

MAKE EUROPEAN LAW WORK

Europe's Parliament must enforce environmental law, says Anita Pollack, despite disruption as more countries join the EU.

The next five years will be difficult for the EU, not only because of the environmental challenges we face, but because we are welcoming 10 new member states into the European family.

We do not yet know how this will affect the political makeup of the European Parliament. However, the sheer quantity of existing EU environment legislation to be implemented by the acceding countries could block further progress.

Vast tranches of new environment laws are not necessary (though we do need some), but integrating sustainability with social and economic justice is difficult. Sustainable environmental policies need strong commitment not only from the EU, but at all levels from local to global.

There is a massive job to be done. Wildlife is in decline, climate destabilisation is accelerating, fish stocks are depleting, soil erosion, desertification and access to clean water are major issues, air pollution and noise affect health, GM agriculture remains a threat, chemicals and waste are problematic and traffic continues to clog our cities. Many of the countries joining the EU have degraded environments, weak environmental

protection systems and limited resources. Some of them also have precious biodiversity that needs to be protected from rampant road building and industrialisation.

These are just a few of the multiple, complex challenges facing us, which is why the UK must argue for the environment and not be swayed by business into watering down important measures. There is, for instance, a strong practical argument for creating new environmental taxes at EU level, but equally strong resistance from member states for such measures.

A manifesto for five years for the European Parliament could include:

Climate Change: We need vigilance to ensure Kyoto commitments are met and higher targets implemented for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Also increasing use of clean, renewable energy to 25% of overall energy consumption by 2020, and much more work on energy saving.

Chemicals Policy: The REACH proposals (see page 9) have been diluted after pressure from Germany, the UK and France and need strengthening, in particular to tackle the use of endocrine disrupting and toxic chem-

icals. This means demanding a chemicals policy based on phasing out hazardous chemicals by 2020.

Biodiversity Protection: The EU has set 2010 as a target for halting biodiversity decline. This means enforcing existing legislation, ensuring sustainable development is a key objective for EU regional funds, co-financing for Natura 2000 and radically reforming the CAP.

Waste Not: The EU Parliament should demand more ambitious waste reduction targets, a level playing field for the recycling industry, fiscal reform switching taxes from labour to resource use and clear targets to cut use of natural resources.

Global Action: The EU's record on trade negotiations is a disgrace. EU environment policy operates separately from international policy, particularly that affecting developing countries. Action is needed on joined-up policy. EU CAP export sub-

sidies must be phased out. We have to kill this awful statistic that an EU cow gets more subsidy than an African child.

Food safety: We need a more holistic approach to preventing cruelty to animals, food production and distribution, tackling the power of the supermarkets, and taking a tougher approach to GMOs. A tax on pesticides and artificial fertilisers could reflect their true cost to biodiversity and the environment, as well as support targets to reduce pesticide use 50% over 10 years, improve implementation of the nitrates directive and combat soil erosion and contamination.

Transport: Greenhouse gas emissions from transport continue to rise. We need a framework directive on infrastructure pricing, quantitative environmental targets and the decoupling of transport growth from economic growth. The present Strategic Environmental Assessment

Directive should be extended to apply to structural funds, trans-European transport networks and particularly their extension to eastern Europe. The rush to the hydrogen economy should be watched carefully, and air pollution directives revised to deal with damage from particulate matter.

Implementation: There is a good body of EU environment legislation, but patchy enforcement and implementation. The parliament needs to scrutinise enforcement, encourage working with NGOs and ensure that proper funding is available. It should also work for co-operation between the directorates responsible for environment, food, energy, transport, structural funds, international affairs and development.

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