

Report on the Commission Green Paper on the management of bio-waste in the European Union

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report drafted by José Manuel FERNANDES (EPP, PT) on the Commission Green Paper on the management of bio-waste in the European Union.

Members believe that the Commission initiative promoted in its Green Paper provides an opportunity for Community action on the management of bio-waste.

The report focuses on the following issues:

Legislation: Members urge the Commission to review the existing legislation applicable to bio-waste with a view, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, to drawing up a proposal for a specific directive by the end of 2010, including inter alia:

- establishment of a mandatory separate collection system for the Member States, except where this is not the appropriate option from the environmental and economic point of view,
- recycling of bio-waste,
- a quality-based classification of the different types of compost from bio-waste.

The Commission is called upon to elaborate in its impact assessment an improved system for the management of bio-waste regarding the recycling of separately collected bio-waste, the use of composting for agricultural and ecological benefit, the mechanical/biological treatment options, and the use of bio-waste as a source for generating energy. Members consider that this impact assessment should be used as a basis for preparing a new European Union legal framework on biodegradable waste.

Use: the Commission is urged to lay down criteria in conjunction with Member States for the production and use of high-quality compost and to adopt minimum requirements for end products. This would permit quality-grading covering different types of use for the various types of compost obtained through the treatment of bio-waste in the framework of a strategy based on an integrated approach ensuring not only quality but also product traceability and safe use.

Energy: Members consider anaerobic digestion to be especially useful for bio-waste because it yields nutrient-rich soil improver, digestate, and also biogas, which is renewable energy that can be converted to biomethane or used to generate base-load electricity. They reiterate therefore that separate refuse collections are essential in order to comply with the Landfill Directive (Council Directive 1999/31/EC), to provide quality input to bio-waste recycling and to improve the efficiency of energy recovery.

The report stresses that diverting bio-waste from landfills needs to be increased. It notes, in this context, that bio-waste can contribute to the EU target of at least 20% renewable energy by 2020 and also that of the EU Fuel Quality Directive. Members call, therefore, on Member States to consider energy recovery from the biodegradable parts of waste in their national legislation as part of an integrated waste hierarchy policy and urge them to share best practice ideas.

In order to increase diversion, recycling and biogas generation rates, all technological tools and options that maximise resource recycling or biogas generation should be left open, according to the report. Stressing that bio-waste is a valuable renewable resource for the production of electricity and biofuel for transport and for feeding into the gas network, Members call on the Commission to analyse and promote ways of using bio-waste to produce biogas.

Research and innovation: Members urge the Commission and Member States to encourage and support scientific research and technological innovation in the field of bio-waste management.

Awareness and information: the Commission and the Member States are urged to promote environmental awareness-raising activities in the field of bio-waste, particularly in schools and higher education institutions so as to promote better waste prevention behaviour patterns. The report stresses in this context the important role of towns, municipalities and municipal undertakings in advising and informing citizens about prevention of waste.

Environmental aspects: Members consider that treated bio-waste should be used to conserve organic matter and complete nutrient cycles, especially the phosphate cycle, by recycling it into the soil and calls therefore on the Commission to recognise that policies should be tested for their contributions to mitigating the unacceptably rapid depletion of the world's phosphate resources.

Members also stress that bio-waste which is free of pollutants needs to be regarded as a valuable natural resource that can be used to produce quality compost.

The report stresses that, with a view to attaining objectives at various levels (combating climatic warming, soil degradation and soil erosion; attaining renewable energy objectives), a combination of composting and fermentation of selectively collected bio-waste, if feasible, undoubtedly possesses advantages and should be encouraged.

The Commission is called upon to propose national bio-waste recycling targets to limit the amount of bio-waste available for the least desirable waste management solutions like landfilling and incineration.

Compliance with Landfill Directive: Members reiterate that bio-waste management must be structured in line with the waste treatment hierarchy, namely: prevention, recycling, other forms of waste recovery, including energy recovery, and, as a last option, disposal in landfills. They call on the Commission to make greater efforts to enforce and secure the application of the laws on landfilling throughout the Union.

Economic aspects: Members consider that financial incentives are needed to expand this separate collection and other bio-waste management systems that maximise resource recovery. They underline the fact that in many Member States some infrastructure is already in

place but that financial incentives are required to create and establish the potential markets in compost and digestate, bioenergy and biofuel from bio-waste.

Lastly, the Commission is urged to include in all current or additional impact studies on the matter the question of what type of economic incentives, funds or aids could be mobilised or created for the development and implantation of technologies permitting the proper management of bio-waste.