



## The EPA Network – The European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies

# Recommendations for the new European Commission and European Parliament on implementing the 7th Environment Action Programme

German Federal Environment Agency

Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research

Croatian Environment Agency

Environment Agency Austria

Slovak Environmental Agency

Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency

Finnish Environment Institute

Danish Environmental Protection Agency

Hungarian National Institute for Environment

Estonian Environment Information Centre

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland

Norwegian Environment Agency

Swiss Federal Office for the Environment

Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, Poland

Lithuanian Environment Protection Agency

Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency

Albanian National Agency of Environment

Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry for Environment and Tourism

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning

Malta Planning and Environment Authority

Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre

## Executive Summary

The EPA Network would like to offer its support to the incoming European Commission and European Parliament with regard to the implementation of the 7th Environment Action Programme (7th EAP).

We fully endorse the 7th EAP and would like to contribute to its implementation by recommending specific actions to help realise the programme's priority objectives. As a Network of practitioners, directly involved in the day-to-day implementation of EU policy at national level, we are well positioned to offer insight into aspects of the 7th EAP priority areas.

We call on the European Commission and the European Parliament to promote an ambitious implementation of the 7th EAP in order to address the many pressing environmental challenges we face today and to advance the transition towards sustainable development. Transitioning towards sustainable development stimulates innovation, creates new jobs, and improves the competitiveness of Europe's business as well as the quality of life of citizens.

From our perspective the following recommendations on the implementation of the 7th EAP are equally important and deserve particular attention in the years to come:

- **Protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital:**
  - Stimulate sustainable land use aiming at a land degradation neutral Europe by supporting the development of a shared vision on ecosystem services including soil issues among member states (page 5);
  
- **Turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy:**
  - Transform to a low carbon society by giving strong support to a strengthened policy agenda for 2030 in the light of the 2050 GHG targets (page 5);
  - Stimulate the green economy by focusing innovation and R&D policies on economic activities, which respect the ecological limits of the planet as a true boundary condition (page 6);
  - Highlight resource efficiency by promoting the implementation of the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe (page 6);
  
- **Safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being:**
  - Promote the benefits of a good quality environment by strengthening the linkages between environment and health (page 7);
  
- **Maximise the benefits of Union environment legislation by improving implementation:**
  - Support full, coherent and appropriate implementation of the environmental acquis across Member States (page 7);

- Support suitable regional and local policy initiatives (page 8);
- **Improve the knowledge and evidence base for Union environment policy:**
  - Promote the EU research programme Horizon 2020 as it offers opportunities to reinforce the delivery of long-term policy objectives and targets (page 8);
  - Review Europe-wide monitoring as to whether it can generate the information needed to evaluate the implementation of the 7th EAP (page 8);
  - Support citizen science projects given their potential to contribute to the closure of knowledge gaps and reinforce a transformation towards sustainable development (page 8);
- **Secure investment for environment and climate policy and address environmental externalities:**
  - Reform economic and financial instruments by promoting the phase out of environmentally harmful subsidies (page 9);
- **Improve environmental integration and policy coherence:**
  - Promote an integrated policy agenda for ecosystem resilience to protect biodiversity and related ecosystem services (page 9);
  - Identify options for preventing the abandonment of environmental responsibilities under insolvency by utilising financial instruments (page 10);
- **Enhance the sustainability of the Union's cities:**
  - Promote a coherent urban agenda for Europe, that emphasizes the sustainability and resilience of urban socio-environmental systems as a stated goal (page 10);
- **Increase the Union's effectiveness in addressing international environmental and climate related challenges:**
  - Promote multilateralism where appropriate and take a leading role in addressing major global environmental challenges (page 11).

## Recommendations for the new European Commission and European Parliament on implementing the 7th Environment Action Programme

The EPA Network - The European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies – was established in 2003 as an informal grouping bringing together the heads of environment protection agencies and similar bodies across Europe. A full list of the Network members can be found at the Network’s website: [http://epanet.ew.eea.europa.eu/european\\_epas](http://epanet.ew.eea.europa.eu/european_epas).

The Network exchanges views and experiences on issues of common interest to organisations involved in the practical day-to-day implementation of environmental policy, assessing the state of the environment and communication of environmental issues. The Network works closely with the European Commission as well as with other networks with complementary roles on European environmental issues.

The implementation of the 7th Environment Action Programme (7th EAP) is of heightened importance to the environmental agenda of the European Community. It should be based on the precautionary principle, the principles of preventive action and of rectification of pollution at source and the polluter-pays principle.

