

## **EEB ASSESSMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS OF THE UK PRESIDENCY OF THE EU, July to December 2005**

*Leadership on climate and chemicals – but  
undermining the EU's financing of the environment*

### **SUMMARY OF THE EEB VERDICT ON THE TEN GREEN TESTS**

<b>ISSUE:</b>	<b>VERDICT:</b>
<b>1. CLIMATE CHANGE</b>	☺
<b>2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</b>	☹
<b>3. GREENING EU SPENDING</b>	☹☹
<b>4. FINANCING NATURA 2000</b>	☹
<b>5. CHEMICALS</b>	☺☹
<b>6. AARHUS</b>	☹
<b>7. CLEAN AIR FOR EUROPE</b>	☹
<b>8. WASTE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>no verdict</b>
<b>9. MARINE STRATEGY</b>	☹
<b>10. WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION</b>	☺☹

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The UK Presidency started with bold ambitions on the environment. This included wanting to make a difference regarding climate change – also using its coinciding Presidency of the G8 – and finalising the first round in the Council on REACH. It also expressed interest in starting the discussion on a renewed Sustainable Development Strategy and at least the Thematic Strategy on Air Quality was on its list of things to do.

In parallel, it had ambitions to move the debate on better regulation forward, and, after the outcome of the June European Council it had to work on an agreement on the Financial Perspectives, which would include efforts to reduce spending on the traditional subsidies for agriculture.

Any Presidency has handicaps, but the UK had some specific ones on top:

- The determination to limit dramatically the size of the EU budgets from 2007 and to save as much as possible of the UK rebate. This came together with a more or less positive call for further reforms of the Common Agriculture Policy, but it was clear this was not going to work as Prime Minister Blair had already agreed, in October 2002, to postpone this discussion until 2013.
- An utterly obstructive US Federal Government in relation to the Kyoto Protocol and any environmental policy that might affect the short term interests of its powerful business groups.
- A European Commission that refuses to lead the EU towards sustainable development, obsessed by the Lisbon agenda, therewith providing conservative business lobbyists with a real VIP treatment and shifting the EU agenda more and more away from responsible environmental management. This led to delays in the production of the Sustainable Development Strategy and a disappointing quality of the Thematic Strategy on Air Quality, as well as crumbling support for the REACH proposal of the previous Commission.
- A European Parliament which is no longer the natural ally of the environmental agenda, reflecting the political trends that are dominating the Commission as well. This became very clear in the debate on REACH.

Despite these handicaps, the UK Presidency did manage to have considerable success regarding climate change, on the domestic level (aviation emissions) as well as the global (Montreal COP). It managed in a professional manner the discussions in the Environment Council on REACH and on LIFE+. It also organised some important discussions and events around issues such as public procurement. And it took forward the work at EU level on implementing the Water Framework Directive.

***However, the outcome of the Financial Perspective, as steered by the UK, has seriously undermined these positive results. The Presidency completely ignored the demand of the European Parliament to earmark 21 billion Euros in the Perspective 7-year period for Natura 2000. In addition, environmentally friendly farming schemes and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive via the Rural Development Fund are both in danger of suffering from the major cuts to that budget. For LIFE+ – the environment budget line – the Council has not yet settled on a figure, so uncertainty remains on whether the EU is prepared to continue playing a lead role in protecting and improving the environment in this region and globally.***

Being one of the EU member states that does not see the need for it, the Presidency refused to finally start negotiations on the Directive on Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. And its key priority, better regulation, has had an unclear fate: discussions in two Councils on the subject, but when the first concrete item appeared on the table, the Thematic Strategy on Air Quality, it failed to clearly identify where this Strategy actually contributes to deregulation and reduction of ambitions.

The UK Presidency, in particular Defra, continued with the emerging tradition of open relationships with the EEB and other NGOs. The EEB's UK members, in particular, have been offered ample opportunities to advise and comment. Several occasions were created for the EEB to meet directly with EU decision-makers. The EEB wishes to thank Defra for this.

