

Recent Developments

Preparations for Johannesburg

At their Council session in Brussels on 13 May, EU Environment Ministers acknowledged that they need to have agreed the common position, which the EU proposes to defend at this World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), by 17 June. This common position will then be endorsed by the Seville European Council from 21–22 June.

During the May meeting, ministers took the opportunity to reaffirm their desire to see the EU play a central role in the Johannesburg Conference process, and emphasised the importance of preparing properly for the meeting. They instructed the various Council bodies to actively pursue their work and present their contributions to ensure that the Development Council on 30 May is able to adopt Conclusions on a negotiating mandate for Johannesburg. The EU's final position will then be endorsed with Heads of State and Government at the Seville Summit.

The EU aims to ensure that the WSSD yields targeted and balanced results, not only in terms of enhancing commitments by all countries, but also, more specifically, regarding the three components of sustainable development, comprising social, economic and environmental aspects.

Decline in Wild Bird Populations

The European Commission report (COM(2002)146), adopted at the end of March 2002 on the implementation of the Wild Birds Directive, states that nearly 25 per cent of the species regularly observed in Europe have experienced a severe reduction in the size of their populations over the last 20 years. Going on the information provided by the Member States, the report reveals the trend in national laws and the extent or lack of observance of EU provisions. The Commission said that the late publication of the report, which applies to the 1996–1999 period, was because the Member States were late in sending their reports to be evaluated.

The report notes that 236 of the 514 bird species regularly observed in Europe enjoy fairly generous protection and are found in areas far beyond Europe's borders. Eighty-

three species are well protected but tend to be concentrated in Europe, and 195 species, or 38 per cent of the total, are reported to be unevenly protected. The Commission is concerned that the decline in wild bird populations is a reflection of what is happening to numerous other groups of flora or fauna.

EU experts say that the decline is due to changes in land use and land management. Intensive farming practices are noted as one of the main causes of the decline for 42 per cent of species, and the disappearance and deterioration of wetlands is also given as a key factor.

The report also gives a country-based review of the positive way the Directive is being applied, through conservation of habitats and the creation of a network of special protection areas, general protection schemes, and research and other measures and work undertaken by the Commission.

Energy Supplies

Ministers and senior officials from the 15 EU Member States discussed future energy supplies at an 'informal seminar' held in Pamplona, Spain from 26–28 April.

The first two days focused on renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. On the final day, Energy Commissioner Loyola de Palacio stated that 'we cannot meet the Kyoto targets without nuclear energy'. This view was also supported by the OECD's Secretary-General, Donald Johnson (USA). In his address, he emphasised the importance of taking a long-term view on decisions concerning future energy supplies, and painted a pessimistic picture of the likely environmental situation if our consumption of fossil fuels continues to increase, and raised the question of the 'reversibility threshold' regarding climate change. He argued that there is just one solution, and stressed that 'we cannot see a future ahead if we do not examine nuclear energy in a serious way.'

Greenpeace Spain responded by recalling that nuclear power is explicitly excluded from the Kyoto Protocol flexible mechanisms outlined so far.

According to the Meetings 'Conclusions', 'environmental policies have been and continue to represent an essential framework for the European energy market, notably for the production of electricity.' The Conclusions list the benefits of renewables: reduction in energy expenditure, decentralisation, reservoir for employment, notably in regions furthest from economic development and technologically advanced centres.

In order to foster their development towards maturity, the Conclusions recommend 'providing renewables during a transition period with sufficient support to offset production costs, which remain high'. This aid would be reduced as renewables develop. (MJ)



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