

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

IMPLEMENTATION OF TITLE II "ACTION TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT" OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES ON PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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I. Introductory remarks

The Commission was very interested to learn of the proposals made by the Italian Government to give a practical follow-up to certain ideas and actions contained in Title II of Part II of the Programme of Action of the European Communities on the Environment adopted by the Council on 22 November 1973.

The Commission regards the Italian initiative as a confirmation of the importance of action to improve the environment as far as the harmonious development of the Community is concerned.

II. Water

The Community action programme attaches especial importance to the various aspects of the water supply problem, whether from a qualitative or quantitative point of view. A very tight timetable has been drawn up for phasing the work which is scheduled for completion by the end of the current year.

In carrying out this programme, the Commission has already submitted or is in the process of drafting a series of directives on the quality objectives for water depending on how it is to be used. It is variously involved in international cooperation to protect fresh water (1) or sea water (2) against pollution.

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- (1) International Commission for the Protection of the Waters of the Rhine against Pollution; Council of Europe Convention on International Fresh Water Courses.
 - (2) Paris Convention on Land-based Marine Pollution; Conference on the Law of the Sea; IMCO (Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation) etc.

Progress has been made in establishing a viable European network for monitoring and checking the quality of water in the most important streams and rivers. In addition, the Commission is conducting an in-depth study of those sectors of industry where there are major water pollution problems, such as the paper and pulp industry and the titanium dioxide and steel industries.

As far as the quantitative aspects are concerned in particular, the Commission is cooperating closely with a group of national experts to study the available water resources in the Community, the planning methods and medium and long-term supply problems; it is also studying the integrated management of water resources on the basis of management models employed in the various Community countries.

Lastly, the Commission is helping to prepare an integrated and coherent development model for a specific region of the Community (1) where the water supply problem is crucial, with the aim of making this model available to all the Member States.

It is now generally accepted that the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this problem cannot be taken in isolation. In other words, even if the total water resources still appear adequate to meet the foreseeable requirements of Community countries for many years, they vary considerably in terms of geographical distribution and quality. To ensure an adequate supply of water to the population - adequate both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view (according to use) - requires levels of investment which will differ from one region to another.

It goes without saying that a minimum volume of water must be made available to each inhabitant for health and hygiene reasons. This is

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(1) Mittlerer Neckarraum (Central Neckar region)

a basic obligation of the authorities, be they local, regional or national.

A second problem is to meet all requirements, in particular those connected with man's economic activities (industry, agriculture, services sector). It would not make sense to quantify these requirements on a per capita basis as these vary so much according to the economic activities of the various regions. These requirements may either be met by the public authorities who supply water at prices which cover all or part of the capital invested or by the undertakings themselves, assuming the latter use a completely or partially closed system with waste water recycling.

No matter how the water is used, economic operators have to meet overheads. These vary according to natural availability and also according to the required water quality. They thus represent one aspect of the cost of production or of providing the service in the same way as the price of raw materials, labour, energy, and transport; these factors also vary from one region to another as do other manufacturing conditions, namely climate, soil, infrastructure, state of the money market, level of pollution, etc.

The competitive position of an undertaking depends on all these factors and it would be unreasonable to attempt to harmonize them by attaching the same importance to each throughout the Community; in any case, this would be impossible as a number of these factors are "natural" and preclude any human intervention.

III. Non-regenerating resources

The Italian document rightly stresses the vital problem of the progressive depletion of Community and world resources of non-regenerating raw materials. These problems are bound up with those of energy supply and the quality of environment.

The Community Action Programme on the Environment takes account of this interrelationship and devotes two chapters to the various ways of studying and tackling this particular problem.

Interaction between these various factors is very complex and, as a result, the Commission has begun by drawing up a consolidated report on the problems of pollution and nuisances with reference to energy production; this report was forwarded to the Council on 23 April 1974 and is currently being considered by the experts. In all the work and studies covering products, particular industrial sectors and waste, account is taken of the energy-related problems of pollution and of the conservation of non-regenerating raw materials.

