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SGI Europe's position on the new EU Soil Strategy

SGI Europe welcomes the European Commission's initiative to set up a new EU Soil Strategy planning to improve the quality of soils in Europe, to tackle land degradation and desertification and to increase biodiversity. As cross-sectoral EU association representing public service providers and services of general interest, it lies at the very heart that the quality and the health of soil is guaranteed to ensure high quality water resources for all EU citizens.

For this, SGI Europe pleads for an effectful systematic protection of soil and the environment through the coherence of European legal acts to keep providing safe EU water resources. In order to strengthen the good status of the water and soil environment, it is essential that measures in other sectors linking to the good standard of soils and water are also geared towards the corresponding environmental protection goals. This is the only way to make a sustainable and systematic contribution to improve their quality.

To this end, SGI Europe would like to highlight the following recommendations:

- **SGI Europe is highly stressing the planned interlinking of the different EU environmental policy fields such as the Zero Pollution Action Plan**, but also stresses to look further into the **evaluation of the Sewage Sludge Directive, Urban Waste-Water Treatment and align the standards within the Water Framework Directive and its daughter Directives**.
- SGI Europe asks that all existing and future EU Green Deal initiatives that contribute to healthier soils and water resources must be measured against the target of reduction at the source first. This means to **take into account the challenges of micropollutants, pharmaceuticals, persistent substances (such as PFAS) and other emerging pollutants, by reducing pollution at source and consequently implementing the precautionary and polluter pays principle** and ensure it becomes part of the solution to reach the set goals of the EU Green Deal.
- The strategy should aim at **protecting drinking water resources by improving groundwater and surface water quality and quantity**, and thereby contribute to reaching the goals of the Water Framework Directive. This necessitates among others reducing agricultural emissions from manure/fertilizers and pesticides. Here, **SGI Europe's recommends to the Commission to encourage Member States to prioritise remediating contaminated sites that have a serious negative impact on drinking water abstraction zones**.
- The decrease in water quality and availability is a **problematic consequence of climate change and its dreadful effects and the increasing pollution issue intensify each year**. Climate change reinforces salinisation of Europe's soils and waters. The impact of salinisation on the availability of fresh water sources for the production of drinking water should also be addressed.