Report on the Commission White Paper: 'Adapting to climate change: towards a European framework for action'

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PURPOSE: to outline actions needed to strengthen the Union's resilience in coping with a changing climate (White Paper).

BACKGROUND: climate change increases land and sea temperatures and alters precipitation quantity and patterns, resulting in the increase of global average sea level, risks of coastal erosion and an expected increase in the severity of weather-related natural disasters. Changing water levels, temperatures and flow will in turn affect food supply, health, industry, and transport and ecosystem integrity. Climate change will lead to significant economic and social impacts with some regions and sectors likely to bear greater adverse affects. Certain sections of society (the elderly, disabled, low-income households) are also expected to suffer more.

Addressing climate change requires two types of response. Firstly, and importantly, it is necessary to **reduce our greenhouse gas emissions** (GHG) (i.e. take mitigation action) and secondly **adaptation action should be taken** to deal with the unavoidable impacts. The EU's recently agreed climate change legislation puts in place the concrete measures to reach the EU's commitment to reduce emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2020 and is capable of being amended to deliver a 30% reduction if agreed as part of an international agreement in which other developed countries agree to comparable reductions and appropriate contributions by economically more advanced developing countries based on their responsibilities and capabilities.

The planet will take time to recover from the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere. The impact of climate change will continue to be felt for at least the next 50 years. Therefore, adaptation measures need to be taken. Adaptation is already taking place but in a piecemeal manner. **A more strategic approach is needed** to ensure that timely and effective adaptation measures are taken, ensuring coherency across different sectors and levels of governance.

CONTENT: this White Paper sets out a **framework to reduce the EU's vulnerability to the impact of climate change**. It builds on the wide-ranging consultation launched in 2007 by the Green Paper on Adapting to Climate Change in Europe and further research efforts that identified action to be taken in the short-term. The framework is designed to evolve as further evidence becomes available. It will complement action by Member States and support wider international efforts to adapt to climate change, particularly in developing countries. The EU

is working with other partner countries in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards a post-2012 climate agreement which will address adaptation as well as mitigation. The Commission's proposals in this context are set out in the Communication entitled "Towards a comprehensive climate change agreement in Copenhagen" (COM(2009)0039).

The EU's framework sets out a two-phase strategic approach to adapting to the impacts of climate change in the EU which complements actions taken by Member States through an integrated and coordinated approach.

The intention is that **phase 1 (2009-2012) will lay the ground work for preparing a comprehensive EU adaptation strategy to be implemented during phase 2, commencing in 2013**.

Phase 1 will focus on four pillars of action:

1) building a solid knowledge base on the impact and consequences of climate change for the EU;

2) integrating adaptation into EU key policy areas;

3) employing a combination of policy instruments (market-based instruments, guidelines, public-private partnerships) to ensure effective delivery of adaptation and;

4) stepping up international cooperation on adaptation. For phase 1 to be a success, the EU, national, regional and local authorities must cooperate closely.

The purpose of will be increase understanding climate change and possible adaptation measures and how adaptation can be embedded in key EU policies. Adaptation needs to be mainstreamed into EU policies. This exercise has to be carefully prepared, based on solid scientific and economic analysis. However information content and availability differs widely across regions.

Impacts of climate change will vary by region, with coastal and mountain areas and flood plains particularly vulnerable. It is for this reason that most adaptation measures will be carried out nationally or regionally. The role of the European Union will be to support these efforts through an integrated and coordinated approach, particularly in cross-border issues and policies which are highly integrated at EU level. Naturally, climate change adaptation will need to be at the heart of all EU policies. Adaptation must also feature prominently in the Union's external policies to assist those countries most affected and cooperate on international adaptation issues with partner countries.

To support cooperation on adaptation and with a view to taking this framework forward, the **Commission intends to set up an Impact and Adaptation Steering Group (IASG)** and provide the secretariat (after the usual evaluation of the organisational and resources impact of this action). This group will be composed of representatives from the EU Member States involved in the formulation of national and regional adaptation programmes and will consult with representatives from civil society and the scientific community. The Steering Group will be supported by a number of technical groups, who will deal specifically with developments in key sectors (agriculture and forestry, biodiversity, water, oceans and seas, energy, health etc.).

Moreover, **by 2011**, the Commission will: (i) establish a Clearing House Mechanism for exchange information on climate change impacts in which to exchange information on climate change risks, impacts and best practices; (ii) develop methods, models, data sets and prediction tools; (iii) develop indicators to better monitor the impact of climate change, including vulnerability impacts, and progress on adaptation; (iv) assess the cost and benefit of adaptation options.

The proposals set out in this paper cover actions to be taken in the first phase and are without prejudice to the future structure of the EU budget and to the current and future multi-annual financial framework.

The Stern Review identified financial constraints as one of the main barriers to adaptation. **Climate change is one of the priorities for the current multi-annual financial framework (2007-2013)** and it is important to ensure that the available funds are used to reflect this priority. In this regard, it is necessary to: (i) estimate adaptation costs for relevant policy areas so that they can be taken into account in future financial decisions; (ii) further examine the potential use of innovative funding measures for adaptation;

(iii) explore the potential for insurance and other financial products to complement adaptation measures and to function as risk sharing instruments; (iv) encourage Member States to utilise the EU's ETS revenues for adaptation purposes.

The Commission will regularly review progress in implementing the first phase of the framework for action identified in this White Paper with a view to developing a comprehensive adaptation strategy from 2013.