

South American civil society organisations to Leaders of the European Parliament:

Please help save the Pantanal from unprecedented fires

We, the undersigned civil society organizations from Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, write to ask for your help to save and restore the world's largest tropical wetland, the Pantanal, which faces unprecedented fires.

At the start of your previous parliamentary term in 2019, you helped put the need to do more to help stop the Amazon forest fires on the EU's agenda. Since then, South American civil society has noted, with great respect and gratitude, the efforts of Members of the European Parliament to protect the environment and our beloved Amazon forest, such as through voting for legislation to protect forests globally.

Now we ask you to pay regard to an equally beautiful, unique biome which is at risk of disappearing even faster: the Pantanal.

Spanning 42 million acres, the Pantanal is home to a vast array of species, many of which are vulnerable or endangered. It is an important carbon sink and plays a critical role in climate regulation for South America. The Pantanal is also home to 1.2 million people, including eleven Indigenous territories. However, the vast majority of the Pantanal is unprotected and increasingly threatened by extensive fires.



In 2020, nearly 30% of the biome – an area almost the size of Belgium – burned, and 17 million wild vertebrates were killed in fires. The carbon emissions from the fires were more than Belgium’s for the entire year.

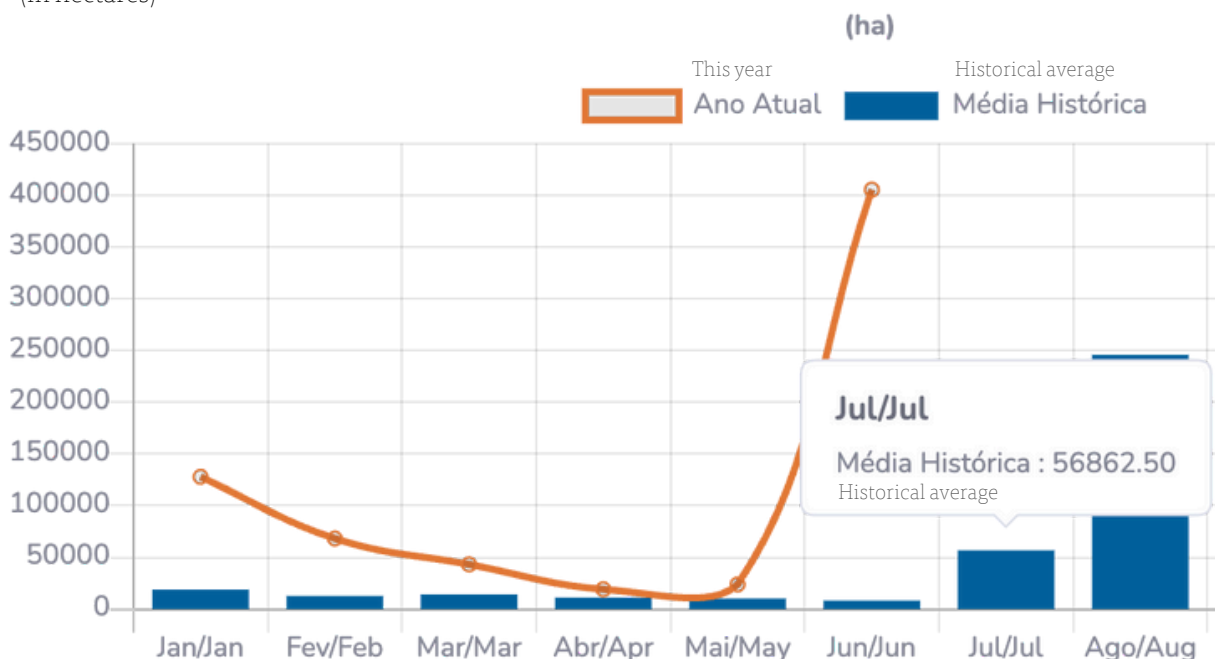
This tragedy, once unthinkable, is likely to be repeated this year. Nearly 700,000 hectares, an area more than 40 times the size of Brussels, has already burnt from January to June 25th, and we are only at the very beginning of the dry season. The fires devastated the landscape, leaving behind a trail of corpses of animals that did not have time to escape the flames.

This is the result of climate change and reckless land conversion within the Pantanal and on its outskirts. The deforestation within the floodplain is happening mostly to intensify cattle production - driven by international demand for cheap commodities, including from the EU.

In the surrounding areas, native vegetation is being replaced by soy plantations, largely for export, compromising the rivers that flow to the Pantanal that are essential to guaranteeing its hydrological balance. In the past three decades, the Pantanal lost 29% of its surface water. The extreme drought, combined with climatic events such as El Niño and La Niña, which new scientific evidence suggests are becoming stronger in face of climate collapse, is contributing to devastating forest fires.

