



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**



## **The 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Plan**

**A stepping stone for resource efficiency?**

March 2013

## The 7th Environmental Action Plan (7EAP): A stepping stone for resource efficiency?

The European Parliament is currently discussing its report on the European Commission's 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Plan (7EAP) 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'.

In Friends of the Earth Europe's view, the Parliament needs to ensure that resource efficiency is at the core of the 7EAP with these elements:

- **Indicators:** ensure that Europe measures its consumption of key natural resources, using effective and workable indicators – land footprint, water footprint, carbon footprint and material use footprint.
- **Targets:** introduce clear and defined targets to reduce resource consumption, in particular to reduce our global land footprint.
- **Waste:** introduce a target for zero residual waste to landfill and incineration by 2020 across the EU, and introduce prevention and preparation for reuse targets.
- **Product policy:** introduce a system that promotes resource efficiency across the supply chain.

### 1. Introduction

Resource use is shaping the political and economic agenda more than ever. We are witnessing an alarming increase in the consumption of natural resources across the world, which has resulted in a 150% price increase since the year 2000. Europe is already consuming more than its fair share of natural resources, with devastating impacts on ecosystems and communities. It's time for the EU to reduce its resource consumption so that other nations can enjoy the same levels of resource wealth.

However, despite the existing legislative framework, Europe is still the continent with the highest net imports of resources, making our economy dependent on a secure and uninterrupted supply of imports of all types of resources.

The availability of resources will remain a cause of conflict as pressure for the same resources increase, the global population increases, middle classes grow and developing nations expand their economies.

Friends of the Earth Europe believes that in the current economic climate, Europe needs to champion policies that will move the continent toward an absolute reduction in resource use. This is not only positive for the environment, but also socially, since it can create jobs in Europe in areas such as recycling and reuse<sup>i</sup> and it can bring massive cost savings and net benefits of up to €640 billion<sup>ii</sup>.

The 7EAP needs to have resource efficiency and its benefits at its centre. At the moment, although resource efficiency is mentioned, it does not help to build that policy area nor does it contribute to the Europe 2020 vision.

Ultimately, the 7EAP should be an action plan, as its title suggests. As such, the text needs to be of strategic importance and add value, rather than having a list of revisions of legislation that are already in the pipeline for the next few years. The 7EAP needs to create a framework for action and implementation as well as provide leadership.

This paper outlines what Friends of the Earth Europe believes the key policy actions are when it comes to resource:

## 2. Resource Efficiency

- **Make the development of the right indicators a priority for the 7EAP.** The Parliament's final position on the Resource Efficiency Roadmap<sup>iii</sup> made it very clear that it considered the land footprint, the water footprint, the carbon footprint and the material footprint the adequate indicators. Since then, a lot of time has been wasted in obscure academic debate, rather than ensuring that the EU uses the right indicators. Despite the fact that a compromise might be needed in the short term, the EU needs to ensure that the right indicators are developed and that no more time is wasted using far-from-suitable indicators. Therefore, a plan to make the chosen indicators robust needs to be in place by 2013, so that the land footprint, the water footprint, the carbon footprint and the material footprint are adopted in the next two years.
- **Make legislatively binding resource reduction targets for Europe a priority by 2015.** Measuring is not enough; only a reduction of resource consumption will bring the environmental, social and economic benefits that Europe needs. Therefore, a clear process on how to develop and implement targets for this is essential.
- **Ensure that land footprint, water footprint, material footprint and carbon footprint are part of the impact assessments of all EU policy proposals** (including the programming of agricultural and cohesion funds), so

that reducing resource use becomes integral to the policy-making process. This will ensure that the policies passed by the EU do not increase our resource consumption.

- **Resource efficiency indicators in the European Semester.** The resource use indicators should be part of the Europe 2020 headline indicators used in the Commission's Annual Growth Survey that kicks off the Economic Semester. This will give a powerful signal to member states and policy makers about how resource efficiency is interrelated with the overall economic, environmental and social success of the EU.
- **The EU should provide guidance and tools to enable member states, companies and others to use the resource use indicators.** The indicators noted above can be used at national, company or individual product level. Spreading their use through supply chains will be an effective tool in encouraging resource efficiency throughout the economy.

## 3. Waste in the 7EAP

- **Make zero residual waste a legally binding target by 2020.** The Resource Efficiency Roadmap states that the EU should aim for near-zero residual waste (the waste that is not prevented, reused or recycled). We need to ensure that this vision becomes legislation, making the worst performers in the EU improve quickly.
- **Introduce prevention and preparation for reuse targets for all member states by 2020** as well as increased recycling targets based on the best-performing EU member states. This will provide the right legislative incentive for member states to introduce the necessary economic measures to operate at the top of the waste hierarchy.
- **Have an EU-wide incineration and landfill ban by 2020.** The EU needs to make use of economic and regulatory tools to move up to the top end of the

waste hierarchy, such as introducing landfill and incineration bans, introduce long warranties for all products and requiring mandatory separate collection for recyclable and compostable waste.

- **Stop funding landfills and incinerators.** The EU is currently funding the creation of incinerators, which locks local authorities into long-term contracts that ensure that incineration takes place for decades. This is not only harmful for the environment, but is also allowing valuable materials to escape the economic cycle. We simply cannot allow public money to go to this sort of infrastructure. Therefore, there should be a ban on the use of public money for these for the next programming period (2014-2020).

#### 4. Product Policy

- **Measuring the resources consumed by products,** using the same indicators as used for the EU economy as a whole – i.e. land footprint, carbon footprint, water footprint and material use can enable companies to identify opportunities to reduce resource consumption within their supply chain, and can help the EU and regulators identify the priority products and sectors using significant amounts of natural resources.
- **Prioritise some products.** Not all products have to be measured at once. A staged approach is best to ensure that the most resource-intensive products are tackled with urgency.
- **Standardisation of any self-reporting** and self-labelling is needed and should be agreed and guided with transparent methodologies.
- **Focussing on action by companies, not consumers.** Consumers are already overwhelmed with information,

and companies must take the primary responsibility for greening their products. A review of the current labelling should take place, as well as a ban on unjustified and confusing environmental claims.

- **Identifying and implementing key measures to improve the resource efficiency of products.** For example, bringing in compulsory minimum warranties or recyclability standards.

#### 5. Contact and web sites

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[www.foeeurope/resources](http://www.foeeurope/resources)

#### 6. References

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- i If all member states recycled as much as the best EU performers, 500,000 new jobs would be created. Reference: Friends of the Earth (2010) *More Jobs, Less Waste* [http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2010/More\\_Jobs\\_Less\\_Waste\\_Sep2010.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2010/More_Jobs_Less_Waste_Sep2010.pdf)
  - In addition, jobs in the recycling sector are better paid than jobs in landfilling and incinerating waste. Reference: EEA (2011) *Earnings, jobs and innovation: The role of recycling in a green economy* <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/earnings-jobs-and-innovation-the>
  - ii AMEC and Bio (2013) *The opportunities to business of improving resource efficiency* [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/resource\\_efficiency/pdf/report\\_opportunities.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/resource_efficiency/pdf/report_opportunities.pdf)
  - iii European Parliament (2012) *A resource efficient Europe. Text adopted* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0223+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

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Switzerland	Zelenyi Svit
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**Friends of the Earth Europe** campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.