

# **Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee**

## **EPC(2)-06-06(p1)**

### **To consider the implications for Wales of the EU Waste Strategy.**

#### **Purpose**

1. This paper identifies for the Committee's consideration the main implications for Wales of the European Commission's recent Communication on its Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste (hereafter referred to as "Waste Thematic Strategy").

#### **Background**

2. The 6<sup>th</sup> Community Environmental Action Programme established seven Thematic Strategies that were due to report by July 2005. The European Commission officially communicated its Waste Thematic Strategy on 21 December 2005.

3. The Waste Thematic Strategy also contains the Commission's proposals for: a) a revision of the existing Waste Frame Directive (WFD); b) the repeal of the Waste Oils Directive; and c) the repeal and integration of the Hazardous Waste Directive into the revised WFD.

4. The Thematic Strategy was presented for policy debate at the March Environment Council. There is a provisional aim for Council Conclusions on the Thematic Strategy at June Council. The Communication itself sets out a further timetable for revisions to EU legislation related to waste, but these will be dealt with separately.

#### **The main implications for Wales of the Thematic Strategy in Waste**

5. The Waste Thematic Strategy does not alter the basic objectives of current EU (and Wales) waste policy, i.e., to reduce the negative environmental impact of waste through waste prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery. It maintains the waste hierarchy, which is also at the centre of Wales' waste policy. By maintaining this approach which is central to the delivery of the Wales waste strategy it supports the parallel aim of the strategy which is to ensure compliance with EU legislation on waste and in particular the requirements of the Landfill Directive.

6. The Waste Thematic Strategy seeks to address the following issues that the Commission considers

still cause difficulties in achieving the objectives of waste prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery:

- Waste volumes continue to grow;
- Legislation is in some cases poorly implemented, leading to significant differences between national approaches;
- The potential for waste prevention and recycling is not yet fully tapped; and
- The emerging knowledge about environmental impact of resource use is not yet fully reflected in waste policy.

7. The Waste Thematic Strategy sets out the following action that the Commission believes will address these issues:

- Renewed emphasis on full implementation of existing legislation;
- Simplification and modernisation of existing legislation;
- Introduction of "life-cycle thinking" into waste policy;
- Promotion of more ambitious waste prevention policies;
- Elaboration of the EU's recycling policy.

8. Specific actions at an EU level that will support the delivery of Wise About Waste, The National Waste Strategy for Wales include the following:

- Clarification on when waste ceases to be waste through the setting of criteria set on the basis of potential environmental and economic benefit (with priority given to compost, recycled aggregates and possibly tallow);
- Enhancing life cycle thinking by improving the knowledge base on the impact of resource use, waste generation and management, and on forecasting and modelling (largely provided by actions within the Thematic Strategy on resources);
- Exchange between Member States of best practice on waste minimisation;
- Revisiting the Commission of the issue of developing a framework for eco-design in the framework of the Integrated Product Policy initiative;
- The production by the Commission in 2006 of guidelines on applying life cycle thinking to the management of biowastes;
- The undertaking by the Commission of a detailed analysis of the long-term feasibility and viability of a material-specific approach for recycling.

9. There are a number of other implications for Wales within the Waste Thematic Strategy, the key ones being the following contained in the proposed revision of the Waste Framework Directive:

- The requirement for Member States (and through devolution the National Assembly for Wales) to develop publicly available waste prevention programmes. The Assembly Government has already identified with Defra that many of the most effective waste minimisation measures will need to be adopted at the UK level or may require action at the EU level;

- The setting of minimum environmental standards for recycling operations and recycled materials. The Assembly Government is already working with the Environment Agency, Defra and the other Devolved Administrations in this area to clarify the position of recycled materials e.g. compost and secondary aggregates;
- The use of energy efficiency thresholds to classify waste treatment in municipal waste incinerators as either recovery or disposal. Current energy from waste operations can utilise as little as 30% of the calorific value of the material (this is a typically common of thermal power stations as well). There are proposal to increase this value before the operation will be considered to be recovery rather that disposal of the waste. We will need to consider the practical impact of such a move on the implementation of the Wales waste strategy.

### **Actions for the Committee**

10. The Committee is invited to give its consideration on the Impact of the Waste Thematic Strategy on Wales.

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