



**European Environmental Bureau
Bureau Européen de l'Environnement**

Bd de Waterloo 34 -- 1000 Brussels
Tel: + 32-2 289 13 06 – Fax: 289 10 99

**EEB Comments for the ad hoc Working Group meeting on Rural Development
30 March 2004**

The EEB welcomed the establishment of rural development as the second pillar in Agenda 2000. Particularly the agri-environment programmes and LFA payments have provided environmental benefits. Nevertheless, research by WWF, IEEP and several EEB member organisations indicates that rural development can still be vastly improved (project “Europe’s Rural Futures - the Nature of Rural Development”).

Six key concerns are described below, five of them derived from that study. These should be addressed by the mid-term evaluation of the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) in 2004 in order to improve rural development. Further steps should be taken in future reforms.

• **More funding**

The tightly constrained budget for the second pillar is thwarting its true potential. Modulation agreed in the mid-term review of the CAP in 2003 will reach 5% from 2007-13 and provide additional resources for the second pillar. However the increase is not enough to realise the full potential of the second pillar and for it to contribute adequately to EU objectives, such as halting the loss of biodiversity in 2010. Rural development has to be strengthened more substantially. Within this budget, at least half should remain reserved for agri-environmental measures. In the long run rural development should become the core of the CAP.

• **A broader focus**

In the current plans, modernisation and the competitiveness of the agricultural sector remain the dominant foci. Member States should incorporate strong targets and indicators of sustainable rural development, much more so than they do currently, balancing economic, social and environmental outcomes. Payments under Rural Development must not be used to promote environmentally unsustainable farming.

• **More participation**

Public participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies is recognised as a legitimate requirement by Member States, but often certain interests (for instance environmental, local, regional, or non-agricultural rural economic) have been excluded. If their needs are overlooked, this will affect the successful achievement of a sustainable rural development package. Therefore the EEB would like to see a regulation which builds on positive experiences with regional participation of the Leader programme. We need more public participation in the process of Rural Development Plans at national and regional level.

• **More diversity and flexibility**

The existing regulations do make it possible for countries to tailor their plans to meet specific local needs, but not all Member States make use of this, despite their rhetoric. Controls and procedures often inhibit creative and innovative approaches. On the other hand, the Rural Development Regulation itself and the Commission’s interpretation of the rules could be adapted so as to offer more flexibility. In this respect, the Leader programme is a good example of the necessary flexibility.

- **Better environmental integration**

Rural development has the potential to make an important contribution to EU environmental policy priorities like climate change, the 2010 biodiversity target, Natura 2000, water and soil protection etc.

Most national programmes take a minimalist approach in the assessment they offer, simply reviewing environmental issues rather than analysing them. They set general environmental objectives, which do not necessarily relate to identified environmental priorities. Furthermore, few Member States so far seem to seek coherence with existing environmental legislation, although several Member States address Natura 2000 site management in the rural plans. A more integrated approach to planning, including environment planning, is the only way to achieve real sustainable rural development. The targets of EU environmental policies must be clear at national and regional level. If these are not defined clearly, monitored and controlled sufficiently, there should be an obligation for a proportion of the CAP budget to be allocated to these EU environmental policies. For example, the management of Natura 2000 sites requires funding through the revised RDR. Those actors best suited for implementing the objectives of the environmental policies should receive the funding, allowing other relevant stakeholders to be other than farmers. Another example is the financing of 'green services', payments for services for society that the market currently does not pay for, such as building of hedgerows, water management, etc. Within this context well-designed agri-environment measures with clear biodiversity and environmental objectives will be crucial.

- **A more integrated approach**

So far, in many cases, the plans are a collection of existing measures, rather than a coherent set of actions in the region. Furthermore, there is need for better co-ordination with other plans which are effective in the same region (EU-funded, national and regional). A complicating factor is the fact that rural development in many places is funded through the CAP Guarantee Section. This inhibits the pooling of resources with Structural Funds and national and regional funds into one rural fund for the region. The proposed Single Fund for Rural Development could facilitate integration and simplify the administration of the fund.

In the long term, rural development should be based on clear national and regional objectives, established by integrated (regional) plans with a bottom-up approach with full stakeholder involvement.

The EEB's position paper "Greener Fields – Further Reform of the CAP" (July 2002) is available on the EEB's website: www.eeb.org. The EEB Agriculture Working Group is currently working on a position paper on the future of rural development policy which will be finalised in May 2004.

For further information please contact:

Christine Falter, EU Policy Officer - Agriculture, Biodiversity and Soil, European Environmental Bureau

Tel: 02 289 13 06 E-mail : Christine.Falter@eeb.org

Arjan Berkhuisen, Policy Officer EU Nature- and Agriculture Policies, Stichting Natuur en Milieu, NL

Tel: +31 (0) 30 234 8218 E-mail: a.berkhuisen@snm.nl

Gun Rudquist, Officer of Agriculture, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

Tel: +46 (0)8 702 65 07 E-mail: gun.rudquist@snf.se