

**COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION
ON INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS
IN COMMISSION POLICY-MAKING AND MANAGEMENT**

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years the Commission has sought to ensure that environmental considerations are fully integrated into its policy making. In that time, and in line with Article 130R of the Treaty, substantial progress has been made in areas such as the structural funds, development policy and in the areas of transport and energy. This Communication considers how this development can be continued and reinforced.

2. EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRATION PROCESS WITHIN THE COMMISSION

This development has taken place in a situation where internal measures agreed by the Commission in 1993¹ to achieve the objective have not been particularly effective.

Presented with this Communication is the annual assessment of progress in integration of environment in specific policy areas in 1996, as provided for in the 1993 measures. It is based on information supplied by the services. It demonstrates that important progress has been achieved during the present Commission in integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas.

The Annex to the Communication sets out a detailed evaluation of the implementation of the procedural measures agreed in 1993. It is clear that important progress has been made in integration in practice. However, the measures to integrate the environment into sectoral policies are still not fully internalised by the services of the Commission in operational terms. There is a lack of incentive to integrate environmental issues in new policy proposals and few perceived benefits of doing so.

Of the measures introduced in 1993 it appears in particular that the requirement to consider environmental effects early in the decision making process has only been partially effective, even though lately, there has been some progress.

3. BACKGROUND

In agreeing in 1993 how to proceed, the Commission recognised that, in line with the Community's Fifth Action Programme on the Environment and Sustainable Development and the commitments undertaken by the Community at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, it had to give a lead in the integration of the environmental dimension into its proposals for all Community

¹ SEC (93) 785 final

policies. It stressed the need for an early appreciation of the kind of impact new policy proposals could have on the environment and to take this into account in the subsequent development of the proposals and of their implementation when adopted. It recognised too that it was important to ensure this was not done in a way which imposed unnecessary administrative burdens.

Since the adoption of those measures, approaches to the integration of environment and to the concept of sustainable development have moved forward and there have been new developments both within the Community and internationally.

The Treaties, in particular as revised at Maastricht, already contain a clear legal obligation to integrate environmental requirements into other policies. Current proposals being discussed by the IGC, and proposed by the Commission, will, if adopted, strengthen the requirement for integration of environmental considerations in other Community policies as a means to achieving sustainable development.

The review in 1995 of the Community's Action Programme on the Environment and Sustainable Development² stressed the need for improved integration as a major requirement if the targets of the programme are to be fulfilled. Integration of environmental considerations into key target sectors is the main focus of the Commission's proposal to ensure a more effective implementation of the Programme. In adopting that proposal, the Commission also reiterated its own commitment to pursue practical steps to improve the integration of environment in new and existing policy and action³.

4. WHY REINFORCE THE COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATION?

This year will see a new international focus on sustainable development and the need to better integrate environment into other policies. In June 1997 Heads of State or Government will meet at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (Earth Summit II) to review the outcome of the agreements made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. By signing the Rio Declaration countries committed themselves to integrating environmental considerations in their policy making. At Earth Summit II, UN-members are likely to focus on integrating environmental, social and economic policies as the key to a focused programme of action to attain the Rio objectives more rapidly. The Community, in its own preparations for the Special Session, has emphasised the need for policy integration.

The European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have all pressed the Commission to improve integration of environmental considerations in its policy development processes and to show

² COM (95) 624 final

³ COM (95) 647

the results to the outside world.⁴ The Parliament's Environment Committee has held a series of hearings with Commissioners to review developments on integration in specific policy areas.

In a number of Member States the integration of environment and of sustainable development considerations has advanced and has become a strategic tool for policy making. The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Austria and Denmark are developing integrated approaches involving integration mechanisms such as government commissions or groups of ministers for sustainable development, integration secretariats within the Head of Government's office and strategic environmental assessments of new proposals. The Commission is seen as having set an example in developing this kind of approach.

A Community directive of 1985⁵, revised in 1996⁶, requires an environmental assessment for a wide range of projects carried out in Member States. The Commission made proposals in 1996⁷ to extend this process to plans and programmes and there are pressures on the Commission from Member States to apply such a process more systematically in its own policy-making.

