



Procedure file

| Basic information | | |
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| INI - Own-initiative procedure | 2006/2293(INI) | Procedure completed |
| Thematic strategy for soil protection | | |
| Subject 3.70.01 Protection of natural resources: fauna, flora, nature, wildlife, countryside; biodiversity 3.70.06 Soil pollution, deterioration | | |

| Key players | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|------------|
| European Parliament | Committee responsible | Rapporteur | Appointed |
| | ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety | | 29/11/2005 |
| | | ALDE PRODI Vittorio | |
| | Committee for opinion | Rapporteur for opinion | Appointed |
| | ITRE Industry, Research and Energy | The committee decided not to give an opinion. | |
| | AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development | | 05/06/2007 |
| | JURI Legal Affairs | The committee decided not to give an opinion. | |
| Council of the European Union | Council configuration | Meeting | Date |
| | Agriculture and Fisheries | 2790 | 19/03/2007 |
| | Environment | 2785 | 20/02/2007 |
| | Agriculture and Fisheries | 2777 | 29/01/2007 |
| European Commission | Commission DG | Commissioner | |
| | Environment | DIMAS Stavros | |

| Key events | | | |
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| 22/09/2006 | Non-legislative basic document published | COM(2006)0231 | Summary |
| 14/12/2006 | Committee referral announced in Parliament | | |
| 29/01/2007 | Debate in Council | 2777 | |
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| 03/10/2007 | Vote in committee | | Summary |
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| 25/10/2007 | Committee report tabled for plenary | A6-0411/2007 | |
| 12/11/2007 | Debate in Parliament |  | |
| 13/11/2007 | Results of vote in Parliament |  | |
| 13/11/2007 | Decision by Parliament | T6-0504/2007 | Summary |
| 14/11/2007 | End of procedure in Parliament | | |

Technical information

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| Committee dossier | ENVI/6/33977 |

Documentation gateway

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|---|-------------|-------------------------------|------------|----|---------|
| Non-legislative basic document | | COM(2006)0231 | 22/09/2006 | EC | Summary |
| Document attached to the procedure | | SEC(2006)0620 | 22/09/2006 | EC | |
| Committee opinion | AGRI | PE382.452 | 05/06/2007 | EP | |
| Amendments tabled in committee | | PE390.762 | 26/07/2007 | EP | |
| Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading | | A6-0411/2007 | 25/10/2007 | EP | |
| Text adopted by Parliament, single reading | | T6-0504/2007 | 13/11/2007 | EP | Summary |
| Commission response to text adopted in plenary | | SP(2007)6527 | 18/12/2007 | EC | |
| Commission response to text adopted in plenary | | SP(2008)0412 | 05/02/2008 | EC | |
| Follow-up document | | COM(2012)0046 | 13/02/2012 | EC | Summary |

Thematic strategy for soil protection

PURPOSE: to propose a strategy to ensure that Europe's soils remain healthy and capable of supporting human activities and ecosystems.

BACKGROUND: soil is a resource of common interest to the EU and failure to protect it at EU level will undermine sustainability and long term competitiveness in Europe. It is rapidly degrading in many places across the EU exacerbated by human activity, such as certain agricultural and forestry practices, industrial activities, tourism or urban development. An estimated 115 million hectares or 12% of Europe's total land area are subject to water erosion, and a further 42 million hectares by wind erosion. Approximately 3.5 million sites within the EU could be contaminated. About 45% of European soils have low organic matter content, principally in southern Europe but also other Member States are concerned. Different EU policies already contribute to soil protection but no coherent policy exists. Only nine Member States have specific legislation on soil protection, often covering a specific threat, in particular soil contamination.

Soil degradation has strong impacts on other areas of common interest to the EU, such as water, human health, climate change, nature and biodiversity protection, and food safety. Soil protection is not only a national concern as soil contamination in one Member State can have transboundary effects and cause pollution and economic burdens on neighbouring states. Also, different ways of dealing with soil problems may distort competition for economic operators within the internal market.

CONTENT: against this background, the Commission considers that a comprehensive EU strategy for soil protection is required. This strategy should take into account all the different functions that soils can perform, their variability and complexity and the range of different degradation processes to which they can be subject, while also considering socio-economic aspects.

