



Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

**ADDRESS TO THE EEA MANAGEMENT BOARD  
23 JUNE 2011**

**I would like to have this opportunity to speak about:**

- How do I see EEA today?**
- What are the main challenges for European environment policy today and in the future and what could be the role of the EEA in addressing them?**
- How can we set up a process in which we can together make the EEA fit for that purpose?**
- I would be really keen to hear your opinions on this, to see how we can make this process work for the best outcome.**

**How do we see EEA today?**

**The EEA is a key player among EU environmental policy knowledge providers:**

- EEA is a unique body in EU environmental policy making. It is an essential provider of information and knowledge, and a key hub in the networks of knowledge providers for environmental policy.
- **Many people value and benefit from the EEA's wide ranging technical expertise.**
- DGs in the Commission, especially ENV and now after reorganization also DG CLIMA very much depend on the EEA to

collect the data, develop the indicators, provide the assessments on which to base its policies, throughout the policy cycle; from the first framing of the issue, through the analysis of instruments to the assessment of the impacts of policy interventions.

- It is an important source of information for Europeans as well as for member states or neighbouring countries, and an external reference point on environmental information.
- Composition of the Management Board - you - reflects the fact that EEA is a crucial forum for sharing information and knowledge about the environment.

## **2. The EEA has been a pioneer in many aspects of information provision:**

- It has been a keen promoter of the concept of a Shared Environmental Information System [SEIS] since its beginning and is actively engaged in shaping and implementing it.
- It has been an innovator in the area of spatial and geo-referenced data, helping people find out about their local environment, which can then help them to play a more active role in the decision making process.
- It has been among the first to support environmental integration through indicators (e.g. IRENA and TERM) and early assessments (e.g. of Environmentally Harmful Subsidies in the energy and transport sectors) to promote ecosystem accounting and to bring precautionary thinking into our decisions (e.g. early warnings).
- It has been flexible in the face of changing requests from the Commission, as our policy has evolved.

- Its influence derives from the relevance and quality of the information and assessments it provides. Its voice is heard by decision makers in Europe and beyond.

All this is a remarkable achievement for a body less than 20 years old. It is a key asset for EU environment policy. It testifies to the quality and dedication of its staff, the breadth of vision of its successive managers and the wisdom of its governing bodies. This is indeed a very solid basis on which to build, to meet the challenges ahead of us.

**3. Since the EEA was founded, the world has changed and so has the way environment policy is made: its knowledge providers have also to adapt to the new challenges.**

**3.1. What are these challenges** and what do they mean for the Agency?

They have been very clearly stated in the recent SOER – and drawing from the Agency's own analysis I want to highlight 4 challenges, which are at the centre of future environmental policy. These are:

⇒ **First, the sustainability challenge, more pressing than ever. One of the responses is to be found in integration:** while environmental concerns are increasingly taken into account by other policies, further, deeper integration is needed: we should not only be looking at how to minimise impacts but increasingly at how to manage systems change together.. **This is at the core** of our strategy on Resource Efficiency. Integration is a two way process:

environment policy can help to reach and to secure other policies' goals; and those other policies must become greener, to succeed.

⇒ **Second, the effectiveness challenge.** The response that there should be better and full implementation: the legal framework (apart from soil) is now firmly established but there are still some gaps. Implementation lags behind what is needed to secure a sustainable environment. We cannot accept this situation. We need to create a level playing field for all. This is the only way to meet our objectives and is the best way to persuade our external partners to adopt similar measures. Implementation should become a 'new frontier'. We need to update, modernise and simplify our legislation; streamline our instruments and innovate as situations evolve. It also means adopting a risk based, life-cycle, holistic approach. And it means that we have to be able to rely on data needed for effective enforcement.

⇒ **Third, the credibility challenge: this means improving** and continuously updating **the knowledge base** which underpins our policies: assessing the state of environmental media and ecosystems (air/atmosphere, water, soil, marine, biodiversity). But we also need a better understanding of the pressures and the drivers of environmental impacts – especially production patterns and consumption behaviour. And we need to be able to assess the effectiveness of our policy response. We also need to anticipate better, to analyse emerging risks (e.g. nanomaterials, shale gas), to identify potential future scenarios, to understand inter-linkages, trade-

offs, and tipping points where systems can be irrecoverably endangered. Commission and the EEA will need to work harder to find out what evidence is needed in advance, and how to inform and influence greener behaviour.

