Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources

2006/2210(INI) - 23/10/2006

The Council adopted conclusions on the sustainable use of natural resources. It invites the Commission and Member States to endorse the following priorities for action:

1) Outline an ecological vision: focus efforts to outline the ecological dimension of the long-term vision anticipated in the renewed Strategy on Sustainable Development. The vision should combine sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable consumption and production with a view to the goal of increasing wellbeing while reducing the consumption of natural resources and environmental impacts related to their use. The vision should act as a catalyst for setting strategies to diminish Europe's dependency on fossil fuels and to increase resource efficiency, including material efficiency, significantly in order to break the linkage between the negative environmental impacts of consumption and the growth of the economy while at the same time creating new business opportunities by encouraging innovation.

2) Balance the use of natural resources: set targets for resource-specific impacts and eco-efficiency in order to complement the strategy by the year 2010. Targets and measures should address uses of natural resources that contribute most to negative environmental and social impacts. The focus should be to improve resource-efficiency and to decrease negative impacts, especially in crucial economic sectors such as housing, transport and food. Member States are called upon to deepen the understanding of the impacts of natural resource use throughout the whole life-cycle and as appropriate to implement national programmes and measures. The Commission is invited to facilitate the exchange of best practice and of information on national programmes for the sustainable use of natural resources at a high level with all Member States. The Council calls on the EU to take a leading initiatory role at global level towards the establishment of an international panel on natural resources under the auspices of the UNEP. The main idea of the panel should be to inform and support policy-makers globally and at EU level in questions of resource use and resource efficiency. It also recognises the importance of biodiversity for supporting ecosystems services vital to the use of natural resources and the negative impacts resource use can have on biodiversity; and underlines the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources for reaching the global target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

3) Find synergies between the strategy on natural resources and the action plan on sustainable consumption and production: the Council stresses that the Commission will draw up an EU Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Action Plan by 2007. The key objectives of the action plan should be to identify concrete steps to improve eco-efficiency aiming to bring resource use and consumption patterns within national, regional and global carrying capacities.

The Council highlights the fact that, to achieve these objectives, the SCP action plan should:

- § launch targeted structured dialogues involving authorities, businesses, research institutes and NGOs to improve eco-efficiency, and formulate proactive strategies to promote best practices;

- § inspire purchasers and suppliers to seek the most cost-effective environmental technologies and solutions and to give preference to products, services and technologies with optimised resource use;

- consider options for new market-based instruments that can also ensure that policy goals can be reached in a cost-effective way. Further progress is also needed on the elimination of environmentally harmful subsidies;

- set long-term targets for the environmental performance of key products and services based on life-cycle thinking and encourage their uptake by business and consumers;

- motivate Member States and the EU to set indicative targets for the funding of research and development in eco-innovations;

- use effectively existing proactive policy tools that promote cleaner production and products, including eco-labels, environmental management systems, producer responsibility, and sustainable public procurement policies;

- integrate natural resources concerns into all policy areas relevant to SCP, such as in the 2007 mid-term review of the Communication "Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: A Policy Framework to Strengthen EU Manufacturing.