The overall objective is protection and sustainable use of soil, based on the following guiding principles: (i) preventing further soil degradation and preserving its functions; (ii) restoring degraded soils to a level of functionality consistent at least with current and intended use, thus also considering the cost implications of the restoration of soil. To achieve these objectives, action is required at different levels ? local, national and European. Action at European level is a necessary addition to the action by Member States.

The strategy proposed by the Commission is built around four key pillars:

- framework legislation with protection and sustainable use of soil as its principal aim;
- integration of soil protection in the formulation and implementation of national and Community policies;
- closing the current recognised knowledge gap in certain areas of soil protection through research supported by Community and national research programmes;
- increasing public awareness of the need to protect soil.

Having examined different options, the Commission proposes a Framework Directive as the best means of ensuring a comprehensive approach to soil protection whilst fully respecting subsidiarity. The Framework Directive sets out common principles, objectives and actions. It requires Member States to adopt a systematic approach to identifying and combating soil degradation, tackling precautionary measures and integrating soils protection into other policies. But it allows for flexibility - it is for the Member States to decide the level of ambition, specific targets and the measures to reach those. This is because soil degradation offers a very scattered picture throughout Europe, where 320 major soil types have been identified.

Member States are required to identify areas where there is a risk of erosion, organic matter decline, compaction, salinisation and landslides. They must set risk reduction targets for those areas and establish programmes of measures to achieve them. They will also have to prevent further contamination, establish an inventory of contaminated sites on their territory and draw up national remediation strategies. When a site is being sold, where a potentially contaminating activity has taken or is taking place, a soil status report has to be provided by the seller or the buyer to the administration and the other party in the transaction. Finally, the Member States are required to limit or mitigate the effects of sealing, for instance by rehabilitating brownfield sites.

The Strategy will boost research on soil and raise public awareness and ensure public participation in the preparation and review of the programmes of measures adopted by the Member States.

Thematic strategy for soil protection

The Council held a policy debate on the thematic strategy for soil protection and on the proposal for a Framework Directive. Some of the main items discussed related to:

- the added value of the proposed thematic strategy;
- the efficiency with which the proposed Framework Directive manages to fulfil the objective of creating a consolidated and more sustainable use of soils across the EU;
- areas of potential concern in terms of scope, requirements and implementation of the proposed Directive; and
- how the thematic strategy and draft Framework Directive on soil protection fit in with, and contribute to, Community action in relation to other environmental policies and sectoral issues.

Thematic strategy for soil protection

The Council took note of the concern raised on several occasions by the Austrian delegation supported by the German, French, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portuguese, Polish and Finnish delegations, pointing out the importance of soil protection to agriculture and forestry and the need to grant Member States sufficient subsidiarity on that issue. The Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Finnish delegations took that opportunity to propose the inclusion of soil acidification in the impact assessment as the eighth ?threat to soil?.

The Presidency drew the Commission's attention to the need for further discussion of proportionality and subsidiarity.

The Commission took note of the remarks made by those delegations and recalled that the proposed directive provided Member States with the necessary subsidiarity with regard to targets, implementing measures and timetable respectively. It indicated that it would carry out an in-depth analysis of the documentation provided by those Member States concerned by soil acidity in order to determine whether such criteria should be included in the impact assessment provided for in the directive.

Thematic strategy for soil protection

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the initiative report by Vittorio PRODI (ALDE, IT) in which it welcomes the Commission's communication on the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection.

It notes that soil degradation has local and regional causes and impact, and that occasional transboundary effects are caused by regional geomorphological factors and consequently require intergovernmental measures. It is concerned at the consequences of soil degradation, whether natural or the result of human activity and stresses the need for a European strategy to identify and remedy the problems linked to the degradation of soils.

The committee firmly believes that the huge diversity in terms of types of soil (320, with numerous sub-types) necessitates, in addition to national bottom-up approaches, a European strategy based on prevention, public awareness, information and the identification of risk areas to

deal with this problem at European level. It calls on Member States without soil protection legislation to shoulder their responsibilities for soil protection, taking also into account the responsibilities of owners and considers, in particular, that regional and local authorities should play a major part in formulating objectives and plans for soil protection.

MEPs consider that the thematic strategy needs to be strengthened in all Member States, and that much more dynamic progress will be made in implementing the strategy if it is complemented by financial aid measures financed from available budget appropriations for cohesion regions.

