

Policy Brief on the Soil Monitoring Law (Directive (EU) 2025/2360)

Summary

- First ever law on soil at EU level, officially published on 26 November 2025.
- Establishes a common framework for monitoring and assessing soil health across Europe.
- Aspirational objective to achieve healthy soils by 2050.
- Establishes soil descriptors, soil health criteria and measurement methodologies.
- Includes the monitoring and assessment of soil contaminants (heavy metals, PFAS, pesticides...).
- Encourages support for landowners and managers to improve the health and resilience of their soils.
- Includes provisions on identification, investigation, assessment and management of (potentially) contaminated sites.

Background information

After more than two years of legislative process, the [Directive on soil monitoring and resilience](#) (the Soil Monitoring Law) was adopted and published on 26 November 2025.

The Soil Monitoring Law (SML) is the first EU law to regulate soils, which finally gives them the same legal status as water, air and the marine environment. The text lays down measures for monitoring and assessing soil health based on a common definition of what constitutes healthy soils, and tackles the issue of contaminated sites. It mainly focuses on four aspects: monitoring and assessment of soil health, support for soil health and resilience, land take mitigation, and assessment and management of the risks of contaminated sites.

The initial proposal was presented by the Commission in July 2023¹, then taken up and discussed by the European Parliament and the Council until a provisional agreement was

¹ See ECN Policy Brief, 'European Commission adopts Proposal for a Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience', 24 July 2023.

found in April 2025. The start of a new mandate in the Parliament a few months later created some uncertainty as to the fate of the text, but it was ultimately formally adopted by a large majority of Member States and MEPs. The final text was published in the Official Journal of the EU on 26 November and entered into force on 16 December 2025. Member States now have three years to transpose it into national law.

This Policy Brief aims to summarise the final content of the Directive and explain the key elements that contributed to its drafting.

Non-binding target to achieve healthy soils by 2050

The aspirational long-term objective of the SML is to achieve healthy soils by 2050 (Article 1), which was already included in the EU Soil Strategy for 2030 published in 2021. However, this does not impose an obligation on Member States to achieve healthy soils by 2050 or to set intermediate targets. This was the approach adopted by the Commission, and despite the efforts of the rapporteur to make this overall target binding, both the Parliament and the Council maintained the initial proposal of the Commission in their final position. This is justified by the limited knowledge on the condition of European soils and the effectiveness and costs of measures to regenerate soil health. But when the first assessment of soil health and the related analysis are available, a review of the Directive will be considered.

Scope and definitions

The SML applies to all soils in the territory of Member States, without exception. Its Article 3 provides common definitions of soil, soil health, soil resilience, soil contamination and correlated aspects.

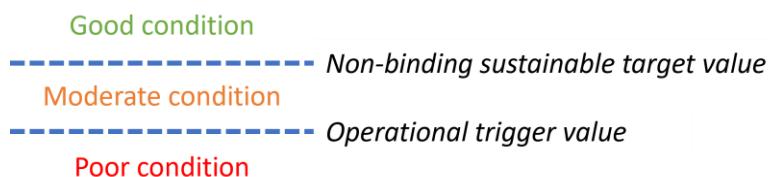
Monitoring and assessment of soil health

The core of the Directive is Chapter II, which aims at establishing a common monitoring framework for soil health. Article 6 lays down criteria upon which the monitoring framework set up by Member States shall be based. This includes soil descriptors and criteria for healthy soil condition, sampling points, soil measurements, and use of remote-sensing data.

According to Article 7, when monitoring and assessing soil health, Member States must use the soil descriptors listed in Annex I Parts A-C (e.g.: salinisation, loss of soil organic carbon, subsoil compaction, water retention, loss of soil biodiversity, soil contamination etc.) and apply for each of them criteria for healthy soil condition that are set in Annex I Parts A-B or by the Member States themselves, with the support of the Commission. At the Council's instigation, these criteria were split between the "non-binding sustainable target values", which are only aspirational and set in Annex I or by Member States if established at national level, and the "operational trigger values", which are set directly by Member States.

Member States shall carry out soil measurements via soil samples to determine the values of the soil descriptors (Article 9). The methodology for determining or estimating the values of the soil descriptors is set out in Annex II, as well as the methodology for determining sampling points.

Based on the data collected, the Member States must assess the health of their soil. The soil is categorised in three different classes: the soil is considered as being in “good condition” only when it is above the target value. If the soil is above the trigger value, it is deemed to be in “moderate condition”, and it is below the trigger value, it is in “poor condition”.



This approach leaves more flexibility to Member States since in the initial proposal of the Commission, soil was healthy when all the criteria for each soil descriptor were met. The first soil health assessment must be carried out by 17 December 2031 and then every six years (Article 10).

Concerning contamination, a new soil descriptor was introduced to include PFAS, pesticides and their metabolites (Annex I Part C). Additionally, pushed by the Council, the final text requires in Article 8 the Commission to establish, in cooperation with Member States, an indicative list of soil contaminants.

Additionally, the initial Commission’s proposal was encouraging Member States to set up mechanisms recognising the efforts of landowners and land managers to maintain their soil in healthy condition, including in the form of a voluntary soil health certification. This measure would have created great incentives but unfortunately, it has not been included in the final text.

Support for soil health and soil resilience

In its initial proposal, the Commission was requesting Member States to define sustainable soil management practices based on sustainable soil management principles listed in Annex, which included the prioritisation of circular solutions that enrich the organic content when fertilisation is applied. However, this provision was removed from the final text and replaced by a support for soil health and soil resilience. This way, Member States only have the obligation to encourage, facilitate and support landowners and managers to improve soil health and resilience through advice or training for example. No obligations are imposed on landowners and managers.

The SML also lays down land take mitigation principles to avoid the loss of capacity of the soil to provide ecosystem services, although their scope has been reduced and they have been made voluntary (Article 12). Indeed, these principles have to be taken into consideration only in the event of new soil sealing or new soil removal as part of land take, and not for any land take. However, Member States must also establish a monitoring framework for soil sealing and soil removal with indicators listed in Annex I Part D.

Contaminated sites

The text provides for a risk-based and stepwise approach to tackle contaminated sites, which comprises the identification, investigation, and assessment and management of (potentially) contaminated sites (Chapter IV). The Directive lays down measures for each of these steps. Annex IV lists a series of indicative risk reduction measures for contaminated sites, including composting and soil amendments as a bioremediation technique.

Reporting, information and access to justice

Chapter V focuses on funding and reporting obligation for Member States. EU countries are obliged to electronically report specific data and information to the Commission and the European Environment Agency every six years. Furthermore, Member States have to make publicly accessible the data generated by the monitoring and assessment of soil health. Finally, Article 23 ensures that members of the public concerned have access to a review procedure to challenge the substantive or procedural legality of the soil health assessment and any failures to act of the competent authorities.

Evaluation of the Directive

The Commission shall carry out an evaluation of the Directive by 2033 to assess the progress made towards achieving its objectives and the need to eventually revise it (Article 25).

Contact

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About the European Compost Network (ECN)

The ECN is the leading European membership organisation promoting sustainable recycling practices by composting and anaerobic digestion of organic resources and guarding over the quality and safe use of the recovered organic fertilisers and soil improvers. With 67 members from 27 European countries, ECN represents more than 4,500 experts and plant operators with more than 45 million tonnes of biological waste treatment capacity.