

EU Environment Policy Brief



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The monthly newsletter that keeps you informed about developments in EU environment policy

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WATER

Majority of Europeans believe water quality and quantity are serious problems

Almost two out of three of Europeans think that the quality of water in their country is a serious problem, according to a special Eurobarometer survey on water issues published by the European Commission. The report also shows that Europeans see the quantity of available water as an equally serious problem. More than a third of EU citizens feel that over the last five years the quality of rivers, lakes and coastal waters has deteriorated. Industry and agriculture are seen as having the biggest impact on the quality and quantity of water in their countries. Chemical pollution (75%) and climate (50%) are perceived by Europeans as the main threats to water resources in their country. As many as 85% think climate change will have some impact on water resources in Europe. Water shortages are seen as a great threat to water resources in southern European Member States (73% in Cyprus). Flooding is seen as a greater threat in Member States in northern Europe (75% in the United Kingdom). A large number of Europeans say they are taking steps to reduce water-related problems. The use of environmentally-friendly household chemicals is another way Europeans are improving their impact on water.

[Press release](#)

Public consultation

By 2015, all water in the European Union should be of good or high quality. Proposals are currently being put forward in the river basin management districts on how to reach these goals for rivers, lakes and coastal waters. The Water Framework Directive gives all interested parties the right to influence the future River Basin Management Plans across the EU. The deadline for starting the public consultation, which runs for six months, was 22 December 2008.

[Further details](#)

OZONE

Commission welcomes agreement in Parliament on legislation to protect ozone layer

The Commission has welcomed the first reading agreement by the European Parliament on 25 March on reinforcing ozone legislation. The agreement comes less than a year after the Commission's proposal was presented. In addition to updating current legislation on the protection of the ozone layer in light of scientific developments, the new regulation reinforces measures on the illegal trade and remaining uses of ozone depleting substances, including hydrochlorofluorocarbons. It also confirms the ban on the use of methyl bromide from early 2010 and bolsters measures on the management of banned substances in older products. International measures to protect the ozone layer in the stratosphere have had remarkable success. In the EU, current legislation – generally more ambitious than the 1987 Montreal Protocol that regulates these substances internationally – helped achieve a 99% phase-out of ozone-depleting substances, thus demonstrating its commitment to lead in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. The new legislation should help the ozone layer recover from 2050 onwards and also contribute to efforts to mitigate climate change.

[Press release](#)

SOIL

Commission dishes the dirt on the importance of soil

A new report published by the Commission underlines the crucial role that soils can play in mitigating climate change. Soils contain around twice the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and three times the amount to be found in vegetation. Europe's soils are an enormous carbon reservoir, containing around 75 billion tonnes, and poor management can have serious consequences: a failure to protect Europe's remaining peat bogs, for example, would release the same amount of carbon as an additional 40 million cars on Europe's roads. The report, a synthesis of the best available information on the links between soil and climate change, underlines the need to sequester carbon in soils. The technique is cost competitive and immediately available, requires no new or unproven technologies, and has a mitigation potential comparable to that of any other sector of the economy. Soil management practices have a considerable impact on carbon stocks. The report underlines how agricultural practices can be improved to minimise carbon losses, at the level of the crop and the crop residues, and by ensuring that soils are protected against water and rain with a permanent vegetation cover, less intrusive ploughing techniques and less machinery. Such practices could sequester between 50 and 100 million tonnes of carbon annually in European soils.

[Soil report](#)

BIODIVERSITY



Official launch of EU guide to the sustainable hunting of wild birds

On 16 March, the European Commission officially launched a guide on the hunting of wild birds to ensure the activity is carried out in accordance with EU nature legislation. It aims to clarify the hunting requirements of the EU's oldest nature law, the Birds Directive, which celebrates its 30th anniversary on the 2 April 2009. This is one of the key tools in helping achieve the EU's objective of halting biodiversity loss. Although there is a general ban on the killing of wild birds, certain species can be hunted outside breeding and pre-nuptial (or spring) migration periods. These closed periods are critical and allow wild birds to renew their numbers. The directive lists 82 species which can be hunted in EU Member States. While aiming at the overall conservation of birds, the guide to sustainable hunting focuses on the timing of recreational hunting, on minimising the risk of disturbing birds and their habitats and on conditions for allowing hunting under exceptional circumstances. The objective is to clarify areas of possible confusion and make clear the minimum requirements of the directive. This will enable hunters to go about their activities in a sustainable way. The guide was launched at an official ceremony in Paris by the French Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo and the Director-General of the Commission's Directorate-General for Environment, Karl Falkenberg.

[Press release](#)

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Commission and retail sector launch Retail Forum to promote more sustainable consumption

On 3 March, the European Commission and the European retail sector launched a Retail Forum as part of their drive to promote more environmentally sustainable consumption patterns. The Forum aims to generate a better understanding of the practical measures needed to promote sustainable consumption and production. Over time the result should be greater availability of environment-friendly and energy-efficient products in the shops and better information to consumers on how to use products in the most ecological way (for example, washing clothes at low temperature). Participants will share best practice, discuss how to promote sustainable consumption and tackle barriers that hinder it, and obtain scientific information from relevant bodies to help evaluate environmentally sound products. The rationale behind the Forum is that retailers are in a position to promote more sustainable consumption through their own actions, through their partnerships with suppliers, and through their daily contact with European consumers. Membership of the Forum is voluntary and open to all retailers who join the Retailers' Environmental Action Plan (REAP) which includes many company-specific environmental commitments. To date 24 retailers and retailers' associations have done so. The Forum was launched in Brussels by Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas, Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva, EuroCommerce President, Senator Feargal Quinn and Pierre-Olivier Beckers, President and CEO of the Delhaize Group, representing the European Retail Round Table (ERRT).

[Press release](#)

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



Environmental integration and sustainable development conference in Kazakhstan

An international conference on environmental integration and sustainable development, co-organised by the European Commission (DG ENV) and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan, was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on March 13. The conference involved participants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, several EU Member States, the European Commission, the World Bank, the OECD/Environmental Action Programme Task Force, and representatives of various international organisations, as well as Central Asia NGOs and business representatives.

The participants agreed that sustainable development is essential to secure a safe and prosperous future. They recognised the importance of making sure that environmental concerns are fully considered in the decisions and activities of sectors such as energy, transport, building and also in the legislative process. Discussion during the meeting clearly showed the need for further collaboration between the European Commission and the countries of Central Asia in taking steps to put environmental integration into practice.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Green Week conference, 23-26 June 2009, Brussels, Belgium

Theme: Climate change: act and adapt



2009 is a crucial year in the battle against climate change, with negotiations on a new United Nations agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol due to be concluded at the Copenhagen climate conference in December. Green Week 2009 will look at what the world must do to bring climate change under control from different angles: the need to achieve deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions by the middle of the century, the need to 'climate-proof' our economies against the impacts of climate change and the need to address climate change within the wider ecosystem challenge. The event will provide a unique opportunity for debate, exchanges of experience and best practice among non-governmental organisations, businesses, various levels of government and the public. Entry is free but those wishing to attend must register.

[Register and subscribe on-line.](#)

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