

Commission Proposal for Better Protection of the Environment by Means of Criminal Law



News

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On 15 December 2021, the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a new EU directive to crack down on environmental crime. In this way, the Commission intends to fulfil a key commitment of the [European Green Deal](#).

The proposal aims to make protection of the environment more effective by obliging Member States to take criminal law measures against environmental crimes. These crimes lead to increasing levels of pollution, a degradation of wildlife, a reduction in biodiversity, and the disturbance of ecological balance. They tend to be highly lucrative and can be as profitable as illegal drug trafficking. For this reason, environmental crimes are highly attractive for organised crime groups, *inter alia*, because sanctions are relatively low and because environmental crimes are prosecuted less often than other crimes. The main features of the proposal are as follows:

- Setting up new EU environmental criminal offences (including illegal timber trade, illegal ship recycling, and illegal abstraction of water);
- Clarifying existing definitions of environmental criminal offences in order to improve the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions;
- Setting a common minimum denominator for sanctions on environmental crimes;
- Making relevant investigations and criminal proceedings more effective by implementing targeted and regular training (at all levels of the enforcement chain), overarching national environmental crime strategies, and awareness-raising measures;
- Improving cross-border cooperation by harmonising effective investigative tools and establishing an obligation to cooperate through Europol, Eurojust, and OLAF.

It is proposed to replace [Directive 2008/99/EC](#), that got [evaluated](#) in 2020 by the Commission as having not enough effects on the ground as the number of environmental crime cases successfully investigated and sentenced remained very low.

The proposal will now be negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council.

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