## **EEB VERDICT ON THE TEN GREEN TESTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This is an assessment of the UK Presidency by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe. The EEB has a mandate from its members to work on environmentally related issues, which is in itself a broad agenda: 'traditional' environmental issues, as well as sectoral and horizontal policies with a direct or potential environmental impact, sustainable development, participatory democracy, and so on.

The EEB views the Presidency as a period of time over which progress on EU environmentally related policy and legislation can be measured. We appreciate that a Presidency cannot make decisions on its own. It needs the cooperation of the Commission, the European Parliament and the other member states. Still, a Presidency has a special impact – from the way it leads discussions, to the way it prioritises the practical work and the profile it gives to specific issues.

Nevertheless, the EEB Assessment is not an overall political assessment of the UK Presidency's performance. We do not assess its role here on general foreign affairs issues, internal security matters, migration policies, etc. Our assessment is based primarily on the TEN GREEN TESTS that we presented at the start of the Presidency.

The EEB presented its TEN GREEN TESTS and its Memorandum to the UK Presidency at the beginning of July. Prior to this, the EEB had sent a first letter with its priorities for the Presidency, which covered most of the issues in the Green Tests. It also had good contacts with officials of Defra before the Presidency started, and its UK Members had their own specific activities to promote the EEB's ambitions for this period.

Regarding the test on climate, and its assessment, the EEB received input from Climate Action Network Europe.

On the TEN GREEN TESTS, one by one, the EEB has come to the following conclusions:

## 10 TESTS FOR THE UK PRESIDENCY

### 1. CLIMATE CHANGE: ACHIEVE KYOTO OBJECTIVES AND INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP POST-KYOTO

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Launch a proposal to reduce emissions from air services in Europe by 2008.*
- *Lay the ground for the second stage of the European Climate Change Programme to deliver reductions in line with the EU's commitment to staying below 2 degrees warming through a medium-term target of 30% and a more stringent Emissions Trading Scheme.*
- *Finalise the Directive on End Use Energy Efficiency and Energy Services with mandatory 2.5% annual efficiency targets and 3.5% annual targets for the public sector.*
- *Secure EU leadership and a negotiation mandate by COP11, for a global post-2012 climate protection regime with legally binding emission reduction targets for industrialised countries, of at least 30% by 2020 compared to 1990, and strong incentives for decarbonisation.*

#### **CONCLUSION: on balance positive**

The parallel chairmanship of the G8 gave the UK additional opportunities to work for global progress on combating climate change. The Gleneagles summit of G8 leaders created a lot of awareness on the issue and raised expectations on a major breakthrough at further international negotiations later in the year.

Furthermore, key talks were held with China, India and Russia on climate change and energy policy, with some concrete agreements on future cooperation in this area.

The October Environment Council meeting, led by the UK, adopted strong conclusions to promote an ambitious outcome of the first Meeting of the Parties (MOP) of the Kyoto Protocol, in Montreal, Canada in December. This MOP was tasked to discuss the future of the Kyoto Protocol. Negotiations ended successfully when an overwhelming majority of countries decided to start discussions to further reduce greenhouse emissions after 2012. The EU, led by the UK, was instrumental in achieving this important decision. The clear step towards deeper reduction targets by industrialised countries also encouraged developing countries to consider additional action to protect the climate, which is necessary for a long-term global solution.

The Presidency had wanted to make significant progress on regulating the climate impact of aviation, but its ambitions were thwarted by slow progress within the European Commission, which only published its communication on the subject in late September. Discussions at Ministerial level took place at the December Council meeting, which ended with remarkably clear and

progressive conclusions on the inclusion of aviation in the EU Emissions Trading System.

The second European Climate Change Programme was launched in late October with working groups established to address key issues such as: impacts and adaptation, carbon capture and storage, aviation, and CO2 and cars. The ECCP establishes the policy framework for the EU to meet its Kyoto obligations. The launch of the second ECCP provides a signal that the EU is serious about implementing domestic emissions reductions. However, there was little scope for the Presidency to advance the process, which started late in the year and was driven by the European Commission. The working groups will do the bulk of their work during the Austrian Presidency in 2006.

