

Environment report shows benefits of EU action

European Commission

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USPA NEWS - EU environment policy has delivered substantial benefits for citizens over the past five years. Europeans enjoy cleaner air and water, send less waste to landfill and recycle more; while environmental policies drive jobs and growth.

The report warns that Europe's long-term goal of "living well, within the limits of our planet" "" the aim of the General Union Environment Action Programme (7th EAP) "" cannot be achieved with the current level of ambition of environment and related policies. The European Environment "" State and Outlook 2015 Report (SOER 2015) prepared by the European Environment Agency is an integrated assessment of Europe's environment that includes data at global, regional and country levels, as well as cross country comparisons.

It also looks at the next five years and beyond and sends a clear warning of the risks of environmental deterioration, in turn affecting human well-being and prosperity. The analysis calls for more integrated policy making "" a call the Commission is responding to with a series of environmental initiatives for 2015, including a new, broader package on the Circular Economy, a review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, an action plan on Ocean Governance and a modified Air Quality package.

European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella said:

"I see the State of the Environment Report 2015 as the 'starting line' of my mandate. The report clearly shows that EU environmental policies are delivering benefits. Environmental policies are also delivering jobs. The rapid growth of the green economy even during the worst years of the recession bodes well for Europe's competitiveness.

We must stay ever vigilant to ensure that good policy, well implemented, means excellent environmental results both on land and at sea. Innovative investment to safeguard prosperity and quality of life are a priority. The long-term investment we make today can ensure that in 2050 we live well, and within the limits of the planet. Resource efficiency/circular economy

The Report makes clear that protecting the environment is a solid economic investment. Between 2000 and 2011, green industries grew by more than 50 % in the EU, making them one of the few sectors to have consistently flourished despite the crisis.

The Report also shows that waste management is improving, although the European economy remains far from circular, with too much waste buried underground and an untapped potential for recycling and energy recovery.

The Commission is aiming to redress the balance in 2015 with an ambitious circular economy package "" to transform Europe into a more competitive resource-efficient economy, and address a range of economic sectors in addition to waste.

Getting most value from resources requires looking at all stages of the life cycle of products, from the extraction of raw materials through to product design, production, distribution and consumption; repair and re-use schemes; and waste management and increasing the use of secondary raw materials.

Nature and Biodiversity

The Report underlines that Europe is not on track to halt biodiversity loss, as habitats for animals and plants continue to disappear. Marine biodiversity, in particular, remains under threat.

In the course of 2015 (a year dedicated to Natural Capital), the Commission will complement the findings of the Report with an in-depth report on the "State of Nature". This in turn will feed into a mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the ongoing evaluation of the EU's nature legislation, to improve effectiveness and reduce the administrative burden.

Green Week, the largest annual EU event on environment policy, takes place in Brussels from 3 to 5 June this year under the title "Nature - our health, our wealth". It will offer an opportunity to reflect on how the EU can continue to address the nature and biodiversity challenges ahead, to assure sustainable long-term growth and prosperity.

Ocean governance

As outlined in the Report, Europe faces the double challenge of restoring and protecting our seas' ecosystems whilst keeping maritime

and coastal activities at the heart of the EU's economy and society. The EU is committed to the responsible management of the seas and to taking a leading role in international ocean governance discussions. This year the European Commission will launch a wide consultation exercise to help shape the Commission's next steps on ocean governance. Alongside this, the EU will keep working with its international partners and global institutions such as the UN to secure wide ranging political commitment for this agenda.

Climate action

On climate, policies are delivering results, with greenhouse gas emissions falling by 19% since 1990 while the EU economy grew by 45%. Renewable and energy efficiency 2020 targets are also within reach. The EU is therefore on track to meet our climate and energy EU2020 objectives. However, according to the European Environment - State and Outlook 2015 Report, existing policies and measures will not be sufficient to meet the longer-term goal of 80-95% emission reductions by 2050, turning Europe into a low-carbon economy. The Commission is already responding to this call, preparing new policy proposals to reach the 40% emission reductions by 2030 agreed last year by the European Council.

Air quality

The Report shows the air we breathe today is much cleaner than in past decades. Emissions of a number of air pollutants such as sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) have fallen considerably over recent decades, mainly as a result of EU air quality legislation. Despite these achievements, however, poor air quality remains the number one environmental cause of premature deaths in the European Union. The EU will be proposing a modified Air Quality Package to ensure the best approach that will achieve results in this area.

Background

The European Environment "State and Outlook 2015 Report provides a comprehensive assessment of the state, trends and prospects of the European environment, placing it in a global context. It informs European environmental policy implementation and analyses the opportunities to modify existing policies in order to achieve the EU's 2050 vision of living well within the limits of the planet. It has been prepared by the European Environment Agency (EEA) as a joint undertaking in close collaboration with the European environment information and observation network (Eionet), as well as European Commission services.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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