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EUROPEENNE DES ACTIVITES DU DECHET ET DE  
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**RESOURCE EFFICIENCY IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST ECONOMY:  
THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT**

LONDON, 14 OCTOBER 2003

**Address by Mr Rolf Annerberg**

**“Implementing the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP -  
A focus on Waste Management”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open this Conference. This gives me the opportunity:

- ① First to demonstrate that the Commission does not just talk about new, innovative policies, but also pursues them and makes sure that they deliver on environmental objectives; and,
- ② Second it allows me to engage in dialogue with you, practitioners, business executives and operators, who are essential partners in effective policy-making in the environmental field.

I will start by recalling the EU's 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme, on which we base our activities, and then talk about new initiatives in the field of waste, natural resources and products in this context.

***An overview of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP***

The 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme, EAP for short, is a significant achievement.

It sets the EU's environment agenda until 2010.

The 6<sup>th</sup> EAP highlights four priority areas for action — climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment and health, including quality of life; and natural resources and waste. It lists 156 specific actions to be taken.

The key principles are:

- our policy objectives and options, must be based on **objective information**, in other words on sound scientific evidence and comprehensive knowledge.
- to cope with the complexity of environmental challenges, and all the interactions between different environmental threats and different actors, we need to use **strategic approaches**. So we need to **integrate** environmental considerations into other policies, encourage the broad **participation of stakeholders** and devise **innovative policy instruments**.
- More often than not, environmental policies require action at **international level** to produce results. The EU is very active internationally and, to mention just two examples, has assumed global leadership in implementing the Kyoto Protocol and promoting sustainable development.
- Lastly and very clearly, we need effective **implementation**, which, as a golden rule, improves when stakeholders are involved in developing the policies.

Now, where do we stand in the implementation of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP and which challenges do we currently face?

### ***State of the play in the implementation of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP***

I am proud to say that in terms of implementing the EAP we have made considerable progress in translating words into deeds.

I won't bore you by listing all our achievements, but I will mention a few examples to give an idea of the range of actions taken by the European Commission. They include:

- The **emissions trading scheme** under the Kyoto protocol: this comes into effect next year and is a tangible commitment of the EU's determination to fight climate change;
- The European **Environment and Health Strategy** we launched in June of this year: this explores the interaction between environmental risk factors and human health and will enable us to take more focused action to protect health, in particular the health of children as the most vulnerable group of society;
- The influence we exerted over the **CAP Reform**, thanks to which the link between subsidies and levels of production has been broken;
- The new system of **Environmental Impact Assessments**, which the Commission put in place in June 2002 in a move towards sustainable development. Such assessments will have to be conducted on all major policy proposals.
- And in a moment of course I shall be telling you more about what we are doing **in the fields of waste, resources and products**.

### ***Thematic Strategies***

But first I would like to talk about thematic strategies, because our most recent initiatives on waste and on resources will become thematic strategies.

The concept of thematic strategies was introduced as a specific way of tackling key environmental issues. The 6<sup>th</sup> EAP calls for seven such strategies, on

:

- soil protection;
- protection and conservation of the marine environment;
- sustainable use of pesticides;
- air pollution;
- the urban environment;
- and, as said, sustainable use and management of resources and waste recycling.

So what actually are thematic strategies?

- Firstly, they are an attempt at holistic policy development (“joined-up thinking” as a British audience might call it). They tackle the entirety of a specific environmental problem - whatever the source or the media concerned – and require the involvement of all the actors who can make a difference;
- They insist on a sound and knowledge-based approach;
- They are a concrete example of the integration principle;
- They emphasise the added value of participatory policy-making.

This first stage is to define the problem and gather information. This first stage has been completed in the field of air quality, marine environment, soil protection, pesticides, prevention of waste and recycling, as well as the sustainable use of resources.

The second stage is to propose well-researched, sound and achievable policy options.

All seven strategies are due to be fully designed and presented by mid-2005. And this is where **enlargement** will again be a big challenge of course. The programme will have to support and guide environmental policies in the new Member States, while we will benefit from their input into delivering the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP objectives.

### ***Waste, Resources and IPP***

Now, let me tell you about the waste and natural resources strategies, and what we call IPP - Integrated Product Policy.

These three initiatives tackle different aspects of our production and consumption patterns, but have a common goal – to facilitate economic growth without further environmental deterioration. They will help us achieve sustainable development, which will be a win-win situation for both mankind and the eco-system. As such, they represent one of the EU's contributions to implementing the conclusions of last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg.

