

Climate Policy: A Glass Half Empty or Half Full?

By Jason Anderson and David Baldock

For some the recent EU climate and energy package was a historic decision reached in record time; for others it was so full of holes it will amount to little action on the ground. Similarly, Poznan either kept up momentum for achieving a UN accord at Copenhagen, or it reflected a stagnation of political will. In truth, both perspectives have some validity; the gulf between them lies in the level of ambition.

For policymakers, the recent package is a relative success. It is sweeping, agreed on time against a deteriorating backdrop of financial meltdown, and resolves some painful distributional issues, pertaining especially to new Member States. However, even the most skilful of pragmatic compromises have to stand up to the continued advances of climate science: 2008 saw a worsening prognosis, from faster Arctic ice melting rates to the recognition that our current emissions trajectory is far higher than previously assumed, putting us on track for a disastrous six degree warming.

The real test for Europe has yet to come, because the UN follow-on to Kyoto will not only define our global ambitions, it is also likely to require a strengthening of the December package. Europe and a rejuvenated United States delegation face the challenge of working together in an international process that has become both cumbersome and weakened by the absence of important players. Europe alone cannot carry the burden of pushing a Kyoto follow-on agreement over the finishing line; more so since some of its leadership has been tarnished in the public horse trading on the 20-20-20 package. Honest effort from the United States, Russia, China and others is essential.

European leadership will come through the power of its ideas, the credibility of its actions and its ability to catalyse agreement among others. Having slogged through the trenches of the UN for so long, Europe may be showing signs of fatigue.

Yet we can draw some comfort from the unappetising December deal. Tough timetables can be met and reluctant special interests bound into a process where there is real political determination. It is less important whether the impetus comes from Brussels, Washington or Beijing than whether the sense of urgency and ambition is maintained. Europe must not shrink from this.



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1. Agricultural Soils – Can the Degradation be Reversed?

After three decades of effort to tackle air and water pollution in Europe there are clear signs of progress. The same can not be said of soils. Considerable evidence has been amassed of the decline of agricultural soils as a result of water and wind erosion, compaction, often arising from the constant use of heavy machinery, and a pervasive decline in soil organic carbon affecting most countries. Salinisation and sodification are major issues in Spain, Hungary, Romania and parts of Bulgaria. In addition there is widespread contamination by pesticides, heavy metals and nutrients, notably phosphates and nitrates. Large quantities of organic carbon are locked up in European soils and the importance of managing this reservoir well has never been clearer.

The Soil Thematic Strategy launched in 2006 was an initiative to push the subject up the European agenda, but the proposal for a soil framework Directive, requiring action by the Member States, remains in the doldrums despite the efforts of the French Presidency. Some MEPs, who felt that not enough was being done to stop the degradation of agricultural soils, created the impetus for a major European study on Sustainable agriculture and Soil Conservation (SoCo), conducted in 2007/08. This was carried out by the Joint Research Centre, with a significant role for IEEP and two principal partners, the Humboldt University of Berlin and ZALF. We conducted case studies in eight Member States, covering both technical and policy issues, gauging the cause and significance of degradation problems and which measures were being used to address soil concerns on farmland. The issue has received much less attention than diffuse water pollution or the loss of farmland biodiversity and policy measures have been applied with correspondingly less vigour. Stakeholders from a range of countries brought together at workshops in Spain, Germany and the UK generally confirmed this view, and there were lively debates about the role of conservation agriculture and organic farming in improving soil management.

The final report of the whole project will be published by the Joint Research Centre this year.

Contact: David Baldock

2. EU Budget Debate: Looking Ahead to 2009

The EU Budget review debate launched by the Commission in September 2007 is rumbling on but, rather than picking up speed, the next steps look likely to be delayed to fit in with a number of key political events in 2009. The European Parliament elections and the installation of a new Commission will take place over the summer, with both institutions keen to leave the main substance of the budget review to their successors. The publication of any potentially controversial budget proposals could also compromise President Barroso's alleged desire to stand for reappointment, and could also affect the outcome of a potential fraught second Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in the autumn.

It looks likely, therefore, that there will be a lengthy gap - possibly up to a year - between the initial stakeholder consultation stage of the budget review and the publication of the Commission's White Paper on the subject. By the time the Commission drew a line under the consultation stage with a conference in Brussels in November 2008, almost 300 stakeholder responses had been received. The Commission has published these responses in full on its website along with a summary document.

In December of last year IEEP published a policy briefing with a specific analysis of the consultation responses of the 27 Member States in relation to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) spending. The CAP is at the heart of the budget review debate and has proved the most commented on and controversial topic of the consultation. The divergent opinions of the Member States reveal some of the potential battlegrounds ahead as the budget review debate eventually progresses into its next phase – namely discussion of a Commission proposal in the European Parliament and Council.

On 21 January David Baldock will continue IEEP's work on the budget review debate by presenting a paper to the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets on how EU spending can meet the Union's energy and climate change objectives.

Contact: Camilla Adelle

3. Delivering on Europe's 20/20/20 Promise

During 2008 the environmental press was filled with speculation about the ultimate content and effectiveness of the vital suite of climate and energy policies under consideration by the Parliament and Council. Finally, in mid December, an agreement was reached between Member States and MEPs. While the implications of the compromises made to achieve agreement will be debated for some time to come, a great challenge now lies ahead. Europe now has a mere eleven years to make good on its 20/20/20 commitments (which may become 30/20/20 if an acceptable deal is reached in the UN) and demonstrate the capability to deliver lasting change to its energy systems.

The implementation of the energy package will be observed across the globe. Over the coming years Europe will be tested: can the promises be turned into reality? Eleven years is not a long time in which to shift our energy usage fundamentally and move convincingly towards the goal of 27 low carbon economies. Rapid mobilisation will be essential.

Over the coming year IEEP will launch a series of reports intended to help clarify the challenges faced across Europe. We will publish a report examining how planning approaches for renewable energy, and specifically onshore wind, can be improved in the UK, providing insights into an area critical to the swift delivery of renewable energy. We will also launch a review of the mechanisms Member States plan to use in order to deliver upon their 2020 obligations. Moreover, we will be specifically examining possible approaches to the development of National Renewable Energy Action Plans, and how this mechanism can best be utilised as a tool to deliver on our ambitious commitments.

IEEP's research findings will be made available throughout the year on our publication page: <http://www.ieep.eu/publications/publications.php>

Contact: Jason Anderson

4. The Impacts of Land Use Changes in Europe on Ecosystems Services

The recent European Commission Communication on the EU Biodiversity Action Plan reveals that the EU will fail to meet its target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 unless significant additional efforts are made over the next two years. Furthermore there is growing evidence that the impacts of climate change, climate mitigation measures and other changes in land use will increase substantially over the next few decades. The current environmental problems in Europe are therefore likely to be exacerbated by unprecedented challenges ahead.

A new study that IEEP is carrying out for DG Environment, in collaboration with Alterra, will help identify the major challenges resulting from likely changes in land use in Europe over the next 25 years. The study will firstly use a range of scenarios and land use models to develop quantitative projections of the dynamic interplay between key land uses, such as agriculture, forestry and the built environment. In particular, it will assess the likely movement of land in and out of the main land uses, the land use transitions within individual land uses and the intensity of land use.

The land use projections will be used to assess likely impacts on key ecosystems services including the production of food (and agricultural products), soil carbon storage and sequestration (and other aspects of soil condition), water resources (and their quality) and biodiversity benefits. The potential impacts of existing and foreseen policy measures on land uses and ecosystem services will then be examined. This part of the project will include a critical assessment of the practical implementation of initiatives that aim to counter habitat fragmentation through the development of ecological networks and corridors, to examine their actual impacts on land use. A workshop will also be held at which invited experts will review the practical implementation of corridor and ecological networks in their countries and identify factors that led to successes and failures.

Finally and most importantly, new policy options will be developed to address the range of major impacts that could potentially arise from the projected long-term changes in European land use. This may require the development of radically new types of environmental policy instrument to effectively tackle the increasing pace and magnitude of land use and climate change.