⇒ **Fourth** and finally, the globalisation challenge, in terms of environmental impacts on climate and biodiversity, but also in terms of the global drivers - the economic, trade and financial systems, which influence policies. This means looking beyond the EU, considering the impact of our behaviour and our policies elsewhere, and at the impact of our partners' behaviour and policies, on Europe and on the global environment.

Understanding these challenges means that new or extended data sets, better indicators, different approaches will need to be developed.

### **3.2. What response from the EEA?**

A single organisation cannot cover everything. Especially in the context of modern budgetary restraint, which we need to take very seriously. The likelihood of a further expansion of EEA staff is unlikely, except where legal obligations explicitly require it.

So we all have more to do, tasks of a more complex nature, with perhaps fewer means. How to square the circle?

I see two possible ways forward, in terms of the scope of what the agency does and in the way it works.

### 3.2.1- First, as **regards the focus of the Agency's work**:

The EEA should benefit from being one of central knowledge nodes in environmental arena, and take advantage from the fact it is not the only one. It should, in my view, focus on its primary functions and key strengths, while promoting its "smart specialisation" in data handling and elaboration of indicators, as well as in integrated assessments and scenario building. These key strengths inform the Agency's ability to monitor the state of the environment, to understand the pressures and the drivers, to decipher links between the environment and other sectors, the environment and the economy at large. Setting priorities is important and there needs to be a strong link between EEA (policy support) priorities and those of the Commission.

On substance, for instance, I would very much welcome the Agency stepping up its work on **resource efficiency** indicators, both as regards the economic productivity side of the equation and the measurement of ecological resilience.

The roadmap on Resource Efficiency which we will present in September will need clear targets to be agreed and then progress towards our common objectives to be measured objectively. EEA engagement in this work is critical to its success. But it will also allow the Member

States' to monitor their performance on environment/resource efficiency within the EU Semester.

I would also welcome the Agency helping us further, in the beyond GDP context, to put together the composite index on environmental pressure that we have started to develop.

It seems to me equally important that work on biodiversity knowledge base and ecosystems accounting should be further developed. We will only be able to meet our commitments from Nagoya if we have a sound monitoring and measurement system in the EU and at international level: we need to be able to map and value the ecosystem services that we depend on.

There is now renewed urgency to resume work on sustainability thresholds and on tipping points. Resilience is a key objective, difficult to quantify, but we must indicate how we intend to measure progress towards it – on marine, seas and oceans; health and the environment; land use.

The Agency should help us – both Commission and Member States – to **better implement** our policies. To implement adequately, we need a rigorous system of monitoring: this is principally done at Member State level but we increasingly need also to check whether this is done properly, accurately, and in a way that allows comparability, to ensure fair application and a level playing field across the EU: e.g. on air quality, how many sensors are used and where they are located.

This requires a major effort and the EEA has an important part to play. On several occasions, the idea of giving the Agency a role in inspections has been mooted. I know that you have discussed this among yourselves and with other agencies, and understand that you are reluctant to take it on. I do not think it would be a good idea either. I am more in favour of strengthening inspections. This is indispensable as shown by the latest analysis of waste shipment.

However, while I don't think the EEA is equipped for such a role, we do need to strengthen our knowledge base on implementation. We cannot continue to have a situation on implementation where the Commission and Member States are looking at different data. We both need a body we trust to provide us with accurate data and state of the art, science-based assessments. We need an independent assessor if needed. This neutral and common information base for compliance monitoring should in my view be provided by the Agency. I suggest we develop a joint analysis of what such a reinforced role would imply, on the basis of one or two pilot cases e.g. on waste and on air. We need to start this process as soon as possible and I will be looking forward to develop it together with you.

3.2.2 Now as regards the **working methods**: the EEA could go one of two ways:

**i) as regards existing customers and partners:**

- I said before that we think the EEA should benefit from not being alone - **working with others** and smart specialization should be the

name of the game. JRC, ESTAT but also research institutes, as well as other networks such as the Network of Environmental Protection Agencies, IMPEL and others.