Two years ago (June 2001), when Commissioner Margot Wallström was speaking at the European Waste Forum, she said: “*We must demonstrate the usefulness of waste and resource policies for the broader objectives of environmental protection and sustainability.*” She emphasised that, “*Waste is part of the problem of resources use*” and also that, “*We should put more emphasis on the environmental performance of products throughout their life cycle*”. This shows that the three initiatives are closely interlinked.

### ***Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources***

I will begin with the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, because most of the waste we produce is processed natural resources or else is generated through our use of resources.

We need natural resources for almost everything we do. We use metals, minerals and timber in production and construction, we consume plants, animals and fish as food, and we depend on sources like coal, oil or bio-mass to produce energy. Using natural resources is indispensable for economic and social development, but it also creates waste, emissions and effluent, which affects water, air and soil. If we want to continue to enjoy economic growth, we must identify ways of using the available resources differently - with less damage to human health and the environment.

From an environmental point of view, the main problem of current patterns of resource use is their environmental impact - and not the potential scarcity of non-renewable resources. For example, the seemingly limitless availability of fossil fuels and, consequently, their extensive use to generate energy has produced some of the most serious environmental problems: air pollution and global warming. In the case of renewable resources, scarcity in itself constitutes an environmental problem. For example, the extinction of certain species means loss of biodiversity, and land usage means loss of habitats.

As the most pressing problem of resources use is the adverse effect on the environment, the resources strategy focuses on reducing these environmental impacts. It will first examine how natural resources enter our economy, what products are made from them, and, how, at the end of their useful life, the various materials and substances return to soil, air and water. It will then suggest solutions, such as cleaner technologies or environmentally less problematic substitutes.

### **The three core elements of the resources strategy**

In order to achieve sustainable use and management of resources, the Commission has identified three core elements that the resources strategy must be based on.

#### *Knowledge gathering*

It is important to gather more information and keep the knowledge base constantly up to date. This will make it possible to determine at any given time which patterns of resources use are of biggest concern and have the greatest potential for environmental improvement, considering technological possibilities and socio-economic aspects.

### *Policy assessment*

Resource use is influenced by many different policies. To mention a few examples: energy and transport policies determine which energy materials we import and how we use them, agricultural and fisheries policies have an influence on the way we deal with soil and marine resources, and trade policy is important when it comes to importing tropical timbers.

It is important to assess whether policy choices in these different areas are compatible with the overall aim of decoupling economic growth from the impacts of resource use, and to suggest alternatives wherever possible.

### *Policy integration*

Concrete measures will need to be taken on the basis of the information generated by the previous two elements. This will involve political judgements to rank the relative importance of different impacts and to prioritise environmental targets on the basis of an overall policy for sustainable management of natural resources. This approach will mean proactively integrating resource-related environmental issues into other policies.

The Commission is now has just adopted a Communication on the the future strategy, and will soon be launching a stakeholder consultation exercise, so it can present a fully fleshed-out strategy next year. In the interests of open consultation, we would welcome your participation!

### ***Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling***

Now let's move on to the Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling. Here, stakeholder consultation was launched in May of this year and is now in full swing.

This strategy is inspired by a life-cycle approach to resources management and takes the waste phase as its starting point. Indeed, waste prevention and recycling policies have to reduce environmental impact throughout the life-cycle of resources. This includes avoiding negative environmental impact from the extraction of primary raw materials and in the production processes which transform those materials.

Again the consultation process is an opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to defining future European waste policy.

It is also an opportunity for everybody to take stock of what we have achieved and to discuss the next steps. Future policy will build on existing achievements but there is ample room for innovative and modern approaches where these can make a substantial contribution to achieving environmental objectives.

I would like to comment briefly on three central features of the Communication:

### *Waste prevention*

As you are well aware, total waste and municipal solid waste are growing and are forecast to grow even more in the future. However, there are limited signs that in some countries waste generation is being decoupled from GDP.

“Afficionados” of EU environmental policy may have noticed that the title of the strategy is “Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste” and not “Thematic Strategy on recycling” as mentioned in the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP. The 6th EAP put particular focus on the prevention of waste and called for waste prevention targets.

But our experience in fixing - and not reaching - waste prevention targets made the Commission take the view that waste prevention targets should not be fixed in isolation. They should be part of a complete policy package, including the choice of the measures necessary to reach these targets.

