



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing\**

**MEPs and Environment Ministers Discuss Waste and Natural Resource Use**

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Effective waste and natural resource management is fundamental to the achievement of many of Europe's broader environmental goals. There had been hopes that the publication, at the very end of 2005, of the Thematic Strategies on waste and recycling on the one hand and natural resource use on the other would provide momentum to these debates - especially regarding the prevention of waste and better use of resources. While perhaps the Strategies did not have the dramatic impact (nor did they contain the ambitious targets) some had hoped for, they have at least ensured that discussions on these important but contentious issues have taken place.

The natural resources Thematic Strategy was not associated with any specific implementing measure, nor did it contain any proposals for reduction targets etc. In April MEPs challenged this lack of vision urging the Commission to dramatically rethink its approach to the Strategy. The European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution that was highly critical of the Strategy, vilifying the absence of goals and targets. The resolution calls for action by the Commission to: develop policies for the 20 materials with the largest impact by 2008; undertake stakeholder dialogues on the most resource intensive extraction and production sectors to identify sectoral targets and efficiency measures; and develop benchmark criteria for sustainable management and harvesting of biotic resources ie wood, fish and agricultural products<sup>1</sup>.

An important element of any efforts to reduce resource use and limit waste production is a more considered and sustainable approach to consumption and production. An action plan on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) has been promised by the Commission for several years but is still yet to emerge. At the recent European Council meeting Environment Ministers highlighted the importance of the sustainable use and management of natural resources. While their proposals were far from as radical as those of MEPs, they did add their support to those pushing for the publication of the SCP Action Plan. In the Council's Conclusions Member States stated that they looked forward to the upcoming adoption of such an action plan. They also called for this plan to contain robust proposals and to create strong links to innovation, productivity, energy and resource efficiency. Ministers also reconfirmed that promoting the sustainable use of natural resources and ensuring the sustainable management of waste should be one of Europe's environmental policy priorities<sup>2</sup>.

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At the same Environment Council Ministers also reached a political agreement on the proposal for a review of the Waste Framework Directive (COM(2005)667). Ever since its adoption the proposal's most contentious and controversial element has been the supposition that municipal waste incinerators could be reclassified as recovery, rather than disposal, if they meet certain efficiency criteria. Much to the consternation of environmental NGOs, this action would move incineration by qualifying plants further up the waste hierarchy. A key concern is that allowing incineration to become a recovery activity would mean Member States' could potentially use incinerators as a means to meet waste targets, undermining the reuse and recycling of wastes. For this reason, at their first reading of the proposal MEPs rejected the reclassification of incinerators as recovery. MEP Caroline Jackson, the rapporteur responsible for the dossier within the European Parliament, argued that this clause might become a 'temptation for a number of EU10 [ie the 10 newest Member States] to skip recovery and recycling and move straight to incineration'.

While the European Parliament's first reading resolution rejects the concept of incineration being classified as recovery, MEPs also adopted a more stringent set of efficiency criteria for incinerators. This suggests that perhaps the Parliament is gearing up for a compromise deal on this element of the proposal. Additionally, there are rumours that the Parliament might concede, reluctantly, to the inclusion of incineration as 'recovery', if the Council agrees to the amendment that calls for specific targets for reduction and recycling (ie waste production be stabilised at the level reached in 2008 by 2012 - this would be supplemented by a reduction target to be laid down in 2010; by 2020, 50 per cent of municipal solid waste and 70 per cent of waste from construction, demolition, industry and manufacturing must be recycled or reused).

At their June meeting Environment Ministers unanimously approved the European Commission's original efficiency calculation and the concept of incineration being classed as recovery – an opposite position to Parliament. This approach had been championed by the current German Presidency of the Council, justified based on the anticipated benefits in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> savings through energy 'recovery' activities. The Council debate on waste was instead focused on the question of the import and export of municipal waste for recovery. Under the proposals, only facilities that are classified as recovery would be allowed to import waste from other Member States. A group of countries bordering Germany, led by the Czech Republic, supported by France and Denmark, won an amendment for which Member States 'may, in order to protect their network, limit incoming shipments of waste destined to incinerators'. It remains to be seen how MEPs will respond to these changes.

### **References**

1. European Parliament resolution of 25 April 2007 on a Thematic Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0154+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>
2. Environment Council Conclusions from 28 June 2007 [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/envir/95033.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/envir/95033.pdf)

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