General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020: 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'. 7th Environment Action Programme

2012/0337(COD) - 29/11/2012 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish the general Unions new environment action programme to 2020.

PROPOSED ACT: the context of this proposal is fourfold.

1. Despite progress in some areas, major environmental challenges remain, as well as opportunities to make the environment more resilient to systemic risks and change.

2. The EU has adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, which guides policy development for the period up to 2020.

3. While many Member States are struggling to cope with the economic crisis, the need for structural reforms offers new opportunities for the EU to move towards an inclusive green economy.

4. Rio+20 highlighted the importance of the global dimension.

Environment Action Programmes (EAP) have guided the development of EU environment policy since the early 1970s. The 6th EAP expired in July 2012.

The final assessment of 6th EAP concluded that the programme delivered benefits for the environment and provided an overarching strategic direction for environment policy. Despite those achievements, unsustainable trends still persist in all four priority areas identified in the 6th EAP: (i) climate change, (ii) biodiversity, (iii) environment and health, and (iv) sustainable use of natural resources and management of waste.

The Commission sees it as essential that Union priority objectives for 2020 are established, in light of a long-term vision for 2050. The new programme should build on policy initiatives in the Europe 2020 strategy, including the EU climate and energy package, the Roadmap for moving to a low-carbon economy in 2050, the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, the Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe and the Innovation Union Flagship Initiative.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the impact assessment found that the proposal would add value in a number of ways: (i) by providing a strategic framework for environmental policy in the EU; (ii) by ensuring complementarity and coherence; (iii) by ensuring predictability and a level playing field; and (iv) by stimulating action at all levels of governance.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 192(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

CONTENT: the new EAP aims to step up the contribution of environment policy to the transition towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy in which natural capital is protected and enhanced, and the health and well-being of citizens is safeguarded. The programme provides an overarching framework for environment policy to 2020, identifying nine priority objectives for the EU and its Member States to attain:

- to protect, conserve and enhance the Unions natural capital;
- to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy;
- to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing;
- to maximise the benefits of the Union's environment legislation;
- to improve the evidence base for environment policy;
- to secure investment for environment and climate policy and get the prices right;
- to improve environmental integration and policy coherence;
- to enhance the sustainability of the Union's cities;
- to increase the Unions effectiveness in confronting regional and global environmental challenges.

The programme shall be based on the polluter-pays principle, the precautionary principle and preventive action, and the principle of rectification of pollution at source.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: the programme in this proposal for a Decision has been developed in line with the Commission proposal for the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020.