Under the guidelines adopted by the Commission in January 1996 on its legislative policy a new focus on integration of environmental requirements would be in line with the aims of helping to improve its administrative culture, strengthening horizontal co-operation and task-oriented management. It would also stimulate dialogue, communication and transparency.

The aim of the integration process is to create an overall approach which ensures the right balance between the environment and other policies. This requires that the services responsible for environmental policies consult other services in the same way when environmental policies and actions which will have an impact on other policies are being developed and implemented.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Commission:

a) makes a renewed political commitment to integrating environmental considerations into its policy proposals as a key element leading to sustainable development;

b) reinforces existing measures and introduces new measures to support the process of integrating environmental requirements into its policy-making and

⁴ OJ N° C 362, 2.12.1996, OJ N° C 212, 22.7.1996, OJ N° C 34, 3.2.1997

⁵ Council Directive 85/337/EEC OJ N° L 175, 5.7.1985

⁶ Council Directive 97/11/EC OJ N° L 73, 14.3.1997

⁷ COM (96) 511 final

actions, recognising the important role it has to play in giving a lead and setting an example within the Community decision-making processes.

5.1. Renewed political commitment by the Commission

Experience within the Commission and elsewhere shows that a positive commitment at the highest political level to integrate environmental considerations at the earliest possible stages of policy development is needed to ensure that integration is ultimately achieved and that progress is made towards sustainable development. Each service is responsible for the integration process in its own area and for adopting a co-operative approach with other services.

To ensure that a strategic overview is achieved by the Commission and as a sign of its political commitment to integration and to sustainable development ahead of and following Earth Summit II, the Commission should agree to increase its efforts to develop overall approaches to sustainable development and the integration of environmental requirements into new policy. This should be discussed annually in the context of the the Commission's Work Programme. The Commission should also regularly review progress on integration. In preparing the General Report it should seek to ensure greater information on integration is published.

5.2. Environmental Appraisal

In the 1993 measures, provision is made for the environmental evaluation at an early stage of Commission plans, programmes and legislative proposals. However, it is clear that to date environmental evaluations have been an exception. Where they have been carried out, they have been done at a late stage in policy development and therefore have had little chance of influencing the basic parameters.

It is therefore proposed that in future all policy proposals must be evaluated by Directorates General at an early stage in their development from the point of view of whether they have positive or negative consequences for the environment. This appraisal should include, where appropriate, the effect on environmental quality, bio-diversity, energy and resource consumption, waste flows and land use.

The scope and details of the appraisal will necessarily be different depending on the policy area, the importance of the policy initiative, the stage at which the appraisal is being done and whether the appraisal is done on a one off or continuous basis. A basic method for such appraisals already exists in the Manual of Procedures. The Commission should immediately instruct its services to make this more operational in relation to their own policy areas and undertake to revise its procedures.

If, as part of the appraisal process, it is judged that no environmental consequences follow from a specific policy or action, indications should be given of how that conclusion has been reached.

As is presently the requirement, where the environmental appraisal shows that a proposal is likely to have a significant impact on the environment, the environmental consequences should be assessed in more detail (see below under 5.5.1). This assessment must form an integral part of the proposal presented by the Commission.

5.3. Sectoral Policy Statements

To facilitate a recognition of where integration is needed, each Directorate General should draw up its own policy statement on the environment and sustainable development, showing where and how the Directorate General will achieve integration of environmental considerations into its own future policy-making. These plans would set out the political objectives to be pursued, identify the principles to guide work on environmental considerations in the specific policy area, the ways of implementation, specific projects on which to focus, the resources to commit and define joint actions with other Directorates General. Several services have produced such strategy papers which have proved extremely valuable in strengthening a co-operative and horizontal approach to policy integration. Plans should be updated on a regular basis.

5.4. Reporting

Each year the Commission should continue to consider progress on integrating environmental considerations into other policies on the basis of information provided on developments in each policy area. Under the leadership of the Directorate General for the Environment an independent evaluation of achievements to this end should be carried out. The Commission should improve the information it provides on integration in the General Report of the Commission.

