] it is important to improve labelling and [...] have deforestation-free supply chains. But, in order to reach that, we have to improve monitoring mechanisms, and I'll definitely be working on that."

"EU's ambitions for the CoP 2020 to the Convention on Biological Diversity

"[...] it is important to have measurable goals that can be monitored. [...] If I am confirmed in post, I would love to travel to China not on my own but with a delegation from the ENVI Committee so that we represent a strong position with, of course, a discussion and dialogue on possible goals."

"When I was thinking about what those goals might be – and this is purely my opinion – I think 30% would be a great goal for the percentage of protected areas in the world, and then 70% sustainably maintained. On top of

that, I think we have to have a separate article on Arctic policy."

Deliver on the zero-pollution ambition

"I look forward actually to including REACH as one of the key pillars of the non-toxic strategy. On the basis of what we have in REACH in terms of data, we can build a very strong non-toxic environment strategy, especially with regard to chemicals, and then even go beyond, for example to endocrine disruptors. These are currently under review, but as soon as we finish we will definitely be working on them."

"[...] pharmaceuticals are already included in the water legislation but also the directive for water is undergoing its check and we'll see if there is a need. After the check we can then say, is there a need to include additional pharmaceuticals or not? As I said, I'm open for additional discussions with the Environment Committee on this issue after the check is done and then present it to you."

"Specifically on endocrine-disruptors, of course, it is important to fully implement the new strategy, which would be a serious step forward. [...] And I think that endocrine-disruptors have to be standardised and perceived as the CMR in the same level. [...] It is important that endocrine-disruptors would be prohibited from toys, cosmetics which we apply directly on our skins, food-contact materials."

"I think we should help our industry to be competitive. Let's look where the industry is going – hydrogen, electricity. [...] we already see that they [our car manufacturers] are shifting. We have to help them through public transport, which has to be green and, of course, uses clean alternative fuels."

"Regarding the Euro7 standard, I think, and there is a mandate for it, that in five years it will be possible to have Euro7, working together with the Commissioner-designate for the Internal Market."

"Regarding environmental laws, the President-elect was very clear and it's stated in the mission letter as well: zero tolerance for non-compliance. [...] I will definitely be looking at all the possible tools in the toolbox."

"[...] I will present for the College's endorsement a clean air action plan, setting out, first of all, a zero-tolerance policy on non-compliance with the current air quality standards. We have to address the EU legislative framework, mapping it and adapting it to the latest WHO recommendations."

"Our journey to a green climate neutral planet has started - it will be hard. As a Commissioner, I will do everything in my power to take us down that road."

“The new Circular Economy Action Plan

“It is important also to mention the construction sector, which is responsible for one third of waste, and it will be among the priorities in the action plan as well.”

“[...] the circular economy will only be successful when we actually find a way to have a non-toxic cycle. So basically, with plastics that are made of friendly chemicals –let’s call them this–we know that we can reuse them in many, many other ways, and they can then be applied in different sectors. This is the only way for a successful circular economy, and throughout my mandate I will be reaching for that.”

“I will definitely ensure that, in decreasing the administrative burden, we don’t lower our environmental legislation, which is important and which we will have to increase.”

Addressing the issue of microplastics and aiming at plastic-free oceans

“I am going, of course, to seek the full implementation of the plastic strategy, but the next step has to be microplastics, especially in textiles, tyres and pellets, that’s where the main source is; biodegradable plastics, [...], we have to establish a clear regulatory framework and identify some applications for which biodegradable plastics are made of – chemicals, mainly – and then of course plastic packaging.”

“[...] in the UN and the G7 but also in bilateral relations with our partners, we have a great example to show, a great example to follow and I will definitely do so.”

“[...] under the EU Green Deal, I will, under my mandate, develop an initiative for clean, healthy and of course sustainably managed seas and oceans. It is important for reaching the 30% goal of marine protected areas under Natura 2000, and not only that 30%, but, of course, it has to be very well maintained, very well implemented.”

Prosperous and sustainable fishing and a thriving blue economy

Focus on the full implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy

“[...] we have to assess as many as possible stocks, because stocks are not assessed properly, and if we will gather as much as possible data, then we can provide a proper sustainability approach to fishermen and -women communities.”

“I want to work with you to make sure that our fisheries control system is fit for purpose and ensures a level playing field. I will address shortcomings wherever I find them.”

