Summary of Discussions at the
1st Integrated Product Policy Expert Workshop

Awareness Raising and Exchange of Best Practice in the Greening of Public Procurement

Brussels, 11th May 2001
1. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE EXPERT WORKSHOPS**

Following the adoption of the Green Paper on Integrated Product Policy (IPP) in February 2001 the European Commission embarked upon a stakeholder consultation exercise, which will finish on 30th June 2001. In addition to welcoming written comments on the Green Paper the Commission has organised a series of meetings, the first of which was the Conference to launch the stakeholder debate on the 8th and 9th of March 2001.

The Commission has also organised seven small expert workshops on particular aspects of IPP. The aim of these workshops was to inform the Commission about particular aspects of IPP to help the Commission in framing its ideas for the forthcoming follow-up Communication on IPP. Participants were invited to apply and around ten were selected on the basis of their expertise and experience. The Commission is aware that with such a small number of participants it will not be able to canvass all experiences and opinions represented. For this reason the input from such meetings is seen as being just a part of the stakeholder consultation process.

This document, therefore, represents a summary of the discussions at the workshop. There was no attempt to reach conclusions or consensus and the fact that a particular viewpoint was expressed at the meeting without being contested does not necessarily mean that the Commission accepts it.

2. **BACKGROUND TO THIS WORKSHOP**

The importance of greening public procurement for IPP was made clear in the Green Paper itself. This workshop was called to consider the particular issues of awareness raising and exchange of best practice in the greening of public procurement and each of the possibilities discussed is discussed below. It was not convened – and this was made absolutely clear at the outset by the DG Environment representative chairing the meeting – to discuss the ongoing revision of the public procurement directives, legal issues surrounding public procurement or the surrounding political issues.

3. **PARTICIPANTS**

Michael Damm (BiG-Net, Kolding Municipality, Denmark)

Lage Elgstrand (Swedish Environment Ministry)

Robert Goodchild (European Commission)

Arie de Graaf (European Federation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)

Klaus Krisor (European Commission)

Michael Janssens (Dutch Ministry of the Environment)

Pascal Lefèvre (European Commission)
Stefania Minestrini (Italian Environment Protection Agency)
Hannu Nilsen (UPM-Kymmene Group)
Ulrich Paetzold (European Construction Industries Federation)
Ylva Reinhard (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency)*
Isabelle Rieser (Independent Reseracher)
Paul Speight (European Commission)

4. **PRACTICAL HANDBOOK**

A representative of DG Environment stated that they were looking to publish a practical handbook aimed at the procurement officials within local authorities explaining what are the possibilities within the existing EU public procurement regime for green purchasing. Participants were asked to suggest ways in which this could be made most effective based on their opinions and experiences.

4.1. **The Format**

*The Size*

The point was made that the bigger it would be the more difficult it would be to update and hence the less flexible it would be as a tool. If the size were also too large it may put people off reading it.

*The Language*

The participants felt that if the target audience were local authorities then the handbook should be in their language.

*Relationship to information on the Web*

It was suggested that information that changes frequently (such as eco-label criteria) or is very detailed (such as checklists of criteria to take into consideration) or “questions and answers”, should be placed on an internet site.

*The Style*

One participant felt strongly that the Commission should sub-contract the drafting of the handbook to professionals in the field of communication.

4.2. **The Content**

Generally there seemed to be the view that the handbook itself should focus on methods and be practical. Within this it could address the issues below.

*Defining clearly what product/service is wanted*....
Several parties expressed the view that local authorities should first decide clearly what their goals and objectives are in terms of procurement as often the failure to do this complicated the whole procedure.

*Looking at what criteria are required to achieve this.....*

Most believed that these criteria should be clear. It was suggested that a list of questions for particular product types may be the most effective way of stimulating procurement officials to consider all the issues and allow them to set their own minimum requirements. One example from Kolding district council was cited, where they had sought to assign products to one of four different categories – facility products, infrastructure, investment and services. Within these they were then seeking to define the groups still further – for example into cleaning and catering. For each of these a list of suitable questions would be drawn up.

*How to deal with Eco-labels and Environmental Management Systems (EMS).....?*

Here it was stressed that there should be basic information on the eco-labelling schemes (EU and national) and EMSs available. It should also be explained that whilst an eco-label may give presumption of conformity with certain criteria in a call for tenders its absence can not be used to exclude certain products.

*How to deal with Transport...?*

Guidance was also considered necessary on the question of transport because this a potentially significant part of a product’s impact on the environment.

