Public access to environmental information (repeal. Directive 90/313/EEC)

2000/0169(COD) - 26/02/2001

The committee adopted the report by Eija-Riitta KORHOLA (EPP-ED, FIN) substantially amending the proposal under the codecision procedure (1st reading). The committee sought to broaden the definition of public authorities to include natural persons performing administrative functions under national law. With regard to the dissemination of information, it wanted the internet to be explicitly mentioned and added that account should also be taken of the future development of information and communications technologies, points which were not mentioned by the Commission. The committee wanted Member States to create publicly accessible data bases where environmental documents would be held. Search aids should be provided to make it easy for the public to locate information. In addition, it laid down quality criteria regarding the information to be provided, which should be up-to-date, comprehensible and scientifically sound. As regards access to information upon request, the committee recommended that the deadline by which an applicant must be supplied with the information be shortened from one month to two weeks after receipt of the request. It amended the clause on the possibility of refusing information where this might have adverse effects on the confidentiality of proceedings of public authorities, by adding "where such confidentiality is required by law". The committee was in favour of protecting the confidentiality of personal data but believed that information on emissions, discharges or other releases should always be answered. On the subject of charging for costs, the committee argued that charges should not exceed the cost of reproducing the material requested. In addition, they should only be made for reproducing information, not for searching or compiling it.