



PRESS RELEASE

EEB, IFOAM and BirdLife dismayed by ministerial block of Soil Framework Directive

(Brussels, December 20, 2007) - Following today's vote in the Environment Council, where a blocking minority of five ministers from Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK stopped a compromise proposal for a Soil Framework Directive, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)^[1], the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and BirdLife expressed their utter dismay at the unwillingness of a select group of Environment Ministers to face a very real problem in the EU: the continuing degradation of our soils.

EEB Secretary General John Hontelez said, "This is nothing short of a scandal. Faced with a problem as serious as soil degradation, we need Environment Ministers from all Member States to throw their full weight behind a common effort to address this problem."

EEB contends that interest groups strong-armed government leaders from the five listed countries into coercing their environment ministers resist coordinating at the EU level, a move which will ultimately hamper national efforts. Concerns about competitiveness raised by special interest groups are not shared by the majority of Member States, including countries with already well-developed soil protection policies such as Denmark and the Czech Republic.

"The challenges we are facing from fertile soil loss are enormous," added Marco Schlüter, director of the IFOAM EU Group. "We should not forget that soil is the basis of our culture and civilization, and without it we will fall short of sufficient quality and quantity of food."

"Delaying legislation is a bad enough development, given the degraded state of our soils,"^[2] Schlüter continued, "without even considering future pressures that will come from greater demand for food, fuel, fibres and animal feed, alongside the continued loss of soil fertility. Blocking this Soil Directive is utterly irresponsible and a sign of poor environmental leadership."

Clairie Papazoglou, Director of Birdlife Europe, added, "If negotiations are not immediately taken forward under the next presidencies, it could mean that scaremongering about bureaucracy and red tape has won out over rational and compelling arguments for taking concerted EU action to address a massive environmental problem."

The EEB now calls on the Slovenian Presidency to give the highest priority to taking this discussion forward in the Council Working Party during its presidency.

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Notes for editors

[1] The Commission's proposal for a Soil Framework Directive would require Member States to identify areas and sites which are at risk from unsustainable use or are likely to have been contaminated. Member States would then have the liberty to decide on a plan of action, targets and deadlines to tackle the problem. On November 14th, the EP voted with a significant majority in support of the proposal.

[2] The EEB is a federation of over 145 environmental citizens' organisations based in EU Member States and most accession countries.

[3] The EEA estimates that roughly 12% of Europe's total land area is affected by water erosion and another 4% is affected by wind erosion. An article in NATURE (Vol. 437, Sept. 8, 2005) reports that over the period 1978-2003 approximately 13 million tonnes of carbon were released from British soil each year. On average, British soils have lost 15% of their carbon.

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