



PRESS RELEASE

European Environmental Bureau (aisbl)

Big picture politics: Adapting to climate change means holistic thinking

(Brussels, 29 June, 2007) - Reacting to the Commission's Green Paper on Adaptation to Climate Change, the European Environmental Bureau, Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations, welcomed the paper as a good starting point for discussion but stressed the need to have a clear strategic focus in this new policy area.

"The worst impacts of climate change on our society will be indirect, and they'll hit us through the degradation of ecosystems and the quality of our environment," said John Hontelez, EEB's Secretary General. "We need urgently to take the necessary steps to adapt. But adaptation policy will only be successful if it's geared to meeting our environmental objectives, and most importantly on soil, water and biodiversity. Protecting ecosystems should be the ultimate objective of all adaptation activities."

One example experts recommend is that the devastating effects of floods can be curbed if we can maintain high-quality soils, natural vegetation and wetlands, which act like a sponge and hold onto excess rainwater for longer, controlling how much water flows into our rivers and lakes. This practice is in turn held to reduce the risk of drought at a later stage.

But EEB warned of the risk that instead of the EU taking this holistic approach to protecting our ecosystem's natural support mechanisms, 'quick-fix' technical solutions which may in the short term help solve problems in one sector, can actually increase damage in other areas. For example, the impact of climate change has meant that rain-fed rivers are increasingly becoming unfit for navigation for longer periods each year. One reaction has been to carry out heavy modifications to river beds to ensure sufficient water levels. The likely side effect is that the river's ecological functions are destroyed and when there is excess water the threat posed by floods would be much more severe.

Pieter de Pous added: "If the EU is serious about adaptation, it should be prepared to take tough political choices, looking critically at our agriculture, transport and energy policy. Most importantly and immediately it will have to become far more ambitious in carrying out its policies on water, nature and soil."

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