

Case Study: Building collective power to protect Europe's vital peatlands

An unsung climate hero, healthy peatlands can store twice as much carbon as the world's forests. They're also a critical ecosystem for climate adaptation efforts, protecting us against floods, droughts and wildfires, and helping to regulate freshwater supplies. Yet far from being climate champions, degraded peatlands currently release around 1.9 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide each year. That's around five per cent of all global emissions. This is a trend that must be reversed if our vision of a just, prosperous future where temperature rise is held to 1.5C is going to be realised.

A historic year for peatlands in Europe

2023 was a key year for peatlands restoration in Europe. A much anticipated Nature Restoration Law (NRL) - landmark legislation to set legally-binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems - was making its way through the legislative process within the European Union. Meanwhile, in Germany - a potential advocate for the NRL - a Natural Climate Protection (ANK) action programme was being launched in which rewetting peatland plays a major role.

Now was the moment to build much needed momentum for peatlands restoration.

Our campaign focus:

Our overall campaign goal was to **“catalyse enabling conditions for ambitious policy change in the EU to protect and restore peatlands.”**

We aimed to do this by:

- Putting the EU on track to deliver the NRL regulation, including targets on peatlands, in line with the ambition needed to mitigate Europe's climate and biodiversity crises.
- Catalysing the implementation of peatland restoration in Germany through public and private sector support and action.
- Bringing together a set of first mover private sector actors to be champions for peatlands restoration and protection.
- Catalysing the power, leverage and funding potential of organisations working on peatlands in Europe.

Forging partnerships across the climate community

By providing financial support to BirdLife Europe, and joining a coalition of European civil society organisations working on the NRL, we positioned ourselves to be able to support strong advocacy efforts to keep the law on schedule and ambitious.

Together with these partners, we quickly identified the business community as a critical voice to mobilise to ensure success of the NRL. And through a targeted partnership with Corporate Leaders Group (CLG) Europe we were able to successfully mobilise this constituency in support of the legislation. This included supporting collective communications efforts, mobilising businesses to meet key MEPs, and coordinating open letters to decision makers within the European Union.

This strong voice was cited by policy makers as an important driver for the proposed law.

“Climate Catalyst engaged the private sector quickly and effectively, leading multiple businesses to voice public support of the law and recognition that nature restoration is good for business. This has been vital in our fight to keep the law alive, and ambitious.”

- Andreas Baumueller from the WWF European Policy Office

And by using our unique position as an organisation sitting across civil society and business we were able to forge a strong connection between these two critical actors, that will continue as the Commission, Council and Parliament work together to reach a shared position during the trilogue period.



Building power and catalysing critical voices to demand change

Just two years ago, when we began our peatlands campaign, this ecosystem was a nascent topic for most businesses and investors, but we are now increasingly seeing interest in measures to protect them.

We've convened a number of critical events to discuss private sector action on peatlands - including two events at the COP27 conference, peatlands 101 webinars and other workshops for both the business and investor communities and an Innovation Lab - and have seen increased engagement from this community. These events helped forge new connections and collaborations between organisations, increase knowledge and build an appetite for more action. In Germany, for example, a new private sector initiative, the Alliance of Pioneers, has formed to support paludiculture, a land management technique which grows crops on wet or rewetted peatlands.

But it is not only in the private sector where interest in this issue has grown with our support. Our German partners, world renowned peat experts Greifswald Mire Centre, and creative campaign organisation Eurosite, identified a critical role for building public support for peatlands protection. Through targeted re-grants, and by offering digital strategy support, they were able to run a public awareness campaign on peatlands in Germany, which has to date reached over a million people, during a critical year for this critical ecosystem. We also worked with behavioural science experts to develop and test key messages and frames for communicating peatlands in Germany and Finland, to strengthen public engagement on this topic.

The campaign in numbers

- We supported the mobilisation of 15 business and investor organisations and 80 CEOs and executives to write open letters to EU decision makers on the NRL, as well as engaging many to contact relevant policy makers directly via email or through meetings.
- We brought the topic of peatlands over 50 businesses and investor organisations through in-person events and webinars.
- Over 1,000,000 signatures and messages were sent to European decision makers from citizens demanding a strong NRL, including through an online tool developed by our civil society partners.
- Our partner GMC's communications campaign has to date achieved a reach of one million, and online impressions of 2.5 million. Over 162,000 people have engaged with the content, and 1.3 million have interacted in some way.
- We shared our message testing results with 130 individuals from organisations across Europe.

Bringing a nimble approach to secure success

Back at the European level, despite our best efforts the NRL was in peril in the later stages of the political process as the European People's Party (EPP) - launched a public and negative campaign to politicise



the legislation with the European Parliament, which fed into existing resistance from some peatland rich member states during the Council negotiations.

With the law under threat in its entirety, we shifted our approach, doubling down on our work to amplify collective business support for the legislation as a whole. We knew this would be a risk and while we helped to successfully ensure the European Council and Parliament voted in favour of the NRL, the peatlands target, the original focus of our campaign, was removed from the Parliament's position and weakened in the Council position, as the EPP used unsubstantiated arguments around energy and food security to rally its members and others to vote against the legislation.

However, our effort ensured the NRL was not thrown out entirely, which kept the door open for improvements, including on the peatlands targets, during the trilogue stage.

“With their profound knowledge in campaigning, Climate Catalyst springboarded our social media campaign on the rewetting of peatlands to stop them from emitting greenhouse gases, something we would not have been able to do without them.”

- Hanns von Sonntag at Eurosite

Creating the conditions for on-going momentum for peatlands protection

While the outcome was not the success we had originally hoped for, it was a success for nature and ecosystem restoration in the EU in the face of monumental opposition. The fight for peatlands via the NRL is far from over and we were able to put in place building blocks for continued work to secure an ambitious outcome for peatlands in Europe, but ensuring the on-going involvement and collaboration between peatlands experts, the business community and civil society.

Meanwhile, outside of the legal corridors, our work has successfully raised the profile of peatlands in climate communities across Europe, having witnessed increased investor and business interest in this topic, and supporting peatland organisations to reach new public audiences online.