One of the most cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse emissions and provide a win-win solution for all is through energy efficiency improvements. Sadly, policy-makers adopted a weak directive on energy services, thereby missing their biggest opportunity to reduce energy demand across the EU. The Presidency failed to get fellow member states to agree to strong mandatory energy-saving targets and merely adopted 'indicative' targets which will provide savings across Europe of only 1% a year for 9 years, falling far short of the potential savings of 2.5 per cent per year had mandatory targets been adopted.

## **2. PUTTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE TOP OF THE POLITICAL AGENDA**

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Ensure adoption by the December Council of a "new, more comprehensive and more ambitious [Sustainable Development] strategy, comprising targets, indicators and an effective monitoring procedure, [which] should be based on a positive long-term vision and should fully integrate the internal and the external dimensions."*<sup>1</sup>
- *Reach agreement on concrete implications for the Lisbon process of this renewed Strategy.*
- *Prioritise environmental and social considerations in an improved Commission Impact Assessment procedure.*
- *Give renewed momentum to the Cardiff process of integrating environmental considerations into the work of each Council formation through the setting of clear objectives and indicators.*

### **CONCLUSION: mixed**

The Commission had delayed its publication of a draft Sustainable Development Strategy to mid-December. And it has been clear from the start that in the eyes of this Commission, such a Strategy should be subordinated to the short term Lisbon process, which has been reduced to a pure economic growth and employment creation agenda. While we know the UK would have

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from the Conclusions of the Spring Summit March 2005

liked to start the discussion on this Strategy, it has not pressurised President Barroso sufficiently to produce the Strategy in time for this.

The UK Government had “better regulation” high on its agenda. It has indeed organised discussions on this, including in the Councils of Environmental and Competitiveness Ministers. Overall it remains unclear what is the precise value of these debates. While both Council formations seem to support the idea that better regulation should not become a deregulation exercise, the Environment Council highlighted the importance of better integrating environmental concerns into other policies and increased transparency, while the Competitiveness Council welcomes the Commission’s simplification approach – which again is mainly motivated by concerns about competitiveness.

Most worryingly, the Competitiveness Council welcomed the Commission’s High Level Group “CAR 21” under the heading of transparency and participation in policy-making. This Group represented a very unbalanced approach giving to industry privileged access to policy-making. The UK itself participated in the Group. Furthermore this Council favours greater reliance on the delegation of important decisions to technical committees, such as the European Standardisation Committee (CEN).

Further to this worrying outcome, the UK Presidency failed to address and assess “better regulation” in its real application, like the Thematic Strategy on Air and the revision of the Air Framework Directive, which was discussed at the December Environment Council.

Regarding the Cardiff process, the EEB appreciates the attempt of the Presidency to develop a “programme of environmental integration headline dossiers”. It included commitments to introduce or strengthen environmental elements of ongoing decision-making in several Councils, as well as initiatives for conferences etc. Several of the commitments were kept and were positive, including on climate and agriculture, on public procurement, on aviation emissions, and on supporting the setting up of the Regional Fisheries Advisory Councils. In some other areas, the Presidency had good intentions, but the outcomes failed to attach sufficient importance to the environment (like on the Millennium Summit Review). In other areas however, we are disappointed about the commitment shown. In particular, the UK did not appear to have an appetite to push for the adoption of the European Fisheries Fund – which is disappointing as funding for the building and modernising of fishing vessels remains an open question, and this risks undermining recent reforms of the CFP.

### **3. GREENING EU SPENDING**

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Ensure that the EU will have the means to actively promote sustainable development across the EU, while phasing out expenditure and support*

*that creates obvious obstacles to sustainable development. Adapt the UK commitment to the Financial Perspective 2007-2013 for this purpose.*

- *Ensure that the Rural Development Fund is not cut in relation to the Commission proposal, and, instead, transfer funds from CAP market expenditure (CAP Pillar 1) to rural development (CAP Pillar 2).*
- *Mainstream the environment into all EU spending programmes, particularly the CAP and the Structural Funds, in particular by adapting the strategic guidelines.*

#### **CONCLUSION: very negative**

The final deal on the Financial Perspective cuts the Commission's proposed budget for rural development by EUR 19.5 bn (from EUR 88.75 bn to EUR 69.25 bn), fails to mention Natura 2000 at all and omits a budget for LIFE+. This is a potential disaster for the environment in Europe, as it could lead to the removal of a coordinating and stimulating role of the EU for environmental management in this region, leaving it entirely to the individual member states. The EEB will call upon the European Parliament to resist this irresponsible move.