The 7th EAP entered into force in January 2014 and is of binding character to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States. The European Commission describes the 7th EAP as a common strategy that should guide future action by the EU institutions and the Member States, who share responsibility for its implementation and the achievement of its priority objectives.

The guiding principle for the coming period of EU policy making from an environmental perspective can be captured by the title of the 7th EAP, namely “*Living well, within the limits of the planet*”. In the light of this broad perspective, the 7th EAP provides a 2050 vision intended to help guide action up to and beyond 2020 and to establish an innovative, circular economy, enhanced societal resilience and low-carbon growth. The 7th EAP should help incite a vital transition in the way we produce, consume and live. Transitioning towards sustainable development stimulates innovation, creates new jobs, and improves the competitiveness of Europe’s business as well as the quality of life of citizens.

To this end, the coherence of EU policy agendas over time is fundamental, as well as a clear understanding of the necessary transitions ahead and underway. The incoming European Commission and European Parliament should make a strong commitment to guiding these transitions by ensuring a targeted implementation of the 7th EAP.

The EPA Network would like to offer its support to the European Commission and European Parliament with regard to the implementation of the 7th EAP.

We fully endorse the 7th EAP and would like to contribute to its implementation by recommending specific actions to help realise the programme’s priority objectives to promote

long-term policy coherence. As a Network of practitioners, directly involved in the day-to-day implementation of EU policy at national level, we are well positioned to offer insight into aspects of the 7th EAP priority areas.

We call on the European Commission and the European Parliament to promote an ambitious implementation of the 7th EAP in order to address pressing environmental challenges we face today and to advance the transition toward sustainable development.

In reference to the nine 7th EAP priority objectives we offer advice about how to contribute to long-term policy coherence in order to promote sustainable development. From our perspective the following recommendations on the implementation of the 7th EAP are equally important and deserve particular attention in the years to come:

## **1. In order to protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital we recommend in particular to:**

- **Stimulate sustainable land use aiming at a land degradation neutral Europe by supporting the development of a shared vision on ecosystem services including soil issues among member states**, by identifying knowledge gaps at European level and promoting sustainable land use policies in order to minimize or prevent the degradation of soils and related ecosystem services.

### **Rationale:**

The 7th EAP emphasizes that the EU has agreed to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development. However, at present unsustainable land use is degrading and consuming fertile soils globally, impacting food security and biodiversity. Soil degradation and the loss of related ecosystem services in Europe continue to remain unchecked on a regular basis, largely due to incoherent policy and targets at the national, regional and European levels. The protection of grassland with high nature value and the establishment and maintenance of ecologically valuable farmland and forest areas need to be secured.

## **2. In order to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy we recommend in particular to:**

- **Transform to a low carbon society by giving strong support to a strengthened policy agenda for 2030 in the light of the 2050 GHG targets**, including an ambitious reform of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme in order to give the right market signals for GHG emissions reductions, and an ambitious approach to improving energy efficiency.

#### Rationale:

The transformation to a low carbon society is crucial when it comes to putting Europe on a path towards sustainable development. Such a transition must be in line with the 2°C objective, the IPCC/UNFCCC framework, and the energy and climate roadmap towards 2050, with an 80 to 95 % reduction of GHG emissions. It is clear that the recent European Commission proposal of 2030 objectives is the minimal trajectory (80 %) and will require further coherent and strong policy initiatives across a large number of EU policy competencies, such as energy, agriculture/land-use and transport.

- **Stimulate the green economy by focusing innovation and R&D policies on economic activities, which respect the ecological limits of the planet as a true boundary condition.** Specifically, policies should combine Europe's green innovation with competitive advantages by focusing on those sectors that have a globally strong competitive position.

#### Rationale:

This issue is crucial not only in terms of environmental protection but also in terms of creating jobs and export opportunities as well as strengthening EU competitiveness. Stimulating a green economy and bio-based economy is a fundamental answer to the call for green growth. Technical and social eco-innovations which promote the green economy are essential to making the true shift towards economic performance that respects the notion of ecological limits. In this context, market diffusion strategies for eco-innovations have to be developed and transparency in production processes and supply chains has to be improved.

- **Highlight resource efficiency by promoting the implementation of the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe,** with a focus on setting suitable and binding targets and life-cycle-oriented indicators for resource efficiency, and elaborating a coherent policy framework for sustainable production and consumption, managing waste as a resource to support a circular economy, and implementing the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources.

#### Rationale:

A significant increase in resource efficiency and an overall decoupling of natural resource use and its environmental deterioration from economic growth is necessary when it comes to Europe's development towards sustainability. The EU initiative "A resource-efficient Europe" elaborated in the Europe 2020 Strategy provides a long-term framework which describes how the EU can achieve a better sustainable use of natural resources and a shift towards a green economy. The Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe as part of the initiative includes milestones to be reached by 2020.