*Relevant practical examples are necessary...*

It was stressed that a concrete example gave flesh to a theoretical skeleton. These examples could be both of good, and of bad, practice.

*A short explanation of the main environmental problems...*

Some participants felt that it may be necessary to explain what the key environmental problems are where public procurement can make a difference and what is their cause so that a better appreciation of their (relative) importance can be made. It should be borne in mind that the target audience is unlikely to be environment specialists.

4.3. **A Secondary Focus on SMEs?**

Although the primary aim of the handbook would be to give guidance to local authorities on greening their public procurement a secondary aim could also be to help raise awareness of SMEs and other businesses.

The view of the representative of SMEs was that before firms could consider public procurement opportunities there was a need for EMS within the companies. He also stated that there was also a more general problem of SME participation in greening public procurement.
The view was also stressed that if the issue were to be addressed then this may compromise the desirable length of the book. As the main focus was on local authorities too much on SMEs was not desirable, although something on how a local authority could work to educate their SMEs on products’ environmental aspects could be useful.

5. **A Website**

5.1. **Where to have the Website?**

The discussions considered the best location and format of a web-site. Some participants felt that the site would be best integrated into an existing general procurement website. This would facilitate access by those who may not otherwise think about greening public procurement.

5.2. **What should be its content?**

In terms of content some participants felt that the handbook itself should be on the web along with more detailed information such as that mentioned under points 4.1 and 4.2 above.

Most participants felt that for maximum use the website would have to be in all the official Community languages.

5.3. **Links to other websites**

The question of whether the Commission could provide links to external websites was also discussed as well as the degree to which it could be held responsible for their content. It was generally acknowledged that there should be some connection between any Community site and national sites – particularly given that under the Community thresholds national rules apply.

6. **Conferences and Workshops**

The Commission raised the possibility of organising one or more conferences on particular aspects of greening public procurement and asked the participants for their thoughts on their usefulness. In general the participants were in favour of awareness-raising events but usually felt that these would be best organised on a national or local level with minimal Commission involvement. The best way to launch the handbook would have to be considered carefully with one possibility being individual launches in different Member States.

7. **Business Awareness Raising**

The Commission posed the question whether awareness raising amongst businesses was necessary in order to make them aware of the potential market for such products. Here there was a certain scepticism on the part of the participants. One participant felt that public purchasers needed to be made aware that green products may cost more initially. In this case, stated another, businesses should be encouraged to consider the cost of a product over its life-cycle.
8. **How can less active Member States be encouraged to green public procurement?**

Here the Commission asked for suggestions for raising awareness within those Member States who are not so advanced as others. Generally it was felt that this was best done at the national or lower level, although the Commission could provide some form of exchange of best practice.

9. **How can the links between public procurement, eco-labelling and environmental management systems be improved?**

In the context of IPP the Commission asked how co-ordination between these tools could be improved within the existing public procurement legal framework. Generally there was a feeling that it was necessary to recognise the limitations of eco-labels (e.g. availability only for certain products) for procurement purposes but it was felt that the possibilities offered by environmental product declarations (Type III labelling) need to be examined. In terms of concrete advice to public procurers on the use of eco-labels one delegate suggested that they needed to be advised to pick out, for example, the five most important environmental impacts of a particular product. To do this they needed to look at global, national and local environmental priorities.

10. **Areas for future research**

Participants were asked to consider areas in which they felt further research was necessary.

On the subject of measuring the impact and potential impact of green public procurement there was general agreement that this would be very difficult. This would depend on issues such as defining what is a greener product and what are its environmental impacts.

There also appeared to be little knowledge about how many local and national authorities were now practising green public procurement and to what extent. This would appear to provide little basis for assessing what the impacts of greening public procurement could be as there is nothing to serve as a baseline.

11. **Further points**

11.1. **A greening public procurement helpdesk?**

On the issue of the possible establishment of a greening public procurement helpdesk, perhaps similar to those set up to deal with EMAS or the European Eco-label, it was felt that this would be better integrated into the existing SIMAP system (http://simap.eu.int/index.html).
11.2. “Negative” Product Choices

The issue of “negative choices” in public procurement, such as discrimination against products with reprocessed content (e.g. photocopiers) was raised. Here the delegates felt that there was little scope for preventing this.

11.3. Co-operation between Corporate and Public Green Purchasing

The Commission also asked whether it could be an idea to co-ordinate better corporate green purchasing and public green purchasing initiatives. Here some participants felt that no additional mechanism was necessary and others felt that information flow could be encouraged.