The EEB looks to the review of EU spending in 2008 to deliver a fundamental overhaul of the CAP in favour of wildlife and the environment.

#### **4. FINANCING THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK: TO HALT THE LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY BY 2010**

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Provide guarantees for Natura 2000 co-financing under Rural Development, Structural and Fisheries Funds, to a total of at least 3 billion Euro/year.*
- *Work to save the EU's only dedicated biodiversity fund under LIFE+ to help co-finance activities unlikely to be financed through mainstream funds.*
- *Encourage the Commission to come up with a clear, concise, precise and ambitious Biodiversity Communication, building on the "Malahide Message" and the conclusions of the Bergen op Zoom conference on the Birds Directive.*

#### **CONCLUSION: on balance negative**

Considerable progress had been made regarding co-financing of Natura 2000 projects via the European Regional Development Fund, as the Council took up a substantial part of the EP's amendments including those favorable to Natura 2000.

The UK Presidency has been successful in managing the discussion on the budget line for environment and nature conservation: LIFE+. This led to a separate nature and biodiversity component, and also introduced the possibility to use EU funding to co-sponsor much-needed conservation

actions – such as land purchase and the implementation of species action plans.

However, the outcome of the Financial Perspective negotiations does not provide any assurance that sufficient funds will be allocated to Natura 2000: the rural development budget has been slashed, the reference to Natura 2000 that appeared in the Luxembourg compromise has been deleted and funding for LIFE+ remains very uncertain.

The Commission postponed the production of a biodiversity Communication, despite some pressure from the Presidency.

## **5. TOWARDS A ROBUST & PRECAUTIONARY CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT**

*The EEB asked in particular, with regards to REACH, to:*

- *Finalise the first reading, with a key role for the Environment Council.*
- *Maintain scope of REACH, keep registration hazard- and volume-based, and add three more testing requirements for low volume chemicals.*
- *Ensure that chemicals used in imported articles have the same information requirements as those in EU-made articles and that safety information is available along the entire chain and to consumer.*
- *Ensure authorisations for 'chemicals of very high concern' are only granted if no safer alternatives are available and the use is essential to society – this substitution principle must be mandatory.*

*And regarding Deca BDE, to:*

- *Reject the Commission's draft decision to remove the ban of Deca BDE under the Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive.*

### **CONCLUSION: positive for Council decision management, negative for quality of Common Position**

The UK Presidency has done a good job in ensuring that before the end of 2005 a Common Position by the Council on REACH was agreed. It had planned such a result with the two preceding Presidencies and kept its commitment despite the major complications caused by industrial groups, the PPE in the European Parliament and the German elections. In this way it prevented the momentum on REACH getting lost.

Ahead of its Presidency, it also played a positive role in presenting, together with Hungary, the One Substance One Registration proposal, and effort to reduce the cost for industry and the authorities for registration without affecting the quality of REACH in terms of data requirements. The resistance from industry to it made clear that many key players are less interested in corporate responsibility/better regulation than in corporate secrecy.

However the Common Position is, on balance, a weakening rather than an improvement of the Commission proposal of October 2004. Although it went

in the right direction regarding substitution, it still does not provide for intelligent decision-making on the authorisation dossier and unlike the European Parliament, did not close the loophole of adequate control but moved major decisions to Comitology. The Council's registration requirements are even weaker than the already insufficient provisions from the Commission proposal, although not in the same way as the European Parliament compromise. Loopholes have been created, particularly by exempting more substances from the scope – thereby creating market distortions – and by allowing registration with less than the minimum data requirements for substances between 1-10 tons. This reduces the workability of authorisation, as insufficient data is provided to identify the most hazardous substances or safer alternatives, or even to enable a phase-out of the production and use of hazardous chemicals by the year 2020, as was the original objective of the new EU Chemicals Policy. The lack of sufficient transparency, the increased burden put on the European Chemical Agency due to insufficient requirements from producers and down-stream users to deliver sufficient information, and the loopholes regarding chemicals contained in imported articles, undermine what was originally going to be an excellent example of “better regulation”.