### 3. In order to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being we recommend in particular to:

- **Promote the benefits of a good quality environment by strengthening the linkages between environment and health.** In this respect, strengthen EU regulations in line with the World Health Organization levels and promote further efforts especially with regard to improving air quality and noise abatement measures at source. Support an ambitious and coherent policy approach to adapt to climate change and to prevent, minimise and mitigate adverse effects of invasive alien species on human health and safety. Provide the means to set up a Europe-wide human biomonitoring and address the challenge of hazardous substances on human health and the environment.

#### Rationale:

Ambitious environment policy should aim at delivering significant benefits for human health and well-being. While recognizing the advances in health and in the environment in Europe over the last decades, we need to come to grips with the fact that the environmental consequences of our mobility and energy systems, as well as our food and agricultural systems, also play a central role in health issues. Small particulate matter, chemical pollution, pesticides, noise pollution as well as new materials and invasive alien species have an impact on human health throughout the human life cycle, resulting in healthy life years lost, higher incidences of disease and death, and risks for the healthy development of children. As pressures on health and environment caused by climate change will increase in the coming years, the 7th EAP rightly calls for the implementation of an EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change, including the integration of climate change into key EU policy initiatives. Furthermore, the 7th EAP states, that human biomonitoring can provide authorities with a more comprehensive view of actual exposure of the population to pollutants.

### 4. In order to maximise the benefits of Union environment legislation by improving implementation we recommend in particular to:

- **Support full, coherent and appropriate implementation of the environmental acquis across Member States** in order to address environmental challenges properly as well as to provide a clear orientation and a level playing field for relevant actors such as businesses within the internal market.

#### Rationale:

A better implementation of EU environment law is imperative. According to the 7th EAP, the environment acquis is the area of Union law with the most infringement proceedings. The costs associated with failing to implement legislation are broadly estimated at around EUR 50 billion a year.

- **Support suitable regional and local policy initiatives** and allow for “different speeds” in Europe, as long as full implementation of the environmental acquis is ensured. Allow frontrunners to pull the innovative process forward and open the door for followers.

#### Rationale:

The 7th EAP underlines that in many cases, action to achieve the priority objectives will be required primarily at national, regional or local level. Tailor-made solutions and bottom-up approaches at regional levels are in several cases more likely to succeed than top-down approaches. Thus, the regional and local level is particularly suitable for supporting frontrunner and ambitious environment policy implementation. There are already many regional and local initiatives underway, which are often important drivers with regard to improving quality of life as well as to improving transparency and public participation in political decision-making.

## 5. In order to improve the knowledge and evidence base for Union environment policy we recommend in particular to:

- **Promote the EU research programme Horizon 2020 as it offers opportunities to reinforce the delivery of long-term policy objectives and targets.** In this context, support specific research action on closing significant gaps in knowledge, including research on planetary boundaries, environmental tipping points and research focussed on identifying solutions to environmental challenges.

#### Rationale:

The 7th EAP highlights Horizon 2020 as an opportunity to focus research efforts and to deploy Europe’s innovation potential by bringing together resources and knowledge. In this respect, addressing key environmental knowledge gaps is crucial, in addition to promoting solutions oriented research.

- **Review the Europe-wide monitoring as to whether it can generate the information needed to evaluate the implementation of the 7th EAP,** especially with regard to transitioning towards a low carbon, sustainable economy with people living well within planetary boundaries. Ensure that results from EU funded studies and networks are used for this review and that data are made directly available to relevant authorities.

#### Rationale:

The EU has already invested in the development of relevant indicators, methods and networks. The new 7th EAP includes environmental policy paradigms such as a resource-efficient Europe, circular economy and so on, which require further development of reliable, fact-based and relevant information in order to evaluate sufficiently the progress towards EU targets for 2020 and beyond.

- **Support citizen science projects given their potential to contribute to the closure of knowledge gaps and reinforce a transformation towards sustainable development.**



In this respect, realise transdisciplinary research, strengthen the participation of citizens in environmental policy-making as well as improving the accessibility of environmental data.

**Rationale:**

The 7th EAP aims at strengthening the science-policy interface, including the accessibility of data for citizens and the contribution of citizens' science. Public participation is gaining importance in developing and implementing environmental and sustainability policies and research. Citizen science can help to identify policy gaps and emerging issues thereby facilitating local, regional and even global transformations toward sustainability.