“It is a sensitive period we’re living in: Brexit might happen, and we will have it in that period where EMFF funding has ended, and it will only start in 2021, so a further delay of the EMFF funding would also not be acceptable.”

“We will be prepared, of course, to talk with Great Britain and there will be negotiations on a Brexit deal. That could be a Brexit with a deal, which would, of course, be easier and we would have a transition time. With a no deal Brexit, there are a few scenarios which will be discussed afterwards. But let me assure you that we are prepared.”

“Regarding the EMFF and possible building of new boats, we need to have a further discussion on that because [...] I’m not sure that building new boats would definitely go in line with our goals which are agreed under the CFP implementation.”

“In regard to more selective gear, I think we definitely should look for it through research, through science, but improve it, and this is where we can definitely invest public money – into research, into new decisions, which will help our fishermen and fisherwomen fish more sustainably and more selectively and provide the best possible solutions.”

“Indeed, this problem [funding for the scrapping old vessels] will be one of the first things to tackle if I am confirmed.”

Evaluate the Common Fisheries Policy by 2022 to identify how to address issues not sufficiently covered in the current policy

“By 2022, I will evaluate the Common Fisheries Policy to identify how to address issues not sufficiently covered in the current policy, because we need policy that works for our fishermen and women, our coastal communities and our environment.”

“I will have it in my mandate to review it by 2022. We will definitely address the shortcomings [...].”

“By striking a balance between social, economic and sustainability concerns, we can ensure for them that there is a future within the sector and then, of course, through the EMFF funding and through other funds, we can improve conditions and help our fishermen and fisherwomen out there.”

“It’s women, and they have to be paid, they have to be equally respected, and I will try to do it by arranging it, first of all, that we have to have in advisory councils, equal representation. In our events and so on, setting by example of course, we have to go even deeper and discuss it with the sector and with the stakeholders from small to large.”

“First of all, the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 is important and it will include oceans.”

“My greatest ambition, if confirmed, would be to make the Green Deal a reality on the ground. A deal that works for oceans, for the environment and for our citizens who should be front and centre throughout.”

“Indeed, climate change is the reason behind it, the water temperature in the Baltic Sea has risen and this has had an enormous effect on the eastern cod.”

Contribute to the 'Farm to Fork' strategy on sustainable food

“I see my mandate in ‘Farm to Fork’ as concerning the fishing sector, so that we know and we can trace fish from the net to the can, and so that we know what is being served up here in the EU.”

“[...] I want to invest in the potential of sustainable seafood to deliver farm to fork strategy on sustainable food.”

“Regarding traceability, I think we all agree that we like good quality food and it is important for our EU standards to be maintained. One of the key things is, of course, labelling, so that a consumer knows what he is buying and that the green label really means something.”

“Origin, as we said, is very important, but we have to make sure, first of all, that what is on a label is true information. This is the important step to tackle and I think it is possible to do through digitisation processes for our market.”

Lead the way on international ocean governance

“Our efforts for sustainable fisheries and healthy productive oceans must not stop at our borders. The EU is a global leader in ocean governance. I would use that leadership to enforce our sustainability principles worldwide, to make sure that we can deliver on sustainable development goals for life below water.”

“We know the main issues that have to be tackled: over-fishing [...]. We also have to improve the international legal framework so that not only EU Member States will be on board, subordinate to and observing the rules, but the others as well.”

“On the high seas and pristine areas, like the Antarctic, we need new rules for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity on the high seas.”

“I will push for more Marine protected areas, and for more effective management in our waters.”

Take a zero-tolerance approach to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

“And I will continue our fight against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.”

“It is important to tackle illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. So, I think this is the best way to spend resources: helping our partners, as well, fight with the causes, help them by giving best advice, by showing our best practices and having them on board, that’s the only way. Of course, the EU has a unique position to lead this way.”

“First of all, of course, it is going to be important to work closely with the Commissioner-designate for Trade, Phil Hogan, and it is important to raise those questions for attention at the World Trade Organization (WTO).”

“And of course, it is important also to protect our market, as we said, from unsustainable supply chains.”

Find a global agreement to ban fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing, illegal fishing and overcapacity

“I will work with the Trade Commissioner-designate Phil Hogan to reach a global agreement on banning harmful fishery subsidies.”

New approach for a sustainable blue economy

“I will also lead to develop a new approach for a sustainable blue economy. This should bring together everything from marine knowledge and research to maritime spatial planning. Marine renewable energy, blue investment and regional maritime cooperation.”

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