The report notes that soil, which is a crucial factor in the long-term, sustainable production of food, feed, fibres, and, increasingly, of biomass, has no specific Community legislation and it agrees with the Commission that there is a need for a framework directive on soil protection.

MEPs believe that a framework directive is an adequate measure for soil protection and could enable Member States that have not yet done so to develop soil policies without creating distortion of competition. The framework directive should recognise the already existing national and Community legislation and should not add any unnecessary administrative burden on Member States, regional and local authorities, and land owners.

MEPs stress that a clear demarcation is needed between this directive and other European legislative standards relating to soil protection in order to avoid regulatory duplication.

Synergy with other Community policies: MEPs propose that an in-depth evaluation and analysis be carried out of directives already introduced in the European Union, such as the Groundwater Directive and the Nitrates Directive, and that the extent to which Member States are meeting the cross-compliance conditions applicable to farmers be evaluated and analysed. They consider that, on the basis of this analysis, binding measures may, if necessary, be drawn up to promote soil quality. The Commission is called upon to:

- examine the implementation in Member States of relevant soil protection provisions in other Community legislation on air, water, waste, climate change, biodiversity, desertification, agriculture, energy, products, industry, transport and regional development, and to report to the European Parliament before the end of 2008 on how such legislation can be better used for increased soil protection;
- assess possible synergies with the Waste Directive;
- develop as soon as possible a directive on the sound management of biowaste with the objective of reducing the amount of biowaste that is landfilled or incinerated and of promoting instead the production of compost and biogas.

Climate change: aware that a change in soil use can result in an increase in carbon sequestration or in an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, the committee calls on the Commission to consider measures, including a common minimum levy, for example, on carbon loss. Such levies must be collected at national level and the proceeds must be used to resolve the pollution problem that provides the basis for the levy, for example, to develop systems involving more carbon sequestration. Account should be taken of the important role of soil policies in both the mitigation of climate change and adaptation to the impacts of climate change in their negotiations on a post-2012 regime under the UNFCCC. The report calls on the Commission to promote further research on the soil's role in increasing water retention and combating falling groundwater levels, in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and to identify possible best practices on measures that increase carbon sequestration in the soil, and to report to the European Parliament before the end of 2009, when an ongoing Commission study will have delivered some results.

Agriculture: the report notes that productive agricultural land is an increasingly scarce global resource and that this calls for sustainable agricultural practices that preserve valuable soil qualities. The committee calls on the Commission to:

- establish priorities as to how Europe's land area is to be used so that the soil is protected in the best way possible and a basis is created for high levels of biodiversity and carbon sequestration; in addition to sequestration in the soil, it should be ensured that woods, shelter belts and, not least, agro-forestry are included;
- establish a catalogue of agricultural practices and their different effects on soil, so that best agro-technical practices can be promoted in line with the characteristics of farming and its benefits for the soil and the wider environment;
- promote show-cases of sustainable agricultural practices geared towards soil conservation.

Research: the committee calls on the Commission to promote further research on the soil's role in protecting biodiversity and soil biodiversity, in the fields of processes underlying soil functions, spatial and temporal changes in soil processes, ecological, economic and social drivers of soil threats, factors influencing soil eco-services and operational procedures and technologies for soil protection and restoration. There are first steps in this direction in the proposal for the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013), which covers research into soil functions as part of its 'Environment' and 'Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology' priority areas.

Desertification and steppe formation: the report states that 14 Member States are affected by desertification, and that the remaining 13, even if they are not actually affected, are subject to regional or local environmental pressures such as erosion or salinisation. The Commission is urged to submit a communication on desertification and steppe formation, firstly in the EU and then worldwide, containing a precise description of the regions affected or likely to be affected by the desertification process and steppe formation, together with a detailed analysis of the causes and socio-economic effects on the regions, and identifying appropriate Community actions to help limit the negative effects of these processes.

Contamination: underlining the importance of the prevention of soil contamination, the committee calls on the Commission to ensure that existing and future Community legislation adheres to this objective. MEPs believe that a systemic approach for the identification of contaminated sites, based on monitoring objective parameters and a common list of activities, is needed to gather the necessary information and establish databases in order to manage the legacy of soil contamination, thus giving a signal to economic operators so that they take effective preventive measures to avoid future contamination. The establishment of a Europe-wide platform for the exchange of information between Member States has been welcomed since it promotes the transfer of know-how and may open the way to synergies. The report stresses that the reporting and documentation requirements laid down in the framework directive must be confined to what is strictly necessary so as not to impose an excessive burden on towns, municipalities and regions; in particular, Member States need to be able to use their own reporting systems.

