



# STATEMENT

February 2001

## GREENING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### Executive Summary

Proposals by the European Environmental Advisory Councils for the  
EU Sustainable Development Strategy

## The following EEAC councils have endorsed this statement:

<i>Austria</i>	Austrian Association for Agricultural Research (ÖVAF) Clean Air Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (KRL)
<i>Belgium</i>	Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders (MiNa-Raad)
<i>Denmark</i>	Danish Nature Council (DNC)
<i>Estonia</i>	Estonian Commission on Sustainable Development (ECSD)
<i>Finland</i>	Finnish Council for Natural Resources (FCNR)
<i>Germany</i>	Council of Environmental Advisors (SRU) Advisory Council on Global Change (WGBU) Council for Land Stewardship (DRL)
<i>Hungary</i>	Hungarian National Council on the Environment (NEC)
<i>Ireland</i>	The Heritage Council (HC)
<i>Lithuania</i>	Lithuanian National Council for Sustainable Development (LNCSD)
<i>The Netherlands</i>	Council for the Rural Area (RLG) Advisory Council for Research on Nature and Environment (RMNO) Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM-Raad)
<i>Portugal</i>	National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS)
<i>Slovak Republic</i>	Council of the Government for Sustainable Development of the Slovak Republic
<i>Slovenia</i>	Council for Environmental Protection of the Republic of Slovenia (CEPRS)
<i>Sweden</i>	Environmental Advisory Council (MVB)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) English Nature (EN) Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

As most EEAC councils have been involved in developing or reviewing national or regional sustainable development strategies, the network in summer 2000 established a Working Group in order to develop recommendations for the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. A draft was submitted to all other councils for consultation and the work finalized early in 2001. In February 2001 the Swedish Environment Council, during the Swedish EU Presidency, hosted a conference where the EEAC Statement was presented to the outside world. The 23 councils listed above endorsed the general orientation of the statement, which later became one of the principles that form the basis for councils cooperating in the EEAC network. In this function it has been endorsed by four further councils.

This brochure contains the Executive Summary of the longer EEAC Statement, which is also available at the secretariat.

## Executive Summary

The European Union urgently needs to commit itself wholeheartedly to sustainable development. Adoption of a Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU will therefore mark a major step forward. This must be a substantial and influential document, which will provide a framework for integrating environmental considerations into EU policies in every sector.

The national and regional advisory bodies which make up the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEACs) are putting forward detailed proposals for the scope and content of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, drawing on the experience of putting sustainable development into effect already gained in Member States.

EEACs acknowledge that sustainable development must fulfil economic, social and environmental objectives. Because survival of the natural environment is crucial for economic and social development in the long run, they have focused on the environmental dimension of sustainability.

Many current trends are not sustainable. They include the rising level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; other forms of pollution from diffuse sources; the effects of congestion and pollution on the quality of life for people in towns and cities; disruption of the water cycle; degradation of soils and terrestrial ecosystems; increasing concentrations of hazardous chemicals in the environment; increasing quantities of wastes for disposal; losses of biodiversity, and of natural and cultural landscapes; and over-exploitation of marine ecosystems. These environmentally unsustainable trends are driven by the high, and increasing, use of basic natural resources that results from traditional patterns of economic growth.

The basic principle of sustainability, EEACs believe, is that the natural environment has critical and unique values that can seldom be substituted by, or traded for, the economic or social products of civilisation. Sustainable development can be achieved only if the EU adopts a new concept of development, involving far-reaching modifications in patterns of both production and consumption. This new concept of development will acknowledge economic needs and social aspirations, but accept protection of the environment and natural resources as fundamental.

By taking the lead in technological and social innovations that decouple economic development from resource use and pollution, the EU can not only improve the quality of life for all its peoples, but also increase the competitiveness of its industries and stimulate employment.

There are many barriers to achieving such a new concept of development. One major barrier is a general lack of coherence in the EU's existing policies, especially with respect to long-term effects. Notable examples include perverse subsidies given under the Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds. Fundamental transformations in policies will therefore be required.

EEACs identify the essential elements for success. A sustainable development strategy must have both wide political support and strong backing at the highest levels of government. It needs to be supported by approaches to learning which make full use of people's experiences and creativity. It must look at least 20-25 years into the future. It must address the most important long-term environmental problems, and establish clear objectives for resolving them, utilising quantified indicators and targets. It has to bridge the gap between global and local levels, and incorporate carefully designed mechanisms that will ensure effective implementation. A sustainable development strategy should have a strong research base. Once it has been adopted, its effectiveness must be monitored continuously and it must be reviewed at regular intervals.

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy must have tangible content. There must be significant changes in the procedures of all European institutions. EEACs believe that:

- The Cardiff Process for integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas must continue and be reinforced. The Lisbon Process, which aims to integrate social and economic policies through an annual report to the spring EU summit, must be extended to include environmental considerations.
- There should be an annual review of the Strategy at the spring EU summit. Each part should be reviewed in detail at least every four years, not least to extend the scope of the Strategy beyond the six initial policy areas identified by the European Commission.
- To secure better co-ordination of policies, the directorates-general of the European Commission should establish a programme of joint policy reviews.
- A Sustainable Development Committee of the European Parliament should keep under review the extent to which EU policies are environmentally sustainable.
- Where international obligations have been allocated between Member States, the European Court of Justice should have powers to impose penalties on any Member State which fails to meet its obligation.

EEACs also propose far-reaching changes to policies in particular sectors. These include:

- Energy: The Strategy must focus on the need for very large reductions in carbon dioxide emissions in the long term. That will require a carbon tax, with a minimum rate applying throughout the EU, and demanding energy efficiency standards for products and buildings. Energy markets must be structured to encourage low-carbon technologies.
- Transport: More ambitious targets are needed to reduce fuel consumption of vehicles. A high minimum rate of road fuel taxation must be set at EU level, and backed by other measures to promote less environmentally damaging forms of transport. Market-based instruments should be applied to air transport.
- Agriculture: The Common Agricultural Policy needs radical reform. Financial support should only be given to farmers who go beyond legal requirements to protect the environment.
- Industry: The main focus must be on the use of materials and energy over the entire life cycles of products, and on a new strategy for chemicals.
- Nature conservation: In all forms of land use promoting biodiversity should be an objective. To maintain biodiversity and overall productivity, integrated strategies must be adopted for marine ecosystems and coastal zones.

EEACs will draw on the present paper in giving advice to their national and regional governments. They also intend to use it as the basis for a continuing dialogue with the European institutions and other actors about the best ways of moving towards sustainability.



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