How can this be done best and what can the EEA's role be?

The first rule should be to recognise the other organisations' competence, so as to avoid duplication, notably with Group of 4.

This may mean however that a 'minimum' internal core capability needs to be established in the Agency, in order for the best cooperation with other knowledge-providing entities (e.g. with ECHA on chemicals, with research centres, and with the JRC) to take place.

The EEA role in networks such as in NEPA is fine, as EEA ideally placed to do it. EEA could help further by ensuring these networks are representative and that they include all the players in the Agency.

**Internationally**, the EEA fulfils a useful role as a contact with other international organisations (OECD, UNEP, and other UN bodies) so as to harmonise and compare data, information on the environment, assessments. But this interplay should be seen as a means to use the other organisations expertise, rather than as a call to mimic or replicate their activities at EU level.

**Working for others**, can help with environmental integration, and conversely can usefully inform environment policy so that it takes

account of other policies' specific constraints. It undoubtedly depends on the way these other policy areas recognise the unique competence of the EEA in gathering information on the state of the environment, as well as on environmental policies and measures, on its expertise in designing indicators, processing information and assessing data. This should be borne in mind. It is only by constantly strengthening its core business competence that the agency will attract other 'customers' and exert a wider influence.

Working for others – even if this is fully funded by them – should be taken on carefully, so as not to lead to any significant shift in the balance between the traditional partners (like ENV/CLIMA) and the new ones. It should not lead to a shift in priorities.

## **ii) new partners?**

I sense that more can be done in structuring the environmental science landscape, which would help bridging the gap between science and EU environmental policy-making. I would like to see if the EEA could play a key role in this. I come back to my idea of a process – how can we set it out in order to get the answer to my question? EEA is uniquely placed to bring definitive solutions where the science for EU environment policy is concerned.

## **iii) As regards tools and instruments:**

**Information, Participation and Innovation.** There is also an increasing need, in an open and well-connected society, to improve

citizen participation (even as information providers) and to support the smarter use of ICT tools.

I understand from Jacquie that the EEA has heralded the use of unconventional sources of information (citizen science, utilities, practitioners...), testing possible new, cheaper, more inclusive solutions to data gathering.

This is welcome and can certainly play a demonstration role for member states that do not have the resources to experiment by themselves. It also can help bring about a common EU approach among those members states, which are developing their own approaches. However, in this context I really need to emphasize my frustration with the uneven level of implementation record in the EU. Key in addressing this will be that the data on which we base our policies should be validated, robust and undisputable. I would therefore advocate rather further testing in one or two promising areas.

With the upcoming SEIS Implementation Plan, we have an important new opportunity to hasten the evolution of the way we gather and use environmental information. As SEIS comes to full implementation over the coming years, building on the advances brought about by INSPIRE, and increasingly taking advantage of data gathered from earth observation, we can see a community better informed about the environment at all levels, better equipped to help generate sustainability, better motivated to implement policy.

Informing citizens of their local state of the environment through smart internet tools is essential. This raises awareness and improves transparency. It may induce exposed business or local authorities to act. This is therefore another useful tool in support of implementation. (E.g. EPRTR - EU Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, safe bathing water areas, air quality and noise maps, CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, Natura sites and protected species). Such provision of information could be extended to cover landfills, incinerators, recycling facilities, waste water treatment plants, contaminated soils; and more.

Standard setting in eco-informatics (e.g. eco-informatics; cloud computing; GEO standards; but also 'now-casting', data-mining etc. Similar line on this: it is a legitimate and welcome EEA activity, in as much as it is a natural development or a key condition for the further deployment and use of tools that enhance the EEA's efficiency.

To conclude – EEA remains one of the most important partners in the European ecosystem of environmental information, policy design and its implementation. With new challenges in a resource constrained world – in all senses of the word - it is key that we work together in refining its role and setting the priorities for successful new generation of European environmental policy. This will be an interesting process and I am looking forward to be part of it together with you. For my part I will ask Karl to work with Jacquie on some concrete ideas I raised today, especially to advance to advance pilot actions in the area of implementation. But I am of course also very much looking forward to hear your views and ideas.

Thank you.