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How to synergise with the European Parliament Headline points

- The European Parliament has been very much involved with the EEA from the start. We have been a somewhat awkward partner for the Agency to deal with. Whereas the focus of the Agency has inevitably been on overarching assessment of the evolution of Europe's environment and trends in its likely future development, MEPs often tend to want - or say they want - something much more immediate and short-term which can help us in our discussions on whatever directive we are dealing with at any one time. We have therefore been very grateful to the work of our two representatives on the Board of the EEA, Professor Michael Scoullos and Nigel Haigh for the way in which they have kept us informed of the Agency's work in progress, and for the way they have fed in our comments and requests.
- Essentially what MEPs look for from the agency can be divided into four categories: first, when we look at the range of proposals the Commission is considering putting to us, we want to know whether these fit with actual environmental problems and threats, rather than with political posturing and rhetoric. Here the Agency can definitely help us;
- Secondly, as we consider new legislation we need to know the existing background in each Member State. Having got that we can assess how practical we believe a Commission proposal is and which Member States will have problems which they may not want to admit. Here the Agency can help us.
- Thirdly, and increasingly, we are interested in a cost impact assessment of what the Commission is proposing. This is a debateable and much contested area now; but surely the Agency should have a say in assessing and quantifying the environmental gain there may be

in a Commission proposal to offset the more loudly talked about economic cost. It is amazing to me that for the last 20 years the Commission has seen fit to publish new proposals without assessing the likely costs and benefits, except, in a very desultory fashion, via the impact on small business. The habit of ignoring textual impact is deeply engrained in MEPs too. No doubt at the root of this calculated ignorance was a feeling that those involved with environmental legislation should press ahead for the common good, but in fact this approach can be self defeating. Expensive legislation will be delayed and its implementation ignored.

- Fourthly and very importantly MEPs are much more interested nowadays in the record of implementation of EU law in the environmental field. We are at the end of a long period of creative environmental legislation in the EU. It is natural for us to want to know how things are going. It is therefore heartening for us to find that Jacqueline McGlade, in the Agency's mission statement, sets out that one of the Agency's tasks is to, monitor, evaluate and assess actual and expected progress in the implementation and results of Community measures.
- As parliamentarians we will do whatever we can to assist the Agency in this task. When the Agency was set up some of us will recall battling with Mr Delors to allow it to have a role in verifying the implementation record of the Member States. Oddly I recall Delors was against such intrusions into States' rights to mismanage the law as they saw fit. Now what we find is great nervousness among the older Member States at the possibility that new States may get a competitive advantage by implementing expensive environmental law slowly, so reluctance about verification at EU level has lessened and better implementation has rushed up the agenda.

- For our own needs therefore we want to extend the Agency's ability to provide a contemporary snapshot of what is *actually* happening in member states as well as the ability to go into greater depth about a country's real performance, to establish exactly what they are doing.
- Non-compliance remains a big problem. It is staggering that such a large proportion of new cases investigated by the Commission are the result of approaches by private citizens' or NGOs. It is equally disappointing that there are still only very few instances of member states being fined because they have infringed EU environmental laws. We hope that the new environment Commissioner will take up Mrs Wallstrom's campaign for better implementation with renewed vigour, and on the basis of information not simply supplied at random by individual citizens in their complaints but partly also on the basis of information from the Agency.
- MEPs very much welcome the work of the Agency in establishing indicators for measuring progress. Recent publications from the EEA have been of enormous value in highlighting the shortcomings of Member States in enforcing environmental legislation and meeting targets to which they have agreed. For example, I look with interest at page 17 of the EEA's *Signals 2004* which pinpoints failure in reaching Kyoto climate change targets: this is exactly the kind of information we need and what we want the EEA to be doing.
- The challenge for the EEA looks set to intensify with the continued expansion of the EU. With the accession of countries with poor environmental records together with a limited capacity and political will to implement and enforce higher standards the work of a strengthened EEA becomes even more crucial.

- The EEA plays a vital role in the European Environmental field and long may it continue to do so. However, it is a role which I am keen to see develop. To get to the bottom of exactly what is happening to and within Europe's environment we need up-to-the minute reports from the EEA. It needs to develop an enhanced dual role of verification and investigation and evolve from being a sponge for what Member states tell it to being a true, accurate and real-time mirror reflecting the exact situation across its wide geographical remit.