Monitoring, impacts of natural disasters, training and education: the Commission is called upon to: i) ensure that soil protection and its links with climate change, biodiversity, deforestation, land drainage, desertification, steppe formation, falling groundwater levels, acidification, erosion and increased risks as a result of natural and man-made disasters will be dealt with under the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) and INSPIRE as a matter of priority; ii) develop schemes to encourage the transfer of know-how relating to best practice under national soil protection legislation; identify more structural ways to improve training and education within the European Union on soil

classification, sampling, monitoring and possible best practices on soil protection, exchange of information and best practice, increasing knowledge of the importance and need for soil protection and also promoting best agrotechnical practices in agriculture aimed at restoring the productive function of soil.

Thematic strategy for soil protection

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Vittorio PRODI (ALDE, IT) in which it welcomed the Commission's communication on the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection.

Parliament noted that soil degradation had local and regional causes and impact, and that occasional trans-boundary effects were caused by regional geomorphological factors and consequently required intergovernmental measures. The huge diversity in terms of types of soil (320, with numerous sub-types) necessitated, in addition to national bottom-up approaches, a European strategy based on prevention, public awareness, information and the identification of risk areas to deal with this problem at European level. Member States without soil protection legislation must shoulder their responsibilities for soil protection, taking also into account the responsibilities of owners. Regional and local authorities should play a major part in formulating objectives and plans for soil protection. Parliament stated emphatically that soil was a policy area which, by virtue of its great diversity, required tailor-made solutions that need to be developed at local and regional levels.

MEPs considered that the thematic strategy needed to be strengthened in all Member States. Much more dynamic progress would be made in implementing the strategy if it were complemented by financial aid measures financed from available budget appropriations for cohesion regions.

Parliament noted that soil, which was a crucial factor in the long-term, sustainable production of food, feed, fibres, and, increasingly, of biomass, had no specific Community legislation and it agreed with the Commission about the need for a framework directive on soil protection.

Such a directive could enable Member States to develop soil policies without creating distortion of competition. The framework directive should recognise the already existing national and Community legislation and should not add any unnecessary administrative burden on Member States, regional and local authorities, and land owners. There must be a clear demarcation between this directive and other European legislative standards relating to soil protection in order to avoid regulatory duplication.

Synergy with other Community policies: MEPs proposed that an in-depth evaluation be carried out of directives already introduced in the EU, such as the Groundwater Directive and the Nitrates Directive, and that the extent to which Member States were meeting the cross-compliance conditions applicable to farmers be evaluated and analysed. On the basis of this analysis, binding measures might be drawn up to promote soil quality. The Commission is called upon to:

- examine the implementation in Member States of relevant soil protection provisions in other Community legislation on air, water, waste, climate change, biodiversity, desertification, agriculture, energy, products, industry, transport and regional development, and to report before the end of 2008 on how such legislation can be better used for increased soil protection;
- assess possible synergies with the Waste Directive;
- develop as soon as possible a directive on the sound management of biowaste with the objective of reducing the amount of biowaste that is landfilled or incinerated and of promoting instead the production of compost and biogas.

Climate change: recognising that a change in soil use could result in an increase in carbon sequestration or in an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, Parliament called on the Commission to consider measures, including a common minimum levy, for example, on carbon loss. Such levies must be collected at national level and the proceeds must be used to resolve the pollution problem that provided the basis for the levy, for example, to develop systems involving more carbon sequestration. Account should be taken of the important role of soil policies in both the mitigation of climate change and adaptation to the impacts of climate change in their negotiations on a post-2012 regime under the UNFCCC. The report called on the Commission to promote further research on the soil's role in increasing water retention and combating falling groundwater levels, and to identify possible best practices on measures that increase carbon sequestration in the soil. Parliament asked for a report before the end of 2009.