Since the environment programme was published, the energy supply situation has deteriorated giving a greater sense of topicality and importance to these matters. All these considerations are given prominence in a draft resolution drawn up by the Commission for the next meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Environment.

In the context of the environment programme, the Commission is also studying with the aid of national advisers and experts, a number of mineral resources whose depletion and above all the rate of consumption could have serious repercussions on the environment. The studies will also cover recycling and substitution, again with reference to energy conservation.

It will not be easy to draw practical conclusions from all these studies and the Commission feels it will be unable to alter the timetable set out in the programme, even if the work were to be given all the priority it deserves.

IV. Agricultural and Forestry Considerations

The Italian document calls for greater awareness at Community level of the environmental imbalances which are becoming more and more

marked between different rural areas. It draws attention to the areas which are intensively farmed and those depopulated marginal areas threatened with damage to the soil and the natural countryside. The document proposes a series of projects - or rather objectives - which have been organised to form a rational plan and also includes the action undertaken or planned by the Commission under the action programme on the environment.

A. As far as the marginal areas are concerned, the Council approved a Commission proposal on 20 November 1973 for a Directive on the agricultural development of mountainous and certain less-favoured areas, the precise aim of which is to counter the imbalances affecting marginal areas. By giving direct aid to those farmers who undertake to continue their work, the Directive will ensure upkeep of the environment in areas where depopulation induced by natural handicaps has led to neglect of the traditional techniques for protecting the soil, in particular those designed to reduce the risk of erosion and avalanche.

Coupled with this action to counter the shift away from certain marginal areas, there are aids and special conditions for adapting agricultural holdings to tourism and the craft industry. Tourists visiting areas would be rewarded by contact with a thriving rural community and trade between urban and country dwellers would be stimulated. What is more, it might, as the Commission hopes, slow down or even prevent a kind of tourist "take-over" which would not be in keeping with moves to preserve the Community's natural countryside.

Under Article 2 of this Directive, Member States and the Commission are currently engaged in defining areas which might benefit from the proposed aid.

B. As far as intensive farming is concerned, the Community programme initially provides for a series of studies which are now under way and these may lead to specific action.

Under the heading of ecological implications of the use of modern production techniques in agriculture, the Commission is looking at three areas in particular, namely intensive stock-rearing, the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

As far as intensive stock-rearing is concerned and in particular in cases where there is a high concentration of animals in a limited area, work of the Commission departments will centre on:

- (i) drawing up an inventory of existing laws and legal practice concerned with protection of the environment against pollution of the air, water and soil from stock-rearing;
- (ii) a study on the feasibility of granting Community aid from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) to agricultural investment aimed at curbing pollution from stock-rearing;
- (iii) a study of various types of pollution caused by intensive stock-rearing, and studies on the feasibility of limiting such pollution by means of Community regulations.

With regard to pesticides, the studies in progress are directed towards the following practical solutions:

- (i) A ban on particularly dangerous products in view of the ecological damage they can cause;
- (ii) development of pest control methods based on
 - (a) use of the pest's natural enemies and
 - (b) the application of pesticides only when the real dangers have exceeded a certain level;

(iii) development, where necessary, of measures to encourage farmers to use these methods of integrated pest control.

As far as fertilizers are concerned, a study on the ecological effects of the intensive use of chemical fertilizers is under way. The study deals mainly with the effects on the quality of harvests and on the quality of surface stream water and water which permeates the soil.

Still in connection with intensively farmed areas, it should be remembered that Article 3 (5) of the Directive on marginal areas referred to above permits of assimilating to these areas, and therefore granting aid to, those parts of the country where farmers are handicapped by special environmental protection measures restricting the type of product they may produce and the production methods they may use.

C. Activity relating to all agricultural areas

The Italian document calls for action to be taken to safeguard and restore natural, ecological and cultural values. It would also like to see measures taken to protect those parts of the natural environment on which these values are based.

The Commission has now embarked on a series of projects to study all rural areas and these are in line with those parts of the Commission's action programme on the environment which come under the title of "Action to Improve the Environment". The Commission has concentrated on three aspects in particular, namely forests, the quality of foodstuffs, ecological values and the countryside.

