EU Ecolabel

2008/0152(COD) - 16/07/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to lay down rules for the establishment and application of the Community Ecolabel scheme.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: the overall objective of this Regulation is to set benchmarks for the good environmental performance of products and services, based on the top performers in the market. By guiding consumers towards them, the Ecolabel logo should promote those products and services that have met these benchmarks compared to others in the same category. These benchmarks will also be used for developing and implementing other environmental policy tools, such as providing environmental criteria for public purchasers to use and giving recommendations on potential future minimum standards for products.

This proposal is designed to replace Regulation (EC) No 1980/2000 on a revised Community Ecolabel award scheme. The current scheme is not achieving its objectives as it

suffers from low awareness of the label and low uptake by industry, resulting from overly bureaucratic processes and management.

The following package of measures was therefore proposed for the modification and simplification of the scheme:

- design the Regulation to fit better with other sustainable production and consumption actions. This will mean that synergies between different product related policy instruments can be enhanced and therefore mean that there is a harmonisation of the framework in which criteria are presented. This will reduce the administrative burden on companies;
- open up the scope of the label;
- introduce measures to encourage harmonisation with other ecolabelling schemes. For companies wishing to apply for more than one ecolabel, harmonising measures can only reduce their administrative burden. Costs of tests could be reduced by 100% if one label is already held as no additional testing or verification would be required. This reduced financial burden may be particularly interesting for small and medium sized enterprises;
- more product groups / quicker criteria development. Simplified procedure for criteria development would reduce costs for all parties involved (less meetings to attend) but development of more product groups clearly has an associated cost;
- introduce a template for criteria documents to ensure they are more user-friendly. Making criteria documents standardised and more user-friendly will mean reduced administrative burden for companies and purchasing bodies using criteria for technical specifications;
- incorporate guidance for Green Public Purchasing into criteria development. Procurement officers will have easier access to EU-wide harmonised criteria and companies will have a level playing field if the same criteria are used across Europe in technical specifications for contracts. Member States will also save money because the same criteria can be used for eco-labelling and public purchasing;
- abolition of the annual fees and simplification of assessment procedures. The current direct income for competent bodies from fees is around EUR 1million per year in EU 27. This direct income will be lost if fees are abolished, but the administrative burden will be reduced for companies. The administrative savings could be around half a man-day per year for a company, along with the benefit of not having to pay an annual fee. For Member States, the administrative burden of operating the scheme will remain the same as the work required to administer and undertake

assessment and verification in the current scheme will be equal to the work required to undertake market surveillance under the new proposals. Simpler criteria should, however, help to reduce the administration required;
- peer review for Competent Bodies;
- boost marketing;
- propose mandatory environmental performance standards for products;
- simplify criteria documents, focusing more on the most significant environmental impacts of products, while keeping the ambition levels high.

This revision of the Ecolabel is aimed at giving the EU Ecolabel:

- high awareness, understanding and respect in the EU-27 and around the world. The medium-term benchmark for success should be that the Ecolabel is recognised by consumers and by companies throughout the EU;
- criteria are for the products and services where the Ecolabel can provide the most benefits, especially product groups with a substantial environmental impact and therefore with high potential for improvement. (Moving from 25 product groups to 40 -50 by 2015);
- many more Ecolabel products on the shelves for consumers to choose from (with a 10% market share in product groups covered by the label);
- criteria documents which can easily be used by public purchasers;
- an Ecolabel very well harmonised with other labels, globally and nationally;
- an Ecolabel that can be attained by companies with limited costs and efforts for them while still maintaining a high ambition in order to ensure credibility of the label with consumers and environmental groups.

Costs depend to a large extent depend on the uptake by industry and the associated costs of market surveillance of the conformity of those using the label.