

Brussels, 12 July 2005



**CONCERNING: On your agenda July 20: Thematic Environmental Strategies**



Dear Commissioner....



At your meeting of the College on the 20th July you will discuss the seven environmental thematic strategies that are being prepared under the responsibility of Commissioner Stavros Dimas. We are writing to you as the ten largest international environmental organisations in Europe acting at a Brussels level to express our deep concern that any delays in the process of bringing these strategies forward for Commission approval and adoption will mark a serious and grave setback in the European Union's enviable record on environmental matters. Furthermore, we believe any postponement will send a signal to world public opinion that the EU is backtracking in its global leadership role on sustainable development.



We would remind you that these strategies are part of a legally binding commitment of the Commission towards the other institutions. They are necessary to help the European Union to protect public health and quality of life and to enable the EU economy to protect the natural resource base on which growth, jobs and competitiveness ultimately rest. Lower environmental standards will not help Europe to compete more effectively with the newly industrialising countries – a race to the bottom is the wrong response to the challenges posed by globalisation. European public opinion expects the Commission to lead on environmental policies and to regard them as a measure of a European quality of life which we should export to the rest of the world.



**GREENPEACE**

In July 2002, the Commission agreed with the European Parliament and Council of Ministers on the Decision (No 1600/2002/EC) laying down the Sixth Environmental Action Programme. An important element of the Programme is the development of seven thematic strategies. The Decision explicitly required the Commission to deliver these strategies within three years, which means before July 22, 2005. Even though it has become clear that this deadline will not be entirely respected, nevertheless until recently Commissioner Dimas confirmed to the European Parliament that by the end of this year all the strategies would be published.



Halting or watering down these strategies would send a wrong signal to the European public. Since the referendums in France and the Netherlands, European politicians are looking for ways to reduce the gap between themselves and the EU citizens. In the ratification processes that have taken place so far, we are not aware of any evidence that the public has questioned the role of the EU to promote sound environmental policies. We believe the opposite to be the case. Opinion polls continue to show that this is exactly an area where the European public has high expectations from the EU. A survey undertaken in March this year shows that only 9% of EU citizens think national action is the best way to tackle environmental problems, while 59% insist on international action.<sup>1</sup> And a special Eurobarometer survey of the public's opinion about the Lisbon Strategy undertaken in November last year<sup>2</sup>, showed that 63% of the interviewees considered that *“environmental protection policies are above all an incentive for innovation and not an obstacle to economic performance”*. Only 20% were of the opposite opinion. But *“when it comes to making a choice, European Union citizens give priority to protecting the environment over economic competitiveness (63% compared with 24% who disagree)”*.

In our view these results confirm that the European public is very much aware that, despite 30 years of environmental policies, there are huge challenges still ahead and that they need to be addressed without delay. Biodiversity loss continues at alarming rates, despite the EU objective to halt its decline by 2010, limiting greenhouse gas emissions is a global challenge of enormous proportions and controlling pollution via air and water to improve public health and the environment are just three of the most pressing challenges.

Technological fixes on their own are not enough. We have to work towards sustainable production and consumption patterns and organise our life-styles and economies so that the impact on the environment is minimised. This needs active involvement and support of businesses and citizens. It cannot be successful without a clear legislative framework combined with instruments that make the market work for the environment.

You will certainly discuss the Impact Assessments that will accompany the Thematic Strategies. The employer's confederation, UNICE, has already attacked the Air Quality Strategy assessment. Yet, this impact assessment shows clear net benefits for society as a whole with no overall negative effects on employment and no increase in consumer prices. We also believe that the costs have even been exaggerated; they are the result of a static model that does not take into account, for example, the innovation responses that will be required in response to the Kyoto and post-Kyoto obligations of the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> pressrelease of 04.07.05 about research done by the TNS 6<sup>th</sup> dimension European Access Panel”, in March this year. TNS stands for Taylor Nelson Sofres, a lead market information group with head office in London. [www.tns-global.com](http://www.tns-global.com) .

<sup>2</sup> Special Eurobarometer 215/Wave 62.1, published February 2005  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_215\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_215_en.pdf)

The three-year row about the REACH Impact Assessment has proven that it is easy to spread scare stories about unbearable costs of new policies and new legislation. Often, however, it is more difficult to substantiate them. Furthermore, the costs incurred frequently are innovation challenges which stimulate new economic activities and which often are more sustainable than past activities. Environmental policies have traditionally been justified by the fact that they protect and improve the environment and public health as the EC Treaty requires. There is no evidence that we are aware of that high environmental and public health standards have had substantial negative impacts on prosperity in Europe. We believe the opposite to be the case.

We therefore urge you, on behalf of our membership and supporter base whose views we seek to reflect, to show that the European Union will not shirk its responsibility to protect the environment and the interests of European citizens in providing a high quality of life now and for future generations. We call on you to move forward with the previously announced timetable for the adoption of all seven strategies, starting from this month with the ones on Air and Marine, followed by the others until the end of this year, so not to violate the deadline as laid down in the before-mentioned Decision too much, and to present them to the Council and Parliament in order for the correct political procedures to be followed.

Yours sincerely,

John Hontelez, Secretary General European Environmental Bureau

Also on behalf of:

Claire Papazoglou, Head of EU Policy, Bird Life International

Magda Stoczkiewicz, Policy Officer, CEE Bankwatch Network

Karla Schoeters, Director, Climate Action Network Europe

Genon K. Jensen, Director, European Public Health Alliance Environment Network

Christian Baumgartner, Secretary General, International Friends of Nature

Paul de Clerk, acting Director, Friends of the Earth Europe

Jorgo Riss, EU Policy Director, Greenpeace

Jos Dings, Director, The European Federation for Transport & Environment

Tony Long, Director, WWF European Policy Office