The synergy between different threats, such as invasive species, mining, hydropower plans and new road infrastructure, may lead the Pantanal to collapse. Unless the global community acts to halt these impacts now, we might witness the disappearance of this unique biome within our generation.

BURNED AREA
(in hectares)



Source: LASA - UFRJ



 Gustavo Figueiroa

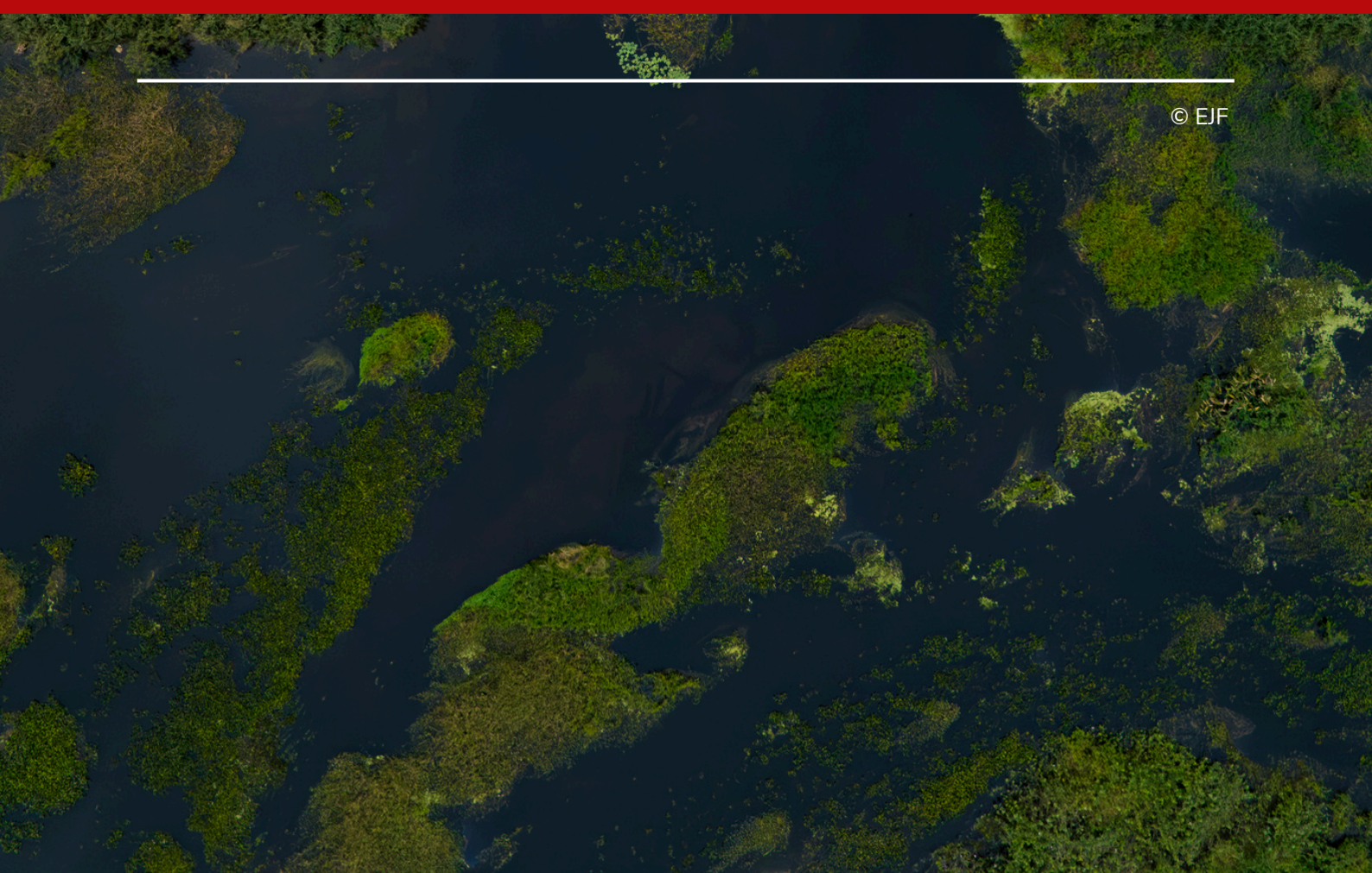
Now at the start of your new parliamentary term, and in view of climate COP30, in Bélem next year, we urge you, leaders of the European Parliament, to consider what more the EU can do to help protect and restore the Pantanal - and similarly threatened wetlands - as central to protecting our climate and biodiversity.

Concretely, we ask you to support candidate Commissioners who:

- Recognise the indispensable role of wetlands in protecting our biodiversity and regulating our climate, and;
- Commit to increasing their protection, including by expanding the scope of the EU's deforestation regulation to cover wetlands and funding the restoration of globally critical wetlands, like the Pantanal, such as via Wetland Partnerships.



**You can make a difference in protecting this unique biome and we urge you
to heed our call for help.**



© EJF

