

Sustainable development: environmental aspects

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PURPOSE: Presentation of a working document on integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas – a stocktaking of the Cardiff process.

CONTENT: This stocktaking of environmental integration follows from the 2003 Spring European Council, which noted “the Commission’s intention to carry out an annual stocktaking of the Cardiff process of environmental integration process and a regular environment policy review and to report in time for the outcomes of these exercises to be taken into account in the preparation of its future Spring reports, starting in 2004”. The stocktaking complements the 2003 Environment Policy Review (EPR) adopted in December 2003, and should be seen in the context of the information presented in the 2003 EPR.

The principle of environmental integration recognises that environmental policy alone cannot achieve the environmental improvements needed as part of sustainable development. The changes required to reduce environmental pressures of high concern from fisheries, agriculture, transport, energy and other areas so as to achieve sustainable development, can only be achieved through a process of environmental integration in these sectors.

While this stocktaking has shown the positive results of the Cardiff process, both in terms of raising the profile of environmental integration and in terms of concrete improvements in some sectors, it also points to a number of weaknesses in implementation. Amongst other issues, it emphasises the need to improve the consistency of strategies across Council formations and for greater emphasis on good practice in terms of content and implementation.

It also points to a set of measures at Community and national levels to support sectoral Councils in their efforts under the Cardiff Process to integrate environmental concerns into their policies and to help maximise the benefits of these efforts in terms of concrete environmental improvements. Further efforts are also needed at national level to fully implement the decisions taken at Community level.

While sustainable development involves dealing with economic, social and environmental policies in a mutually reinforcing way, environmental integration needs increased visibility and political support at the highest level. It should become a regular item on the agenda of the Spring European Council. In this respect and in line with the Presidency Conclusions to the March 2003 European Council, the European Commission will carry out an annual stocktaking of environmental integration as a complement to the Environment Policy Review, which will feed into the Commission’s Spring Report and the Spring European Council debate.

Forthcoming opportunities to further promote environmental integration should also be seized:

- The Review of the Sustainable Development Strategy planned for 2004- 2005 will examine progress made since 2001 and identify priority actions to ensure delivery. This exercise will enable the EU to pinpoint where environmental integration gaps lie at EU level, hampering the EU’s efforts to curb unsustainable environmental trends, and to make concrete proposals to address them.

- The mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy in 2005 offers an additional opportunity to examine how environmental integration and economic and employment growth could increasingly be mutually supportive.

- The Commission's emphasis on sustainable development in its Communication on the Union's next financial perspectives (2007 onwards) will give an additional boost to further environmental integration, in particular in the agricultural and regional policy. The adoption in 2004 of a Commission proposal for a regulation on the structural and cohesion funds in the period post-2006, setting new guidelines, will provide an opportunity to better integrate the environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainable development into cohesion policy.

Environmental integration is a key condition for progressing towards sustainable development. It requires the unfailing and continuous commitment of all policy sectors at all levels of governance in the Union