Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources

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PURPOSE : to present a European strategy for the sustainable use of natural resources.

CONTENT : the "Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources" develops a policy framework to reduce the environmental impacts of resource use in a growing economy. It is aimed at “more value – less impact – better alternatives”:

- more value - creating more value while using less resources (increasing resource productivity);

- less impact - reducing the overall environmental impact of resources used (increasing eco-efficiency);

- better alternatives – if cleaner use cannot be achieved, substituting currently used resources with better alternatives.

This is to be achieved over the whole life cycle of resource use, avoiding that environmental impacts are shifted from one phase to another or to other countries. Since waste represents the last phase in the life cycle of a resource, the resources strategy will generate important information for the thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste, supporting it in reducing waste.

Taking a time horizon of 25 years, the strategy proposes a number of specific measures. They include:

- a Data Centre run by the European Commission to bring together all available knowledge on natural resources and inform decision-makers;

- an International Panel to be set up in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide independent scientific advice on global aspects of resource use;

- the development of national measures and programmes by Member States under the guidance of a High Level Forum with representatives from the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders;

- the consideration of environmental impacts of resource use in economic sector action plans that the Commission intends to develop in the context of its strategy for growth and jobs;

- lastly, by 2008 the development of indicators to monitor and regularly review progress towards the strategy’s goal.

The strategy is focusing on improving knowledge, developing monitoring tools and fostering strategic approaches in specific economic sectors, Member States and internationally. The strategy is one of the seven 'thematic' strategies required under the 6th Environment Action Programme (2002-2012) and closely linked to the waste thematic strategy. Other thematic strategies to be developed by the Commission concern air pollution and marine environment as well as soils, pesticides and the urban environment.