The EU has only limited experience with waste prevention. Legislation at EU level has so far mainly addressed qualitative prevention by banning certain substances in a limited number of products and by encouraging producers to design for recycling.

The Commission is now organising a debate at European level on the potential for waste prevention and on how the EU can contribute to achieving this potential, and again we would very much welcome your input.

#### *Recycling: a case for market-based and economic instruments*

The Commission is convinced that economic and market-based instruments could play a key role in increasing recycling. We encourage all stakeholders - and the European Institutions - to debate the need for adopting such instruments at European level. This is certainly a sensitive issue but the debate could play a major role in shaping tomorrow’s waste policy.

#### *Common standards and good definitions*

Certain Member States and a number of stakeholders are concerned about possible “standards dumping” within the EU - waste tends to be driven out of countries with higher standards and so installations in these countries do not receive sufficient quantities of waste. This is caused by a combination of a rather free market for the recovery of waste with only limited environmental constraints on waste management facilities at EU level. The Commission recognises this problem, and the need to fight bogus recovery, and proposes a number of remedies.

The consultation is an opportunity for a transparent discussion of the issue of how to define waste and on how to apply the definition. This could include:

- (a) the development of objective criteria to establish when certain products become waste or to establish that recovery of certain wastes has been completed,
- (b) the systematic application of the exemption possibilities offered by the current legal framework, and
- (c) the elaboration of common guidelines for the application of the definition by Member States on a case-by-case basis.

I should also stress that any proposal for improvement should include clear evidence that the current definition entails unjustified implementation costs or has negative consequences. It should also demonstrate that it ensures a high level of environmental protection.

The definitions of recovery and disposal are also key building blocks in today's legislation. The Commission is committed to dealing with the implementation issues these definitions raise and is currently assessing the consequences of recent Court rulings involving energy recovery from waste.

I am very pleased to be able personally to express our gratitude to FEAD for its innovative contributions to the discussion of these key definitions in the workshop we held in Brussels in July. The Commission's technical services are currently assessing the final results of the ongoing study.

The consultation process on the waste strategy will end on 30 November 2003. We have created a special mailbox for comments, and they will be posted on the Commission's website as they arrive. It is now up to all stakeholders, including you, to use this chance to help define future waste policy. We hope you do!

The next step will then be for the Commission to finalise and adopt the fully-fledged strategy, which is planned for 2004.

### **Integrated Product Policy**

Lastly, let us take a brief look at Integrated Product Policy.

The waste phase is just the end of a product's life-cycle. It is one part of the environmental impact of a product. Other impacts occur during the extraction, manufacture, distribution and use phases. We need to ensure that by taking measures on waste we do not increase the overall environmental burden or just shift it to another phase of the product's life-cycle. We need to look at the whole life-cycle.

This is easier said than done. Methods for assess environmental impact throughout the life-cycle are far from perfect, but they are improving.

And even when we know where the problem is, do we have the most effective instrument – or combination of instruments – to tackle it, and are the stakeholders concerned prepared to take the necessary action?

In June, the Commission set out its strategy for putting "life-cycle thinking" into practice. It is called Integrated Product Policy, or IPP.

This strategy has two strands.

First, it will seek to promote the policy tools that can be used to make products greener throughout their whole life-cycle. Many of the tools – in what we like to call the "IPP toolbox" – already exist. They include measures like greener public procurement and standardisation and product labelling and can be applied to many different products.

The Commission will promote tools where it has a particular responsibility, because of the Internal Market dimension, and it will encourage other stakeholders – such as local and regional authorities – to take action where they are best placed to do so – such as in consumer information and local public purchasing.

The second strand is to identify those products that have the greatest environmental impact, and the greatest potential for impact reduction, and to propose co-ordinated measures to reduce the negative impacts. Clearly identifying the products with the greatest environmental impact will be a difficult exercise. The Commission will do this in consultation with stakeholders where necessary.

A separate part of the exercise will involve pilot projects on one or two products to demonstrate to the public the potential of a stakeholder-based approach in reducing the life-cycle impact of a product. The Commission has asked for stakeholders to suggest suitable projects and hopes to initiate one or two pilot projects in the first half of 2004.

## **Conclusion**

I trust that I have given you an overview of where we are heading at EU level with our environmental policies and what we are doing in the field that interests you most: waste.

As I said at the beginning, maintaining a dialogue with practitioners and business is essential. You are our partners in implementing environmental policies. For this reason, I sincerely hope you will take part in the different consultation processes I mentioned.

You are pushing against an open door.

I wish you a successful conference!