

Why do we need an environmental policy?

urgently bold

By ~~its~~ nature, the environment transcends political, legal and man-made boundaries.

— bold

As a result, ~~cross-border~~ cooperation within the European Union and between the ~~EU~~ and the rest of the world is essential if we are to tackle challenges which impact on us all. These range from droughts and floods to pollution and threats to Europe's ~~rich~~ biodiversity.

political

European Union

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The underlying aim is to improve the quality of the environment, protect human health, achieve prudent and rational use of ~~natural~~ resources, and promote international measures to address global or regional environmental problems. A coordinated environmental strategy ~~across~~ the Union ensures synergies and coherence between ~~EU~~ policies and, given the relevance of environmental legislation for ~~many~~ business sectors, will ensure a level playing field for their activities and prevent obstacles undermining the single market.

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for

European Union |

several

Many take the environment for granted, but pressure on the Earth's finite resources is growing at an unprecedented rate. Efforts must be made to raise general awareness, use resources more efficiently and eradicate damaging and wasteful behaviour. Otherwise, ~~future~~ generations will be deprived of their

people

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younger

legitimate inheritance. This requires collective action involving the EU, national, ³ local ² and regional ¹ governments, businesses, NGOs and ordinary individuals.

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Pressure of rising demand

constantly bold

Our behaviour makes huge demands on the planet. During the 20th century, the world increased its use of fossil fuels by a factor of 12 and extracted 34 times more material resources. Demand for food, animal feed and fibre may increase by 70% by 2050. If we carry on using resources at the current rate, we will need more than two planets to sustain us.

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Evolving strategy

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The ~~major~~ environmental challenges facing Europe have evolved since the early days of European environmental policymaking.

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In 1970s and 1980s the ~~focus~~ was on traditional environmental themes such as protecting species and improving the quality of the air we breathe or the water we drink reducing emissions of pollutants.

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the emphasis

Now, emphasis is on a more systematic approach that takes account of links between themes and their global dimension. This means moving from

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remediation to prevention of environmental degradation. It ~~includes~~ ensuring that other areas such as agriculture, energy, transport, fisheries, regional development, research, innovation and external aid take fully into account the environmental consequences of their policy and funding decisions. This mainstreaming will ~~ensure~~ a more coherent approach towards environmental ~~challenges~~ and maximise synergies.

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| | lead to

| | problems

After more than ~~four decades~~ of policymaking at EU level, ~~much~~ of our environment is protected by a body of European legislation. But the implementation of these policies remains problematic. This is a ~~major~~ challenge that needs to be tackled for the full benefits of these laws to be enjoyed by all. The new EU environment action programme will address this.

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Environment and economy in harmony

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In ~~short~~, environmental and economic considerations are complementary, like two sides of the same coin. Greening the economy reduces environmental costs through ~~more efficient~~ use of resources, while new environmentally friendly technologies and techniques create employment, give a boost to the economy

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and strengthen the competitiveness of European industry.

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The European Commission is showing the way with its Europe 2020 strategy, the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade. This firmly embeds efficient use of ~~four~~ finite natural resources as one of seven flagship initiatives. Environmental policy can help meet the strategy's ~~overall~~ objectives of moving to smart, ³ sustainable and ² inclusive growth that ¹ will transform Europe into a knowledge-based, resource-efficient economy.

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For instance, strengthening the resilience of ~~the~~ ecosystems, which provide food, fresh water, raw materials and ~~many~~ other benefits, contributes to productivity and quality of life, while reducing public health bills.

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Working across borders

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The environment does not stop at the ~~Union's~~ borders. Air, water, seas and wildlife know no boundaries. The ~~much~~ the ~~EU~~ can encourage neighbouring countries – and ideally the ~~whole~~ world – to adopt its high standards, the better the quality of our own environment will be. It closely works with its neighbours to ~~encourage~~ them to do the same and plays an active role in international

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negotiations on sustainable development, biodiversity and climate change. The EU's longer-term objective of environmental sustainability is ~~one~~ of the United Nations' millennium development goals.

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Public support

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There is ~~strong~~ public support for EU measures to improve the environment. A pan-European opinion survey in ~~mid~~ 2014 revealed that 95 % of respondents consider that protecting the environment is important to them personally. Almost three quarters agree that protecting the environment can boost economic growth, and over three quarters ~~agree~~ that legislation is necessary to protect the environment in their country.

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The most widely voiced environmental ~~concerns~~ were pollution of air and water, waste generation and the depletion of natural resources.

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How the EU develops environmental policy

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Since the 1970s, the ~~EU~~ has agreed over 200 pieces of legislation to protect the environment. But legislation alone counts for little if it is not properly applied and enforced. So, the challenge now is to implement effectively what has been agreed. This is complex since ~~several~~ different tasks are done by diverse

— European Union

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— many

~~people~~ ranging from national inspectors and courts to ~~NGOs~~ and citizens exercising their participatory rights.

Failure to implement legislation has many ~~severe~~ consequences. It can undermine fundamental environmental objectives, harm health and present industry with regulatory uncertainty as agreed standards are applied unevenly across the Union. Meanwhile, ~~correct~~ implementation can bring financial benefits. If EU waste legislation is fully applied it would generate 400 000 jobs and reduce annual net costs by EUR 72 million.

The European ~~Union~~ can, through the European Court of Justice, take legal action against a Member State ~~that~~ fails to implement legislation correctly. ~~Such~~ infringement cases ~~more of them concern the environment than any other area~~ are not only embarrassing for governments, but can ~~ultimately~~ lead to fines for repeated failure to implement EU rules.

But legal action is a last resort. The European Commission attaches greater importance to helping Member States with effective implementation. Capacity-building and financial support are available, alongside better knowledge of the state of the environment ~~also~~ as information on the way Member States deliver on their ~~EU~~ commitments in

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~~Non-governmental organizations~~

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practice. It has ~~suggested~~ that each Member State should establish an independent national review body, such as an ombudsman, to handle ~~environment-related~~ complaints from the public.

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Using the market

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The market is one cost-effective way to protect and improve the environment ~~and~~ ease pressure on scarce resources. Taxes and subsidies can be used to act as incentives or deterrents to persuade companies³ and consumers² to opt for greener manufacturing methods and products. Many already exist, s¹ as fees for cutting trees or disposing of waste.

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The European Commission would like to see the gradual removal of subsidies for industry, transport, farming and energy that encourage use of polluting or energy-intensive products and ~~processes~~.

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┌─┐ technologies

Policies must be based on sound evidence that provides an understanding of the causes and ~~impact~~ of environmental change so that appropriate responses and strategies can be devised. ┌─┐ Much of this data comes from national sources complemented by Pan-European datasets and is analysed by the European Environment Agency, which provides input into the ~~EU's~~ environmental policy.

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┌─┐ consequences

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