5.5. Other Measures

5.5.1. Green Stars in Commission Work Programme

Legislative proposals in the Commission Work Programme, for which it is agreed between the service responsible and the Directorate General for Environment that a detailed assessment of environmental consequences is required, should continue to be attributed a “Green Star”.

The selection of proposals to which a “Green Star” should be attributed should be carried out more vigorously than in the past.

The Directorate General concerned should select the proposals to which a “Green Star” will be attributed, in co-operation with the Directorate General for the Environment and the Secretariat General. The Secretariat General will verify that such proposals, when they come to the Commission for decision, do contain a detailed assessment of the environmental impact.

Individual proposals to which a “Green Star” has been attributed in the Work Programme should be the subject of a detailed assessment in co-

operation between the service(s) responsible and the Directorate General for Environment. The Commission's discussion on the Work Programme should as far as possible include an examination of these items. The "Green Stars" should also be indicated in the annual DG Programmes.

5.5.2. Environmental Integration Correspondents

The Commission should reconfirm the requirement for each Directorate General to nominate a senior official close to the central policy-making process, responsible for ensuring that policy proposals from that Directorate General take account of the environment and of the need to contribute towards sustainable patterns of development.

5.5.3. Greening the Budget

As an important element in the process of integrating environmental considerations in Commission policy-making and in line with requests from the European Parliament, the Commission should analyse the effects on the environment of Community funding, in particular in relation to agriculture, energy, transport and development policies as well as the structural funds. The Commission should consider the preparation of a report on how it could green the budget in areas where this has not yet taken place. The Commission will ensure the necessary structures are in place at service level to achieve the objectives of greening the budget.

5.5.4. Green Housekeeping

The Commission should accelerate its efforts to apply the highest standards of environmental care in its administrative policies by the end of its mandate.

5.5.5. Training

Particular efforts should be made to develop training programmes for Commission staff on environmental appraisal and on integration, building on experiences developed to date within the Commission.

6. CONCLUSION

Although there has been important progress in the recognition within the Commission of the need to integrate environmental considerations into other policy areas there is considerable scope for improvements. The integration of environment with economic and social policies as part of the process of sustainable development puts it at the heart of the policy-making process. Public opinion places it high among its concerns and it is essential for the Commission to take the necessary internal measures to ensure integration happens in its day to day operations.

The Commission is therefore invited to reconfirm its commitment to integration of environmental considerations in its policy-making and management as a means of moving towards sustainable development, to agree to the measures outlined in this

Communication, and to invite the services to implement them as a matter of urgency. The Commission is also invited to agree that it should review developments on a regular basis.

ANNEX

EXPERIENCE OF INTEGRATION SINCE 1993

Since it adopted measures in 1993 to achieve integration of environmental considerations into its policy and actions the Commission has undertaken internal evaluations of the progress in integrating the environment into other policies in 1994 and 1995, the latter as part of the review of the Fifth Action Programme which took place in 1995. Another has just been carried out and the results are presented with this Communication.

On the basis of these evaluations, the following is a summary of progress to date in implementing those measures:

Environmental evaluations

Measure: All Commission activities would be examined for their environmental implications. Where a significant impact on the environment is foreseen a strategic assessment of the environmental impact would be undertaken.

Outcome: This was intended as the key mechanism to assure integration took place. In practice, however, Directorates General have not always fully taken the requirement seriously and the Commission in its deliberations has not systematically made such evaluations a priority concern. Some DGs have carried out evaluations but it has not been done in a systematic way or on a continuous basis. In general, Directorates General have had difficulties to see the benefits of such an approach.

Environmental impact

Measure: In new legislative proposals, the Explanatory Memorandum would describe and justify the impact on the environment as well as the environmental costs and benefits involved.

Outcome: Some Commission proposals have indicated the environmental impact of the proposal and seek to set out environmental costs and benefits. This is not yet as systematic as it should be despite the reference to this need on the fiches required for submission of a document to the Commission.

Green Stars

Measure: Each Directorate General would identify, at the time it prepares its contribution to the annual work programme, which of its proposals may have significant environmental consequences, so called Green stars.

