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## Strengthening policy through science: the contribution of the EJP SOIL programme to EU Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive Proposal

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In response to the lack of dedicated EU legislation addressing soils, the European Commission proposed a Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive in July 2023. This directive aims to set a comprehensive soil monitoring framework in Member States for assessing soil health, with the aspirational goal to have all the soils in a healthy condition by 2050. The EJP SOIL programme is developing research towards climate-smart and sustainable management of agricultural soils, addressing topics very relevant to the proposed directive, such as the definition of soil health, soil health indicators, the effect of agricultural management on soil properties and functions, the harmonisation of soil information and that of soil monitoring systems. The EJP SOIL got heavily involved at the science to policy interface in reacting to and supporting this proposal. Concrete outputs are use of the EJP SOIL results, and their citation, in the Impact Assessment associated with the law proposal, in EU Parliament proposed amendments, in several Member State feedbacks to the Commission and in the compromise text of the law.

This experience allowed to identify elements of a successful contribution of science to policy. The scope and activity of the EJP SOIL programme and its timing matched particularly well the directive proposal timeline. The anchoring of the programme at the national level, research institutes and universities being mandated by ministries and national hubs of stakeholders having been implemented was an asset. The EJP SOIL realised, in its first years, a number of stocktakes, i.e. systematic assessments, in 24 European countries, of the state of play of soil issues. For example, existing national soil databases, national rules for sharing soil information, soil quality indicators used by Member states, characteristics of the existing national soil monitoring systems, national fertilisation guidelines, and other items were systematically investigated. This provided a solid baseline information for policy makers. Furthermore, the programme research results were periodically discussed in the partnership to collectively elaborate policy relevant syntheses and

messages, which were shared in a series of dedicated policy workshops. In addition, consultation channels provided by the commission (call for evidence, public consultations) were used by the programme as well as direct interaction with Commission services.

Overall, the EJP SOIL succeeded in mainstreaming the research effort and contributing to support effective policy development. It is still a learning process, challenging for scientists, who need to understand the policy needs, to deal with the different time scales of research and policy, to come to a consensus regarding research results, to communicate correctly about uncertainty and complexity of the topics and to set an ad-hoc dissemination to policy makers and soil stakeholders.