



To:

Ms Jessika Roswall

Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy

Mr Andy Raine

Executive Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

Call for EU and CMS Action to Protect the Strait of Messina

Dear Commissioner Roswall,

Dear Mr Raine,

BirdLife International and its national Partners across Europe, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East wish to express their deep concern over the proposal of the Italian government to build a suspension bridge across the Strait of Messina, one of the most important bottlenecks for bird migration in the African-Eurasian Flyway, which would result in the deaths of tens of thousands of birds every year.

Raptors, storks, and a myriad of songbirds drift through the air between continental Italy and Sicily Island, separated only by a narrow strip of sea, the Strait of Messina. For millions of migratory birds, this narrow passage is more than just another stop on their journey—it is a lifeline.

The Strait of Messina represents crucial gateway for African-European bird migration; millions of birds cross this 3-kilometer stretch of sea separating Sicily from peninsular Italy each year, traveling to nesting areas in continental Europe and Asia in the spring, and to wintering areas in Africa in the fall. In particular, the Strait of Messina is the most important bottleneck for the pre-breeding migration of certain species of raptors, such as the Honey buzzard, as well as for a high percentage of the European populations of other species such as Barn swallow, Eurasian skylark, European bee-eater, Common crane, White stork and Black stork.

In the spring, after braving extremely hostile environments—2,700 km of Sahel and Sahara deserts and at least 140 km of open sea in the Sicily Channel (between Italy and Tunisia), the birds stop near the Strait of Messina to build up the energy needed to reach their breeding grounds. In the fall, the Strait serves as a crucial stopover before the birds embark on their journey to their wintering grounds.

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For these reasons, the Strait of Messina area is crucial for the protection of birds from all European and African countries linked by the invisible thread of migration that passes through this narrow maritime corridor. Based on banding data, Italy is connected, through migratory birds, to all European countries, over 30 African countries, and 6 different Asian countries. Analyses produced by the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) for the Atlas of Bird Migration in Italy fully confirm Italy's role—and in particular that of the Strait of Messina—as a crucial hub in migration between Europe and Africa.

Given the importance of the Strait of Messina for bird migration, the area has been included in the Natura 2000 Network, a network of protected areas covering the entire European territory, designated under Directive 92/43/EEC ("Habitats") for the conservation of natural habitats of wild flora and fauna, and under Directive 2009/147/EC ("Birds") for the conservation of wild birds and their habitats.

The Strait of Messina Bridge planned by the Italian government would result in the deaths of tens of thousands of birds for several reasons: collisions with the steel cables supporting the structure (especially during inclement weather and strong winds), the destruction of resting and foraging areas, and the forced landings that thousands of nocturnal migratory species would be compelled to make due to the structure's lighting.

During the environmental impact assessment, the state-owned company proposing the project estimated that, in the event of adverse weather conditions, collisions with the bridge could cause, in the spring, the deaths of over 500 birds of prey and over 84,000 passerines and other species that migrate at night, while in the fall, over 130 birds of prey and over 9,500 nocturnal migrants are at risk of death.

The proposing company estimates that 230,000 passerines and 28,000 shorebirds would be forced to make an unscheduled stop and, based on a probabilistic model, 69,000 passerines and several thousand shorebirds would suffer severe physical decline.

And these impacts would occur every spring and every fall for years to come.

These estimates alone are sufficient to deem the project incompatible with the conservation of migratory birdlife crossing the Strait of Messina; however, according to ISPRA, they are not even reliable, as they do not account for the cumulative mortality caused by other types of impacts (such as new power lines, new roads and railways, water withdrawal for construction sites).

Furthermore, ISPRA has determined that, with regard to birdlife, none of the identified mitigation and compensation measures are adequate or relevant to offsetting the negative impacts ascertained within the relevant biogeographic region and/or migration route at the regional, national, and EU levels. Despite this, the project was approved by disregarding the provisions of European Directive 92/43/EEC "Habitats."

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By introducing a major new source of mortality at a critical migration bottleneck, the project would also undermine years of conservation investments made not only in Europe, but also in Africa and the Middle East, and could have wider socioeconomic consequences for communities whose livelihoods depend on healthy ecosystems.

The Strait of Messina is a crossroads where continents, ecosystems, and lives meet. Losing it as a safe passage would undo decades of conservation progress and threaten the survival of countless species.

What happens here has implications far beyond Italy. For now, the Strait remains a corridor of life, a living testament to the resilience of migratory birds. But its future hangs in the balance. Every decision made today will determine whether future generations will witness this extraordinary migration.

For these reasons, we ask the European Commission and the CMS Secretariat to take action within their respective spheres of competence to ensure that the Messina Strait Bridge project is not carried out.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue and for your continued commitment to the conservation of migratory species and their habitats.

Yours sincerely,

Signed by:

Ariel Brunner

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Ariel Brunner
Regional Director
BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

Signed by:

Ibrahim Khader

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On behalf of our national Partners from Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa:

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Protection and Preservation
of Natural Environment in
Albania (PPNEA)



Foundation for the
Preservation of Wildlife and
Cultural Assets (FPWC)



BirdLife Austria



Natagora



Natuurpunt



Bulgarian Society for the
Protection of Birds (BSPB)



Association BIOM



BirdLife Cyprus



Czech Society for
Ornithology (ČSO)



Dansk Ornitologisk
Forening (DOF) /
BirdLife Denmark



Eesti Ornitológiaühing



Føroya Fuglafrøðifelag



BirdLife Suomi



Ligue pour la
Protection des Oiseaux



Society for Nature
Conservation



Naturschutzbund
Deutschland



Gibraltar Ornithological
and Natural History
Society



Hellenic Ornithological
Society



Magyar Madártani és
Természetvédelmi
Egyesület



Fuglavernd/BirdLife
Iceland



BirdWatch Ireland



Latvian Ornithological
Society



Botanisch-Zoologische
Gesellschaft



Lega Italiana Protezione
Uccelli



Association for the
Conservation of
Biodiversity of
Kazakhstan



Society for the Protection
of Nature in Israel



Lietuvos Ornitologijos
Draugijos



natur&emwelt



BirdLife Malta



Centar za zaštitu i
proučavanje ptica

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Vogelbescherming
Nederland



Macedonian Ecological
Society



BirdLife Norge



Ogólnopolskie
Towarzystwo
Ochrony
Ptaków/BirdLife
Polska



Sociedade Portuguesa para
o Estudo das Aves



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Društvo za zaštitu i
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SOS/BirdLife Slovensko



Društvo za
Opazovanje in
Proučevanje Ptice
Slovenije



SEO/BirdLife



BirdLife Sverige



BirdLife Schweiz



Doğa



Royal Society for
the Protection of
Birds



Ukrainian Society for the
Protection of Birds



Uzbekistan Society for the
Protection of Birds



Palestine Wildlife Society
(PWLs)



The Society for the
Protection of Nature in
Lebanon (SPNL)



The Syrian Society for the
Conservation of Wildlife



BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ)



BirdWatch Zambia



Environment Protection
Society (KEPS)



Nature Iraq



The Royal Society for the
Conservation of Nature
(RSCN) - Jordan

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BirdLife Botswana



NATURAMA



Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature (ABN)



Biosfera



SOS-Forêts



Nature Conservation Egypt
الجمعية المصرية لحماية الطبيعة
Nature Conservation Egypt



The Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS)



Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS)



Guinee Ecologie



Nature Kenya



The Society for Conservation of Nature in Liberia (SCNL)



Asity Madagascar



Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM)



Nature Mauritanie



Mauritian Wildlife Foundation



GREPOM/Birdlife Maroc



Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF)



Nature Rwanda



Nature Seychelles



Nature-Communautés-Développement



The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL)



Giving Conservation Wings
BirdLife South Africa



Nature Tanzania



Association "Les Amis des Oiseaux"
Association Les Amis des Oiseaux (AAO)



Nature Uganda (NU)

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