

REFERENCES TO OTHER TOPICS

New Zealand

Forestry Rules Tightened

Since the November 1999 general elections, environmental groups supporting the Labour-Alliance government to stop the logging of native forests have lobbied the Government.

In mid-May, the Cabinet bowed to the pressure and agreed that no further native trees are to be cut on Crown (government) land from March 2002 – seven years earlier than the main opponents, the finance minister and the deputy prime minister, had wished.

The decision was seen as a realistic compromise, which would minimise job losses among furniture makers, people employed as foresters and sawmill workers.

Northeast Asia

Regional Environment Fund

Policy-makers from Northeast Asian countries have agreed to set up a regional environmental co-operation fund and develop joint environmental research and action programmes in their growing effort to address common environmental concerns in the region.

A "Vision Statement for Environmental Co-operation in Northeast Asia," was adopted by senior officials from South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and Mongolia at the end of the Sixth Meeting of Senior Officials on Environmental Co-operation in Northeast Asia, held from 8-10 March in Seoul.

The Statement, also endorsed by representatives from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), will "provide a basic direction for regional environment co-operation in the 21st century."

Decline in Ecosystems

A new report* issued jointly in April by the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute reveals a widespread decline in the condition of the world's ecosystems due to increasing resource demands. The study warns that if the decline continues it could have devastating implications for human development and the welfare of all species.

Ecosystems are communities of interacting organisms and the physical environment in which they live; they are the biological engines of the planet. At the heart of the report is the first-of-its-kind Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems (PAGE). The report examines coastal, forest, grassland, freshwater and agricultural ecosystems, analysing their health on the basis of their ability to produce the goods and services that the world currently relies on. These include production of food, provision of pure and sufficient water, storage of atmospheric carbon, maintenance of biodiversity and provision of recreation and tourism opportunities.

The scorecards that accompany the report describe most of the ecosystems in fair, but declining, conditions. The statistics it contains are alarming. For example:

- Half of the world's wetlands were lost last century.
- Logging and conversion have shrunk the world's forests by as much as half.
- Fishing fleets are 40 per cent larger than the ocean can sustain.
- Nearly 70 per cent of the world's major marine fish stocks are overfished or are being fished to their biological limit.
- Soil degradation has affected two-thirds of the world's agricultural lands in the last 50 years.
- Dams, diversions or canals fragment almost 60 per cent of the world's largest rivers.

* *A Guide to World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life*. The full report, to be released in September 2000, is published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank and the World Resources Institute (WRI). Over 175 scientists contributed to the report, which took more than two years to prepare.

Copies of *A Guide to World Resources 2000-2001* can be downloaded from <http://www.wri.org/wri/wr2000>

"For too long in both rich and poor nations, development priorities have focused on how much humanity can take from our ecosystems, with little attention to the impact of our actions," said Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator. "With this report, we reconfirm our commitment to making the viability of the world's ecosystems a critical development priority for the 21st century."

However, the report warns that halting the decline of the planet's life-support systems may be the most difficult challenge humanity has ever faced.

The report recommends that governments and people must view the sustainability of ecosystems as essential to human life. It calls for an ecosystems approach to managing the world's critical resources, which means evaluating decisions on land and resource use in light of how they affect the capacity of ecosystems to produce goods and services.

According to the report, one of the most important conclusions of PAGE is that there is a lack of much of the baseline knowledge that is needed to properly determine ecosystems conditions on a global, regional or even local scale.

The PAGE report has provided the impetus for the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment – a plan put forward by governments, UN agencies, and leading scientific organisations to allow the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the health of the world's ecosystems.

European Union

Increase for LIFE

The European Parliament has voted to demand an increase from \$600 million to \$883 million in funding for the next phase of the EU's grant-making programme for the environment, known as LIFE.

A compromise text is likely to emerge from ongoing negotiations, which will then require simple votes of approval by the Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

The draft foresees the following major themes for the relaunched programme: nature conservation and environment protection, and technical assistance to third countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Baltic. The Parliament, in spite of opposition from the Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström, wants to allocate some of the environment protection funding to plans and demonstration projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Deputies also want an explicit commitment to further renewing LIFE, by imposing an obligation on the Commission to produce new proposals in 2003.