## 6. In order to secure investment for environment and climate policy and address environmental externalities we recommend in particular to:

- **Reform economic and financial instruments by promoting the phase out of environmentally harmful subsidies**, whilst also taking into account adverse social impacts. Additionally, shift the tax burden away from labour to pollution and push for a further greening of the European Semester.

**Rationale:**

Greening of key economic and financial instruments is crucial for guiding investments and economic decisions by producers and consumers. The current systems are not giving correct or strong enough impulses to change unsustainable systems of production and consumption. In this context it is important to consider the 7th EAP's indication of taking due regard to any adverse social impact when market-based instruments are increasingly used. In addition, it is also important that the potential of green economy, in terms of low-carbon growth, resource-efficiency, job creation and the promotion of green innovation, is properly addressed in the European Semester, as an instrument of the EU 2020 Strategy for promoting economic policy coordination within the EU.

## 7. In order to improve environmental integration and policy coherence we recommend in particular to:

- **Promote an integrated policy agenda for ecosystem resilience to protect biodiversity and related ecosystem services.** In this context, consider an ecosystem approach according to CBD/COP 5 and the formulation of clear policy objectives for integrating biodiversity and related ecosystem services in economic decision making.

**Rationale:**

Resilient ecosystems and landscapes require better policy implementation of the current policies on biodiversity (such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy), protection of nature areas, landscape connectivity and land use as well as a robust systemic approach towards ecosystem-societal interactions. The integration of climate, spatial and agricultural policies is absolutely crucial to increase policy performance in this domain. Securing ecosystem services requires a better understanding of the valuation, use, state and flows of natural capital and how services relate to societal needs and expectations.

- **Identify options to prevent the abandonment of environmental responsibilities under insolvency by utilising financial instruments.**

**Rationale:**

Some EPAs have experienced major operators, which have been subjected to environment licensing of their activities, going into liquidation and leaving substantial environmental legacies with no funds to either maintain pollution control systems or to remediate abandoned sites. Environmental liabilities arising from licensed activities are the responsibility of licensees and it is critical that suitable financial provisions are maintained by them to cover the risk of business failure and to ensure these liabilities are fully addressed.

A lot is left to countries to define and implement financial security, and to identify financial instruments that can withstand bankruptcy in particular. Up to now there are only five directives\* which are explicit about the need for financial provisions, but with different interpretations for adequate provisions. Many other directives are silent on the issue. Uniform standards throughout the EU – which reflect the existing differences between the covered risks – could be reasonable to address the above-mentioned shortcomings. A case in point is the Regulation on Shipments of Waste. Therefore it would be welcomed if the COM assessed existing and new approaches to improve prevention of the abandonment of environmental responsibilities under insolvency and to ensure a level playing field.

*\*landfill of waste; environmental liability; waste management from extractive industries; shipments of waste; and geological storage of carbon dioxide*

**8. In order to enhance the sustainability of the Union’s cities we recommend in particular to:**

- **Promote a coherent urban agenda for Europe, that emphasizes the sustainability and resilience of urban socio-environmental systems as a stated goal.** Additionally, support better and more ambitious earmarking of European funding in that direction.

**Rationale:**

By 2020, 80 % of Europeans population is likely to live in urban and peri-urban areas. Integrated approaches to urban spatial planning, in which long-term environmental considerations are fully taken into account alongside economic and social challenges, are essential to achieving urban communities that are sustainable, efficient and healthy places to live and work. The current wave of creativity, networking, experimentation and political ambitions present in many European cities should be recognized and collected as good practices for further learning and to stimulate policy innovation. Due to different spatial specificities adequate flexibility at the implementation level is important.

## 9. In order to increase the Union's effectiveness in addressing international environmental and climate related challenges we recommend in particular to:

- **Promote multilateralism where appropriate and take a leading role in addressing major global environmental challenges**, including climate change, resource efficiency, the development of Sustainable Development Goals and achieving a sound management of chemicals. Deal with global environmental issues in line with the EU policy for 2050 regarding a low carbon society, as well as regarding the protection of biodiversity and related ecosystem services.

### Rationale:

Strengthening the global environment agenda is crucial. Relevant issues in this respect are the envisaged adoption of a new UN climate agreement in Paris 2015, achieving the Aichi Biodiversity targets within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, safeguarding European environmental standards in international trade agreement negotiations (e.g.: Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), and developing a Post-2015 Development Agenda, which provides for ambitious Sustainable Development Goals. Also relevant are supporting UNEA (United Nations Environment Assembly) as the newly formed environmental decision-making body at the UN level as well as supporting the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) as the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services. In addition, promoting a green economy globally should remain on top of the agenda as an important tool for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication in line with the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference.