



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

European Commission publishes 2006 Annual Environment Policy Review

11 May 2007

The European Commission has published its fourth Annual Environment Policy Review (EPR), covering developments in 2006¹. It describes the recent policy outputs of the EU and the Member States without attempting to evaluate their adequacy or effectiveness. The tone of the report stands in stark contrast to that of the recent Green 10 report *Could Try Harder*, which was published at about the same time. This gives the Barroso Commission an average score of just 4.3 out of 10 across 16 policy areas, and concludes that the Commission has merely paid lip-service to, or marginalised, the environment agenda.

The 2006 EPR is in two parts. The first is a brief 14-page Communication describing

- EU policy developments in 2006;
- new findings in relation to state of the environment; and
- commitments for 2007

across the four priority areas of the Sixth Environmental Action Programme – Climate Change; Nature and Biodiversity; Environment and Health; and Resource Use. It also includes a section on Environment Policy and Better Regulation, which discusses the simplification of existing environmental legislation; impact assessments; and the need to improve implementation in the Member States.

The second part takes the form of a longer Staff Working Document. This includes statistical data and 27 ‘fiches’ summarising the state of the environment and environmental policy actions in each of the EU’s Member States. Success stories as well as poor performance are presented with little comment or explanation. The Communication notes, for example, that greenhouse gas emissions for the EU15 show a decrease of only 0.9 per cent since 1990 and that biodiversity loss continues at an unprecedented rate with two-thirds of the world’s ecosystem services in decline – but makes little attempt to assess the adequacy of existing or future EU policies to address the situation. Commitments for 2007 mainly reflect those already published in the Commission’s 2007 Work Programme.

* This work was funded by the statutory conservation and countryside bodies in the UK, as part of a contractual arrangement with IEEP to provide intelligence on EU environment policy and other policies which impact on the environment. It reflects the independent views of the IEEP and not necessarily the views of the funding bodies. For further information contact Emma Watkins at ewatkins@ieep.eu

The Commission's series of Annual Environment Policy Reviews was launched in 2003, and was initially intended to feed into the European Council's regular annual Spring review of progress on the Lisbon Strategy, alongside longer-established reports on economic and employment policy. The 2003 EPR made a number of robust comments on the need for greater integration of the environment into the EU's sectoral policies. The 2006 EPR, however, avoids making explicit judgements, and was anyway published too late to be considered by EU leaders at the spring summit in March this year.

The reviews of national environment policy developments in each of the 27 Member States was based on work co-ordinated by IEEP during the summer of 2006. Commissioned by DG Environment, this was intended as a pilot exercise to help pave the way for the eventual establishment of a more permanent system for the independent assessment and evaluation by the Commission of their national environmental initiatives. The project highlighted many of the difficulties of collecting up-to-date, reliable, and independent information and analysis, and concluded *inter alia* that native speakers should be appointed in each Member State as independent observers, and that the governments of the Member States themselves should also be engaged in the exercise to facilitate access to data and information.

The new system of annual reporting by the Member States on the implementation of their National Sustainable Development Strategies, agreed by EU Heads of State and Government in December 2005, could provide the foundations for strengthening the process of annual environment policy reviews.

References

1. European Commission Communication *2006 Environment Policy Review* COM(2007) 195 – 30.4.2007; Commission Staff Working Document *Annex to the 2006 Environment Policy Review* SEC(2007) 487 – 30.4.2007 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/policyreview.htm>

David Wilkinson, Senior Fellow
dwilkinson@ieep.eu

© Copyright IEEP 2007