



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

Long-Awaited Green Paper on Adaptation to Climate Change Is Released

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By adopting a Green Paper on adaptation to climate change¹ on 29 June 2007, the European Commission recognises that adaptation has become an unavoidable and indispensable complement to mitigation actions. According to the document, climate change will heavily affect Europe's natural environment and nearly all sections of society and the economy. However, there will be quite large differences in the severity of regional impacts within Europe. Therefore, the Green Paper calls for multilevel governance, in order to achieve efficient coordination between measures in Member States, regions and communities. In this context, the role of the EU would be to support adaptation efforts by adjusting relevant policies, filling knowledge gaps and coordinating strategies.

The Green Paper focuses on four lines of priority actions to be considered:

- Early action to develop adaptation strategies in areas where current knowledge is sufficient, through EU sectoral and other policies and the available Community Funds;
- Integrating global adaptation needs into the EU's external relations and building a new alliance with partners all around the world;
- Filling knowledge gaps on adaptation through Community research and exchange of information, and integrating results into policy and practice;
- Setting up a European Advisory Group on Adaptation to Climate Change to analyse coordinated strategies and actions under the European Climate Change Programme.

In addition, the Green Paper recognises spatial planning as a cross-sector issue and emphasises the relevance of the development of minimum requirements for spatial planning, land use and land use change.

It may be difficult to advocate a European land planning approach, mainly because spatial planning is a Member State competency, although it would be useful to ensure that habitats are not overly fragmented. However, the EU support for development

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and implementation of guidance documents, case studies and good practices can be seen as positive, as ecosystem services and land use should be seen as the main focus of the EU adaptation effort.

While the Green Paper addresses what should be done to enable ecosystems to adapt, and mentions the potential loss of ecosystem services to society, it does not address in any detail the relevant issue of how ecosystems are important means of reducing impacts of climate change. The document acknowledges that healthy ecosystems lie at the centre of any adaptation policy, but does not emphasize their role to adapt to climate change. In this regard, at the 3 July conference, Mr. Arjan Berkhuisen from WWF urged the Commission not to be trapped into technical adaptation solutions and stressed the role of natural processes, which can be cheaper and safer, and which could have other functions, such as recreation.

The paper withdraws reference to specific funding for adaptation initiatives that were in the draft version. That version² stated that adaptation measures should become an integral part of the budget, with their own committed appropriations. Consequently, for the time being, adaptation needs are to be supported by existing funding programmes, which are likely to be insufficient. This may lead to a situation, noted by a UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) study³, in which it is not necessarily the case that policy fails to recognise the problem adequately, but fails to supply the needed resources and thus falls down in implementation.

References

1. COM(2007)354. Adapting to climate change in Europe – options for EU action. Green Paper from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0354en01.pdf
2. Draft version dated 18 April 2007.
3. Climate change and biodiversity in Europe, October, 2005.

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