

Ecological Focus Areas and their potential impacts on biodiversity

Edita Vysna and Trees Robijns

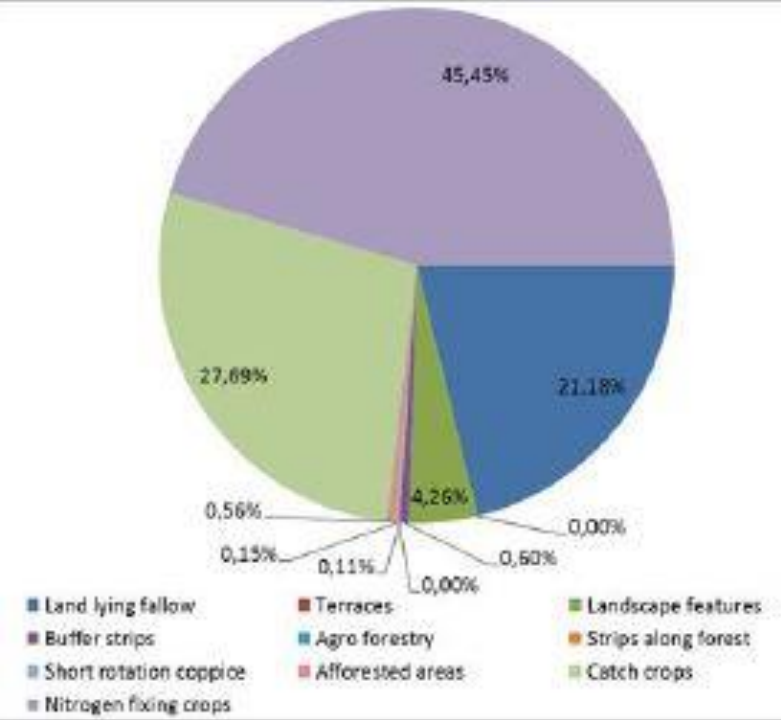
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EFA implementation choices and study outli

- EFA in 2015 was mostly
 - N-fixing crops, catch & cover crops, fallow
 - Never assessed by the commission
- Asked IEEP to research the biodiversity impacts
 - literature review,
 - likely impacts of N-fixing, catch or cover crops
 - compared to fallow, hedges & field margins



EFA element	Over 30% of area	Not eligible
N-fixing crops	IT, RO, PL, HU, UK(not Sc), ES	
Catch & cover crops	NL, BE, DE, PL, RO	ES, IT, UK-NI, UK-Wales
Fallow	ES (10-30% in HU, DE, IT, UK(not Sc)	NL, RO
EFA element	Less than 10% of area	Not eligible
Landscape features	UK(not Sc), DE, BE, IT, HU, NL, PL, RO	ES

Member State management decisions

- EFA period
 - will crops flower or set seed?
 - when crops or fallow are harvested / destroyed
- Application of pesticides or fertiliser
 - e.g. pre-emergence herbicide
 - insecticides & fungicides on grain legumes
- Other crop operations or disturbance
 - e.g. cutting or tillage during the bird breeding season

Findings (1)

Key finding: $\frac{3}{4}$ of EFA declared are crop options which give hardly any benefits OR can even be harmful for biodiversity studied.

Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of total EFAs or 3.5% of arable land will be in valuable elements

Detailed findings:

- Flexibility offered to Member States did not bring forward the right biodiversity options*
- Nitrogen-fixing crops, catch crops and cover crops offer relatively few benefits compared to hedges, field margins, naturally revegetated or sown species-rich fallow.*

Findings (2)

- *Nitrogen fixing crops (both grain legume and forage legume crops) are unlikely to provide significant farmland biodiversity benefits (need for extensive management, pesticide use on grain legumes is problematic, etc.)*
- *Little evidence on farmland biodiversity value of conventional catch and cover crops apart from soil macrofauna (need seed mixes, need time to set seed, etc.)*
- *In certain cases: conventional catch and cover crops can even be detrimental (ecological trap...)*
- *The evidence of biodiversity impacts of nitrogen-fixing crops, cover crops and catch crops is incomplete and mostly weak.*

Recommendations (1)

To have any effect (for around 12 Billion Euros/year):

- The European Commission and Member States /regions must report the necessary data as a priority. Non-reporting jeopardises accountability and hampers the drive towards a more transparent Europe. (FR, Scotland)
- the current options structure fails - robust evidential justification is needed before allowing certain crops to qualify as an ecological focus area (role for the EC). This would translate in the following:
 - Member States mandatorily offering all the non-crop options to their farmers (reason: semi-natural/natural features > crops). E.g. ES-12mil ha of arable land unable to present EFA landscape features (!)

Recommendations (2)

- Setting stricter requirements -A ban on pesticides and fertilisers on all EFA elements AND consideration of temporal and seasonal scale, etc. Scientific findings on importance of in-field habitats ARE NOT the effect of EFA crops (e.g. 5 year alfalfa benefiting the population is NOT 1 months of faba beans as EFA (HU, ecological trap)).
- Removing all the requirements that actively undermine the biodiversity value of EFA elements (NL-''no mixtures'' vs preference of pollinators for mixtures, HU- ''good agricultural condition ''for land laying fallow)
- The choices seeking the fulfilment of biodiversity objective as given would be truly screened by the Commission. (NOT just any species of crop as being beneficial for biodiversity. As a minimum, mandate given to the EC by the delegated regulation (EU) 639/2014 on NFX having biodiversity benefits will be used

Recommendations (3)

- Coupling with an agri-environment-climate measure (AEM) will be more widely explored -number of interlinked commitments likely to show ecological effects.
- Any future review, will not focus solely on a move from 5 to 7%. A focus should lie in reducing crop options without strict management requirements and ensuring more valuable elements will also be getting an improvement of their quality. ->Quality over quantity (quantity of which anyway often doesn't make sense)
- Many claims on the benefits of greening are widely overstated. Wide societal debate through a fitness check to be held on where this policy delivers and where it does not.

Any questions?

Thank you for your attention!

Editia Vysna edita.vysna@eeb.org and Trees Robijns trees.robijns@birdlife.org