Agriculture: Parliament noted that productive agricultural land was an increasingly scarce global resource. This called for sustainable agricultural practices that preserved valuable soil qualities. The Commission was asked to:

- establish priorities as to how Europe's land area was to be used so that the soil was protected in the best way possible and a basis was created for high levels of biodiversity and carbon sequestration. In addition to sequestration in the soil, it should be ensured that woods, shelter belts and, not least, agro-forestry were included;
- establish a catalogue of agricultural practices and their different effects on soil, so that best agro-technical practices could be promoted in line with the characteristics of farming and its benefits for the soil and the wider environment;
- promote show-cases of sustainable agricultural practices geared towards soil conservation.

Research: the Commission was asked to promote research on the soil's role in protecting biodiversity and soil biodiversity, in the fields of processes underlying soil functions, spatial and temporal changes in soil processes, ecological, economic and social drivers of soil threats, factors influencing soil eco-services and operational procedures and technologies for soil protection and restoration.

Desertification and steppe formation: the report stated that 14 Member States were affected by desertification, and that the remaining 13, even if they were not actually affected, were subject to regional or local environmental pressures such as erosion or salinisation. The Commission was urged to submit a communication on desertification and steppe formation containing a precise description of the regions affected or likely to be affected by the desertification process and steppe formation, together with a detailed analysis of the causes and socio-economic effects on the regions, and identifying appropriate Community actions to help limit the negative effects of these processes.

Contamination: underlining the importance of the prevention of soil contamination, Parliament called on the Commission to ensure that Community legislation adhered to this objective. MEPs believed that a systemic approach for the identification of contaminated sites, based on monitoring objective parameters and a common list of activities, was needed in order to manage the legacy of soil contamination. This would give a signal to economic operators so that they take effective preventive measures to avoid future contamination. Parliament welcomed the establishment of a Europe-wide platform for the exchange of information between Member States since it promoted the transfer of know-how

and might open the way to synergies. It urged that, for the voluntary establishment of a platform of this kind as part of an EU soil protection strategy, a pragmatic approach should be aimed for on cost grounds alone, having regard to the systems existing in Member States.

Monitoring, impacts of natural disasters, training and education: the Commission is called upon to do the following:

- ensure that soil protection and its links with climate change, biodiversity, deforestation, land drainage, desertification, steppe formation, falling groundwater levels, acidification, erosion and increased risks as a result of natural and man-made disasters would be dealt with under the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) and INSPIRE as a matter of priority;
- promote research on the increased risks of floods and landslides resulting from sealing and soil subsidence, and the increased impacts of floods, landslides and seismic activity due to higher population density in coastal areas, river basins and areas surrounding volcanoes and areas with large-scale CO₂ and SO₂ emitters, and to identify best practices to address these increased risks;
- develop schemes to encourage the transfer of know-how relating to best practice under national soil protection legislation;
- identify more structural ways to improve training and education within the EU on soil classification, sampling, monitoring and possible best practices on soil protection, exchange of information and best practice, increasing knowledge of the importance and need for soil protection and also promoting best agro-technical practices in agriculture aimed at restoring the productive function of soil.

Thematic strategy for soil protection

The Commission presents a report providing an overview of the implementation of the [Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection](#) since its adoption in September 2006. The report also presents current soil degradation trends both in Europe and globally, as well as future challenges to ensure protection.

Findings: both in the EU and worldwide, soil degradation has increased in the past decade. Between 1990 and 2000, at least 275 hectares of soil were lost per day in the EU, amounting to 1,000 km² per year. Between 2000 and 2006, the EU average loss increased by 3%, but by 14% in Ireland and Cyprus, and by 15% in Spain. In the period 1990-2006, 19 Member States lost a potential agricultural production capability equivalent to a total of 6.1 million tonnes of wheat, with large regional variations. This is a far from insignificant figure, given the levelling off of agricultural productivity increases that has already been experienced and the fact that, to compensate for the loss of one hectare of fertile land in Europe, it would be necessary to bring into use an area up to ten times larger in another part of the world.

This trend is likely to continue unless several factors are addressed:

Land use: the growth in world population, the rising consumption of meat and dairy products in the emerging economies, and the increased use of biomass for energy and other industrial purposes, will all lead to increased global land use and potential soil degradation. At the same time, weather events linked to climate change, desertification and land take for urbanisation and infrastructure will exacerbate this trend. This matters to Europe because competition for land and water resources creates serious risks of geopolitical imbalances. In addition, land degradation leads to a global decrease in the amount of multi-functional land. The EU will thus be even more dependent in future on its finite land resources which include some of the most fertile soils in the world and on their sustainable use.