As to forests, the Commission presented a proposal for a Directive to the Council in the early part of 1974 relating to procedures in the forestry sector designed to establish a system of aid for the afforestation of farm and waste land

and for the improvement of existing forest areas. This proposal is currently being discussed by the Council authorities. The Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament have already received details of the proposal from the Council and have expressed their support for it.

This measure should help meet the growing demands for quality in the environment; forests can help in a practical way by preserving the soil, fauna and flora, the purity of the air, the beauty of the countryside and the recreative pleasure it gives. They also act as wind-breaks and as a natural means of protection.

To back up the measure, a study is being carried out on two of the most important aspects of the forestry problem, namely public access to forests and the recreative infrastructure on the one hand and the development of afforestation techniques and environmental implications on the other.

Moreover, a study of fallow land is in progress to ascertain the ecological consequences of abandoning cultivated land and to suggest suitable methods for protecting the environment.

As regards the quality of foodstuffs, the idea of a European system of quality labelling for certain types of high-quality products or ones made by special methods is now being examined. Mention should also be made of the continuing action to harmonize legislation on standards relating to residues of undesirable substances in animal and vegetable products.

As regards the "identification of the more important natural or semi-natural environment in the greatest jeopardy in the various geographical regions" and the "identification and conservation of areas of historical and cultural value", a study is being carried out on typical rural areas and biotopes

in the Community which deserve special protection.

Concerning "conservation of local genetic characteristics as regards natural flora and fauna", the Commission has this year undertaken to study the problems of migratory birds and it intends to extend this study next year to include other animal species which are becoming extinct or are threatened with extinction. In these last three areas too, Recommendations might be made to Member States with the aim of strengthening their existing legislation.

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The Commission has taken note of willingness shown by the other Member States to forward memoranda as soon as possible on the questions relating to Title II of the Commission's action programme on the environment, i.e. action to improve the environment. The Commission would be pleased if, in addition to a list of topics for possible study, Member States also offered an assessment of the prospects for early legislation and regulations on topics on which they feel they have the necessary knowledge and competence. The Commission feels that such contributions could greatly help the work of its own departments.

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The timetable for the Commission's work on the fields mentioned in the present note is as follows:

a) Water resources

- Study relating to a model for the analysis of water resources and of their quality, as well as of future needs and of medium and long-term problems, taking France as case-study: end of 1974.
- Comparison and synthesis of the Member States' balance-sheets of water resources and demands; comparative analysis of management methods: first half of 1975.

It will be possible to send operational proposals to the Council in the course of the second half of 1975.

b) Depletion of certain natural resources

- Analysis of world resources in metals and other elements mentioned in the action programme: December 1974
- Report on pollution problems relating to energy production: forwarded to the Council in April 1974
- Proposal relating to terminology on resources, production and consumption: second half of 1975
- Study on metals of the platinum group: December 1974
- Study on mercury: February 1975
- Study relating to phosphorus and fluorine: April 1975
- Study on chromium: end of 1975.

Furthermore, environmental aspects will be taken into account in all the studies to be undertaken by the Commission on specific resources, in the context of work on a Community supply policy.

c) Protection of the natural environment

- Directive on hill-farming and less-favoured areas: adopted by the Council on 20 November 1973

- Directive on the promotion of forestry projects for the improvement of agricultural structures: forwarded to the Council on 16 February 1974 and currently under discussion
- Studies on the agricultural and forestry problems indicated under point IV above are in progress - some of them since 1973 - or will commence shortly. It is impossible at this point in time to state their completion dates.

d) Urban planning and land use planning

- Study on environmental problems specific to coastal regions: mid-1975; presentation of proposals: second half of 1975
- Study on environmental problems specific to open spaces and landscapes: October 1975; proposals: first half of 1976
- Study on bird protection: end of 1974; proposals: end of 1974. These proposals will already cover some aspects of the protection of open spaces and landscapes.
- Study on the protection of animal species threatened with extinction or becoming extinct: September 1975. Some proposals will be presented jointly with those relating to birds.