Contact: Graham Tucker

5. Is 'Soft' Law a Soft Option?

With over 200 EU environmental laws already in place, the EU faces an ongoing challenge to further expand its legislative competence, while at the same time ensuring that current laws are not only implemented, but also implementable. To overcome obstacles to political feasibility and address EU 'good' governance and Better Regulation agendas, there has been a noticeable trend towards use of informal networks and 'soft' law. One such example is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which promotes the use of guidelines, benchmarks, monitoring and exchange of best practice through peer review and learning activities. In theory, this procedure respects subsidiarity by achieving EU objectives through the soft coordination of national policies, encouraging cooperation across governance levels, and between public and private sectors.

The use of OMC-like informal networks (in practice if not in name) can be observed in ongoing processes such as the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP) and sectoral networks, such as the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law Network (IMPEL), the Common Implementation Strategy of the Water Framework Directive (CIS-WFD), and the Seville Process (implementing the IPPC Directive). Further examples under development include Green Public Procurement and the EU strategy for an Integrated Maritime Policy, and there are indications that the Commission is interested in exploring the role of OMC in its forthcoming White Paper on adaptation to climate change. IEEP is also exploring the potential of using OMC and other forms of cooperation to reach further harmonisation on environmental taxes, where the unanimity requirement for legislation would otherwise make EU action difficult.

It is worth noting that many OMC-type processes have provided substantial inputs to EU legislation. For instance, the ECCP led to the Emissions Trading Directive, while IMPEL drafted the Recommendations on Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections. These successes seem to suggest that soft law may not be such a soft option after all

Contact: Michelle Twena and Patrick ten Brink

IEEP conferences and events

In the coming months IEEP will organise or participate to the following meetings and events. If you would like to find out more, do not hesitate to contact us.

EPIGOV Project Final Conference – Brussels (Belgium), 23 January 2009

A conference summarising and putting to debate the results of the Environmental Policy Integration and Multi-level Governance (EPIGOV) project will be held in Brussels, hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee. IEEP, in collaboration with ECOLOGIC, Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM) and Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), has been working on this project supported by the European Commission's 6th Research Framework Programme for close to 2 years. Work has focused on the analysis of governance issues linked to the integration of environmental concerns into various sector policies, such as transport, energy or agriculture, at different levels of governance. You can visit the project mini-site at <http://www.ieep.eu/projectminisites/epigov/index.php>.

Contact: [Marc Pallemmaerts](#)

The External Dimension of Sustainable Development - International Conference on the External Aspects of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy - Brussels (Belgium), 28 January 2009

IEEP, in cooperation with EGMONT (the Belgian Royal Institute for International Relations) is organising this major policy conference on the external dimension of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), with the support of the Belgian Federal Departments of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Bringing together experts, officials and stakeholders from EU Member States and non-EU countries, in particular from developing countries, the conference will assess the extent to which the EU is living up to the commitments made in the SDS. The focus will be on EU policies in four high-profile areas with a strong impact on developing countries: biofuels; the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP); climate change; and the Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and the proposed Regulation on imports of illegally harvested timber. High-level speakers will include a number of IEEP researchers. For further information, please see the conference programme at http://www.ieep.eu/publications/pdfs/susdev_conf0109.pdf

Contact: [Marc Pallemmaerts](#)

The European Biodiversity Action Plan. Counting Down to 2010: State of Play and the Post 2010 Vision for Europe – European Parliament, Brussels (Belgium), 11 February 2009

A high-level round table will inform the European Parliament debate on the Biodiversity Action Plan and the mid-term review on its implementation, released by the Commission in December. Among the key issues, the conference will address the degree of achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target, the progress so far, and the possible need for new targets. David Baldock will contribute to the round table discussion.

Contact: [David Baldock](#)

Training Course on EU Rural Development Policy – Belgrade (Serbia), 19-20 February 2009

Tamsin Cooper and Kaley Hart are running a two day training course in Belgrade for a Working Group of government officials and NGOs. The course will provide an introduction to the EU rural development policy framework and will cover the design and implementation of agri-environment schemes in different Member States.

Contact: [Tamsin Cooper](#)

Environmental Policy Development in Central Asia – Astana (Kazakhstan), 13 March 2009

Andrew Farmer has been invited to give a presentation at this European Commission conference which aims to stimulate improved environmental policy development and integration for the countries of Central Asia.

Contact: [Andrew Farmer](#)