#### DECA BDE

The Council failed to take a position in time, and the Commission published its decision to exempt the brominated flame retardant Deca BDE from the RoHS directive in the Official Journal of 15 October 2005 – disregarding the EP plenary challenge of 6 July 2005 that the Commission exceeds its mandate in Comitology with this Decision.

The Council allowed the Commission to revoke an entire phase-out adopted in co-decision, although in the EEB's view the Directive does not give the Commission the mandate to take such a decision. The Directive provides for amending the list of exemptions only on the basis of considerations regarding the practicability of substitution with safer alternatives. However, substitutes exist on the market for all applications – the Commission wrongly based its decision on flawed and unfinished risk considerations.

## 6. IMPLEMENT THE AARHUS CONVENTION

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Restore the right to Access to Justice in the Regulation on Aarhus and the EU Institutions, and widen the scope of public participation requirements.*
- *Lead constructive negotiations on a Directive on Access to Justice at member state level.*

### **CONCLUSION: negative**

The UK Presidency could not do anything regarding the Regulation because it had presented the Common Position of the Council (of December last year) in September to the European Parliament only. Second reading in the EP will finish mid-January.

However, with regards to the Directive, the UK belonged to the group of countries that clearly expressed itself this spring as being against its adoption. As a result, it refused to start work in the Council Working Group on the text of the Directive. The EEB thinks adoption of this Directive is important for setting the minimum standards for the implementation of the right to access to justice in environmental matters as the Aarhus Convention requires.

Thirdly, the UK government maintains a rather negative attitude towards the Almaty Guidelines which were adopted by the Parties of the Aarhus Convention this May. While other Parties consider the Task Force they have set up as a tool to promote the Guidelines in other International Fora (for which purpose they were written), the UK, together with the European Commission, seems to see this exercise mainly as a way to put the content of the Guidelines up for discussion again, inviting other international fora to comment on its content rather than using them as a tool to improve participatory democracy at inter-governmental level.

## **7. CLEAN AIR FOR EUROPE**

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Ensure that the revision of the air quality directives will strengthen – not weaken – the environmental ambition of the directives, and support the introduction of an ambitious and legally binding regime for PM2.5 that will lead to concrete reductions of fine particles.*
- *Stress the need for a very high ambition level in the Council's discussion on the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution. Work for a common position highlighting the need for concrete legislative proposals on light- and heavy-duty vehicles, and the importance of progress on policy measures to tackle ammonia emissions and eutrophication.*
- *Work for Council conclusions which stress the importance of integrating policies on climate change and air quality.*

### **CONCLUSION: negative**

The Commission had delayed publishing the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution as well as the Air Quality Directive proposal until 21 September 2005. The Presidency did not show ambition to start the real work in order to move towards conclusions on the Strategy. Nevertheless, the EEB welcomes the fact that a public debate was held in the Environment Council on this. But we are disappointed that the UK Presidency did not come up with a more critical analysis itself of the Commission's proposals, in particular on the element of reduced ambitions and the failure to comply with the requirements of the 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme, which are "achieving levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on and risks to human health and the environment" (6EAP, Art. 7.1).

The debate in the Environment Council showed that member states' commitment to the strengthening of the air quality directives is unacceptably

weak. Many member states did not even support the Commission's proposed concentration cap, which should be met anyway by implementing existing limit values for PM<sub>10</sub> – let alone supporting an ambitious and legally binding regime for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Instead they highlighted the need for derogations for meeting existing limits. The debate revealed that member states do not take the health threats posed by ambient particles seriously enough.

The Minister's discussion on the Thematic Strategy reflected the need for concrete legislative proposals on light- and heavy-duty vehicles. Seven member states pointed out the need for further ambitious measures by the Commission to reduce air pollution at source. A few member states – particularly Austria – pointed out the need for a higher ambition level. This gives the EEB hope that Austria will make this topic a priority issue for its Presidency. The importance of tackling ammonia emissions and eutrophication was hardly discussed and integrating air pollution and climate change policies was not mentioned at all.