Outcome: Green stars were used for the first time in the Commission's published 1994 Legislative Programme to indicate items of legislation which were likely to require an environmental assessment. An initial screening of other DGs proposals was made and agreed by the Commission. This has continued in subsequent years, but in a more informal and less systematic way. The final responsibility for attaching the Green Star still lies with the sectoral DG with DGXI and the Secretariat General in an advisory role.

Annual assessment

Measure: The Commission would examine once a year progress on how it has contributed to the integration of environmental considerations into other Community policies. In order to prepare this examination each DG will carry out an evaluation of its own environmental performance.

Outcome: At the end of the last Commission, an information note was submitted to the Commission on progress made towards environmental integration. All DGs prepared an evaluation of the progress made by them over the previous twelve months, particularly in relation to the environmental assessment of projects which may have a significant environment impact. In 1995, the main elements were included in the Progress Report on the implementation of the Fifth Programme. A new evaluation of developments in 1996 has just been completed. These reports are often written in uncritical terms and the Commission has never fully debated progress.

Integration Correspondents

Measure: A senior official closely linked to the central policy making operation of each Directorate General would be made responsible for ensuring that policy proposals and legislative proposals developed in that Directorate General take account of the environment and of the requirement to contribute towards sustainable development.

Outcome: Environmental Integration Correspondents have been named in all the relevant Directorates General at varying levels in the hierarchy. They have met informally with the Director General of DGXI from time to time to discuss specific issues of mutual interest and integration in general. DGXI provides them with information on a regular basis. Several DGs have set up a special environment unit to manage integration of environment aspects in their own policy development.

In addition, in 1994 as part of a wider Commission process, a Directors General Environment Network was set up, chaired by the Director General of DGXI. It originally comprised the Director Generals from key Directorates General. At the beginning of 1997 it was widened to involve all Directorates General. Its focus is mainly on overall policy co-ordination on environment issues and impact of the environment on other policies and vice-versa. The DG Network has served a useful purpose of bringing together Directors General to discuss issues of strategic importance.

Overall, the correspondents and the DG Network have had important effects in increasing awareness of the need to integrate environmental considerations into other policies and has allowed an effective exchange of experiences. It is difficult to judge the effectiveness of this process on policy-making in individual Directorates General.

Policy co-ordination in DGXI

Measure: A special unit in DGXI would be set up to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme.

Outcome: A unit has been set up for this purpose reporting directly to the Director General. It has, among its tasks, the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Fifth Action Programme and for encouraging the integration process.

General Report

Measure: The General Report of the Commission would set out progress in the area of integration of environmental considerations and each policy area would set out how it had integrated environmental considerations.

Outcome: Since 1994, the format of the General Report has been partly changed to indicate, for main policy areas, how environmental considerations have been taken into account. The information provided to the outside world is however very brief.

Green Housekeeping

Measure: A Code of Conduct would be prepared by DGIX and DGXI concerning the Commission Services' own operations, for example for purchasing policies, choice of vehicles and equipment, waste prevention and disposal, and energy saving.

Outcome: DGIX, in co-operation with DGXI and the Secretariat General, has undertaken a number of measures in the fields of recycling, waste handling and purchasing policy ("Green Housekeeping"). A Strategy document was adopted in December 1995 which includes a framework for activities. In 1996 the emphasis has been on green reviews of administration. A number of defined areas of activities have been the subject of studies based on which a report and recommendations have been developed that form an action plan to be implemented in 1997. In general, progress in this area has been slow despite a Commission agreement to aim for the highest standards by the end of its mandate.

Conclusion

In general, while in practice progress has been made by the Commission towards a better integration of the environment in its other policies as a means of moving towards sustainable development, there has been a lack of commitment to ensuring the overall success of the process. It has not been seen as a major priority. It involves a major change of attitude and culture which takes time to take root. Experience in other administrations shows a similar development.

Above all, insufficient attention has been paid to evaluating the potential environmental impact of new policy developments and where these have been carried out the process has usually not been carried out sufficiently early to allow full account to be taken of it during decision making.