Preservation of soil organic matter: EU soils contain more than 70 billion tonnes of organic carbon, which is equivalent to almost 50 times our annual greenhouse gas emissions. However, intensive and continuous arable production may lead to a decline of soil organic matter. In 2009, European cropland emitted an average of 0.45 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare (much of which resulted from land conversion). The conversion of peatlands and their use is particularly worrying. For instance, although only 8% of farmland in Germany is on peatland, it is responsible for about 30% of the total greenhouse gas emissions of its whole farming sector⁴⁰. However, with appropriate management practices, soil organic matter can be maintained and even increased. Apart from peatlands, particular attention should be paid to the preservation of permanent pastures and the management of forests soils, as carbon age in the latter can be as high as 400-1,000 years. Keeping carbon stocks is thus essential for the fulfilment of present and future emission reduction commitments of the EU.

A more efficient use of resources: agriculture is highly dependent on soil fertility and nutrients availability. For example, it used 20-30 million tonnes of phosphorus annually over the last thirty years, largely coming from outside the EU. Phosphate fertilisers used in the EU do contain cadmium impurities, which accumulate in soil. At the same time, large amounts of manure, bio-waste and sewage sludge are produced every year, and are sometimes disposed of despite the fact that they contain nutrients and organic matter. A way forward to address security of supply, improve soil conditions and limit cadmium pollution is to ensure a proper collection, treatment and use of these wastes and residues.

These challenges and the fact that soil degradation in Europe continues, make it important that the EU improves the way in which it deals with soil-related issues, particularly in the absence of Union legislation. Whilst the Soil Thematic Strategy has helped raise the profile of these issues, there is still no systematic monitoring and protection of soil quality across Europe some five years after its adoption. This means that knowledge about the status and quality of soils remains fragmented and soil protection is not undertaken in an effective and coherent way in all Member States.

Continuing activities: for its part, the Commission is continuing with the following activities in line with the Strategy:

- Awareness raising initiatives (e.g. conferences, publications, public campaigns), training for young researchers, integration of soil and soil protection aspects in EU-funded information and training events, and specific soil deliverables for the rotating Presidencies of the Council (e.g. information material on national soil types).
- Supporting research projects, particularly in the areas of landslides, soil sealing, soil functions and their link to biodiversity, the soil carbon and nitrogen cycles (with a focus on peatland restoration), soil fertility, and nutrients recycling in agriculture. Continuing to expand the activities of the European Soil Data Centre which hosts soil data and information at European level.
- To consolidate harmonised soil monitoring for a variety of purposes, including food security and safety, diffuse contamination, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, the Commission is considering repeating soil investigations at regular intervals (five-ten years), also by using new remote-sensing techniques. This harmonised monitoring will be implemented in synergy with **Decision**

No 280/2004/EC (Monitoring Mechanism Decision) currently being revised. The Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) programme (**Regulation (EU) No 911/2010**) will also be a source of information, particularly on soil sealing.

Further integration of soil protection in different policies: the Commission is developing a European Innovation Partnership on Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability with a particular focus on land management, including the efficient use of resources and sustainable use of agricultural soil. It will work in the context of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#) to 2020 to improve knowledge and raise awareness about soil biodiversity. It is actively engaged with Member States in discussing the soil-related measures in the [Resource Efficiency Roadmap](#), the CAP and Regional Policy. Lastly, it will finalise guidelines on how to limit, mitigate and compensate soil sealing, which will support the development of the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water and be used in the implementation of Cohesion Policy.

Legislation: the Commission in 2012 will review the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, which will provide an opportunity for better integrating soil concerns at an early stage of project planning. Furthermore, it will consider how to devise incentives to reduce carbon emissions and maintaining soil organic matter by accounting for the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector as part of the EU's climate change commitment for 2020.

International level: the Commission will promote the establishment of an inter-governmental panel on soils in the context of the FAO-sponsored Global Soil Partnership. Along with Germany and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Commission is actively supporting an initiative on the economics of land degradation to set out incentives for investment in sustainable land management policies. In addition, it will assess the desirability of declaring the EU an affected party under that Convention.