## **8. FROM WASTE MANAGEMENT TO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Set overall target and targets for the reduced use of 20 priority resources and sustainable harvesting criteria for biotic resources combined with concrete action on product policy.*
- *Ensure the Commission delivers on quantitative objectives on waste prevention for 2010.*
- *Continue work on priority waste streams, producer responsibility and insist on a Biowaste Directive.*
- *Prevent rollback on waste recycling policies – in particular on waste oils.*
- *Maintain the precautionary and preventive nature in hazardous waste legislation.*
- *Refuse proposals to weaken the Waste Framework Directive if not based on proper consultation and evidence-based case on the benefits and dis-benefits of any proposed changes.*

### **CONCLUSION: no assessment**

The work of the Commission has been delayed by half a year, and is likely to lead to the publication of the two related Thematic Strategies, on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste and on the Sustainable Use of Resources, by the end of December only. The EEB in fact insisted on such a delay, as it felt the drafts as they were half a year ago failed to meet our requirements. In particular the Waste Strategy risks becoming an unfortunate example of a roll-back of EU leadership in environmental policy-making. At this moment, we doubt however whether the half-year delay will have produced substantially better proposals.

## 9. A COHERENT MARINE PROTECTION POLICY FOR THE EU

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Shift new European Fisheries Fund towards monitoring and managing the marine environment.*
- *Embrace a proper planning system and manage human activities in accordance with an ecosystem-based approach.*
- *Give strong support to a moratorium on the destructive practice of bottom trawling on the high seas.*
- *Take specific action at regional level to protect and conserve the marine environment.*
- *Enforce legally binding targets and deadlines, and specifically a target for a fish parameter, which is representative and specific for abundance and composition of fish taxa in the relevant eco-region.*

### **CONCLUSION: a not entirely excusable lack of priority**

Commission tabled a Marine Framework Directive proposal in October 2005. The UK did organise one start-up discussion in the Working Group of Environment Officials but dropped last minute a presentation and discussion from the December Council agenda. This reduced the pressure upon the incoming Presidency to move this issue forward.

## 10. AN EFFECTIVE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

*The EEB asked in particular to:*

- *Ensure the ‘intercalibration’ exercise does not fail because of lack of resources. The exercise should deliver outcomes compatible with the definitions of Good Ecological Status provided in the WFD, and provision for repetition where current data is inadequate.*
- *Use CAP and Cohesion policy funding and mechanisms for supporting the achievement of WFD objectives.*

### **CONCLUSION: work on technical level positive, but the cuts to the rural development budget undermine the progress made**

By end-2006 or early-2007 the Commission must finalise an intercalibration exercise with member states, to ensure a comparable and WFD-consistent definition of what constitutes “good ecological status” – the WFD objective for all waters to be reached by 2015. Due to lack of political ambition, resources and data, this process could fail. The UK has effectively highlighted the problems, worked on finding solutions, supported transparency and the continuation of the intercalibration exercise after 2006, to allow reviewing the likely limited result from the first round. This is an important achievement to improve the application and implementation of the WFD.

The UK initiated work to improve the integration of WFD concerns into CAP, including organising a stakeholder conference on this subject during its Presidency. The event highlighted the critical importance of rural development projects for achieving WFD outcomes. A UK/Commission-led working group on water and agriculture also produced detailed programmatic guidance on this issue. Nevertheless, the final agreement on the EU's 2007-2013 budget will mean substantial cuts to rural development funding. These proposals cast doubt on the UK government's commitment to the environment at the highest level, and on its ability to achieve consistency in its policies towards sustainable development.

The EEB welcomes the Council's supported for the inclusion of WFD implementation considerations into the European Regional Development Fund Regulation. On the other hand recent developments under the Presidency's organised workshop in Prague and Water Directors' conference in London are alarming: easing ecological sustainability conditions for navigation, hydropower and flood control activities, have been discussed and unfortunately now form a starting point for further work under the Common WFD Implementation Strategy.