Dolphin Deaths/Fishing Nets

The Commission is to examine the mysterious deaths of dozens of dolphins in the English Channel to see whether they are victims of a new system of trawling. Although a Commission spokesman cautioned against making a direct link between the dolphin deaths and the latest driftnet developments, he added that the Commission was already funding scientific studies into whether they were connected.

Meanwhile, the Commission is also looking into other new fishing nets, which their designers claim are more selective and ensure that the youngest fish in each stock are not plundered during trawls. Sea trials of the Scottish nets have shown that putting 90mm square mesh panels in trawls can reduce the dumping of undersized fish by around 40 per cent.

It is hoped that the new gear should be on board all British boats chasing white fish and prawns by the start of June 2000, and should safeguard vital North Sea haddock stocks, paving the way for future quota increases.

The plans to protect stocks were tabled by fishermen themselves, but a question mark has hung over them because Norway had not agreed to allow Scottish boats to use 90mm nets in its waters. However, Norway says it has backed the new design in principle.

Vietnam

Polluter Pays System

The Government has announced that it will institute a "polluter pays" system devised by its Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). The system would see both companies or organisations and individuals damaging the environment having to pay a

fine as an alternative to fees and taxes for raising investment capital for environmental protection. In addition, the scheme would force businesses and companies that cause pollution to pay for cleaning up any "resulting environmental problems and compensate the state for any losses."

France/Netherlands Rhine Pollution

France was ordered on 11 April by the Strasbourg Administrative Tribunal to pay more than 24 million francs in damages to the Dutch city of Amsterdam and its water distribution company for its delay in reducing saline pollution of the Rhine caused by potassium mines in Alsace.

The French State has been ordered to pay FF9 million to the City of Amsterdam, and FF14.7 million to NV PWN Waterleidingbedrijf Noord-Holland. France will also be required to pay interest on these sums back-dated to 25 April 1988, when the complaints were lodged, and FF10,000 to each of the plaintiffs in application of Article 8-1 of the Administrative Tribunal's Code, according to the Ruling.

The plaintiffs had demanded compensation for additional operating costs between 1976 and 1987 in respect of drinking water networks, caused by high levels of salt in water abstracted from the Rhine, partly as a result of discharges from Alsatian potassium mines (MDPA). Salt attacks conduits, obliging operators to replace pipes early, cement ducts, underground catchment wells and fund rust removal operations.

The judges concluded that the State was at fault for having failed to regulate brine discharges from MDPA and subsequently, from 1981, in having applied inadequate regulations when discharges were constantly higher than levels not liable to have a damaging effect. The Administrative Tribunal did not rule out the possibility that a part of the additional costs to the operator might be attributed to inflows of sea water, another potential source of corrosion, and estimated that only 35 to 40 per cent of the brine discharged by Alsatian mines could be incriminated. Given that the events in this case date back some time, the judges have set the compensation sum to be paid by the French State at 20 per cent of the sums demanded.

USA

Water Security Alliance

Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, called recently for the creation of a global water security alliance, to face the challenge of water shortages igniting serious political and military crises. She added that the United States proposes to play a decisive role in the development of this new alliance, suggesting that difficulties linked to water raise serious concerns in terms of foreign policy in a number of critical regions around the world.

Secretary Albright indicated that the United States is not proposing an alliance along the lines of NATO, restricted to certain countries and comprising only governments, but rather a less formal alliance, open to those who understand the urgent need to work together to conserve, manage and use transboundary water wisely. She identified several regions, notably in Africa and the Middle East, where water management poses significant problems, over and above purely environmental considerations. She also emphasised that this new alliance would represent a long-term effort, its success resting not only on ecological and health considerations, but also on promoting democracy worldwide.

Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline

Members of the European Parliament who visited Chad and Cameroon to assess the impact of a planned oil pipeline to be built between southern Chad and Cameroon's coast stated recently that they were not hostile to it, but that "the benefits should go to the populations."

In January, the European Parliament had adopted a Resolution calling on the European Investment bank to suspend its contribution of 44 million Euros to the project as long as environmental and social requirements were not guaranteed. The project will generate some \$2 billion for Chad and \$500 million for Cameroon, according to World Bank estimates. Chevron Corporation said recently that it would participate in the 650-mile export pipeline project. However, French oil group Elf Aquitaine and its Anglo-Dutch rival Royal Dutch/Shell Oil Group, who were originally going to participate in the project, have now backed out.

