

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Adapting to climate change in Europe — Options for EU actions'**

(2008/C 53/04)

THE THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- urges the Commission to recognise the importance of local and regional authorities in developing and delivering climate change adaptation measures, and to recognise the need to provide them with the powers and support to enable them to develop adaptation strategies;
- agrees with the assessment of the impact of climate change on physical geography and ecosystems worldwide; however it believes that equal consideration needs to be applied to the economic and social aspects of climate change adaptation as has been applied to the environmental aspects within the Green Paper;
- acknowledges the threat which climate change poses to our citizens and environment, but believes that tackling adaptation early presents an opportunity to create sustainable communities as well as competitive local and regional economies through the creation of new areas of expertise and employment opportunities, and making the most efficient use of our resources by ensuring their sustainable use;
- supports the Commission in its call for early action, particularly in areas where the known impact has greater certainty or where failure to act or adopt a precautionary principle would pose a significant risk to society, the economy and the environment of Member States. Adaptation to climate change will be costly but the Stern Review shows that to do nothing is the most expensive option. The Committee of the Regions feels that it is incumbent on local, regional and national politicians to take responsibility for taking the lead in making climate change adaptation a priority;
- considers that one of the key challenges is likely to be large scale population migration, both from external countries into the EU, between Member States and also between and within regions. Management of the housing, infrastructure, health and public service needs which will arise from this migration will have to be planned for and managed by local and regional authorities;
- calls for EU budget, programmes, policies and especially key legislation to be revised in the light of the changing parameters that climate change will bring; in particular, the Committee calls for adaptation to climate change to be considered as part of the 2008 Budget Review.

**Rapporteur:** Kay TWITCHEN, Member of Essex County Council (UK/EPP)

**Reference document**

Green Paper from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Adapting to climate change in Europe — Options for EU action

COM(2007) 354 final — {SEC(2007) 849}

**Policy recommendations**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes this paper, and the acceptance that the European Union has to take on the challenge of adaptation, working with all partners involved, in particular Member States and partners at the sub-national level, and globally with partner countries. It also welcomes the recognition that a European approach is necessary and that adaptation actions must be consistent with mitigation actions and vice versa;

2. agrees with the assessment of the impact of climate change on physical geography and ecosystems worldwide; however it believes that equal consideration needs to be applied to the economic and social aspects as has been applied to the environmental aspects;

3. acknowledges the threat which climate change poses to our citizens and environment, but believes that tackling adaptation early presents an opportunity to create sustainable communities as well as competitive local and regional economies through the creation of new areas of expertise and employment opportunities, and making the most efficient use of our resources by ensuring their sustainable use.

*Regarding the adverse effects of climate change*

4. considers that one of the key challenges is likely to be large scale population migration, both from external countries into the EU, between Member States and also between and within regions. Management of the housing, infrastructure, health and public service needs which will arise from this migration will have to be planned for and managed by local and regional authorities;

5. reinforces the message that climate change will place significant burdens on healthcare and local social services as the lessons of recent heat waves in Europe have taught. With ageing populations in most EU Member States, the social effects of climate change need to be seriously considered;

6. considers that the item of shade in the public space is missing (see question 3). Providing shade by means of trees, parks, green roofs, a different way of building etc is an important factor in reducing heat deaths and demand for air conditioning and increasing quality of living in an urban area;

7. in addition, believes that the adaptation of the world's population to a reduction of the use of limited natural resources will prove to be a great challenge requiring a significant change

in mindsets. Therefore believes that education, communication programmes as well as market-based instruments (such as the European Emissions Trading scheme) will be necessary to encourage the change of individuals' behaviour in relation to such issues as water use, energy use, recycling and resource conservation.

*Regarding the case for early action*

8. supports the Commission in its call for early action, particularly in areas where the known impact has greater certainty or where failure to act or adopt a precautionary principle would pose a significant risk to society, the economy and the environment of Member States. Adaptation to climate change will be costly but the Stern Review shows that to do nothing is the most expensive option. We have enough information to start acting now. The Committee of the Regions feels that it is incumbent on local, regional and national politicians to take responsibility for taking the lead in making climate change adaptation a priority.

*Regarding the role of Regional and Local Authorities*

9. believes that their participation is fundamental to developing and delivering adaptation measures. Local and regional authorities are key delivery agents in managing the effects of climate change and its impact on citizens' lives. The social and economic costs of dealing with extreme weather conditions are often picked up by local and regional authorities. Therefore they must be supported to develop and deliver adaptation strategies which will need to be integrated into everything they do. The Committee of the Regions considers that there should be greater universal recognition of the vital role local and regional authorities play in safeguarding the future of our communities and protecting vulnerable citizens such as the young, poor and elderly;

10. acknowledges furthermore that local and regional authorities are at the forefront when dealing with the consequences of climate change, and in particular when the actions to mitigate in one area have a negative effect elsewhere, for example where coastal defences and flood barriers result in moving the problem to neighbouring or cross border areas. Therefore there is a need for co-ordination of strategies and policies between local and regional authorities to adapt to the consequences of climate change. This could take a multitude of forms such as river basin groupings etc.

*Regarding the development of adaptation strategies*

11. believes that local and regional authorities are in a unique position to help mainstream adaptation strategies through their responsibilities for areas such as spatial planning, land use planning, building and development regulation, public transport, agriculture, forestry, energy use and production, water and waste management and procurement. The challenge is to ensure that current and future service delivery, infrastructure and buildings are sustainable. Local and regional authorities will need to work in co-operation with others to develop robust strategic and local disaster management plans and to develop and expand existing capacity to respond to extreme weather events as they occur more frequently and on an increasing scale.

*Regarding the role of the EU*

12. believes that an integrated approach between EU Member States is essential. This will reduce costs through the sharing of experience and expertise to enable best practice to be developed and adopted across Member States. The Committee of the Regions could be instrumental in helping local and regional authorities to organise the exchange of experiences having in mind the importance of developing an integrated approach.

*Regarding the integration of action into existing policy and legislation*

13. considers that adaptation must be mainstreamed into all existing EU policy frameworks as an explicit objective, such as EU agricultural and rural development policies, and funding programmes such as Cohesion policy, so that they are able to change to be more in line with the adaptation needs that fall under the responsibility of local and regional authorities. Their continuing flexibility is important because adaptation will be an ongoing process and local and regional needs will continue to change as time goes by;

14. considers that some existing legislation is in conflict with the need to adapt to climate change. The Habitats Directive for example will need to be modified in the light of the likely changes to existing designated habitats modified as a consequence of climate change and the Water Framework Directive will need to be adapted as water quality will be adversely affected in certain areas due to a decline in rainfall. A broad range of existing legislation will need to be revised to ensure appropriate and successful adaptation to climate change.

*Regarding the expansion of integrated climate research*

15. supports the need for further research to establish what will be the impacts on one region of measures taken in another region, or possibly in another Member State. Such research is essential to make sure that planning decisions by one local authority will not impact negatively on neighbouring or cross

border authorities. This particularly applies to such issues as efficient use of water and other natural resources;

16. calls for research and front-line monitoring which will help anticipate extreme meteorological phenomena to assist developing countries, in particular those at risk from desertification;

17. would also encourage further support for research and development with a view to its role in stimulating innovation and the development of innovative adaptation technologies and products. In this way businesses dealing with the effects of climate change have an immense opportunity to develop innovative products and services.

*Regarding the inclusion of European Society, business and public sector*

18. believes that through private and public sector partnerships and inter-Member State networks such as INTERREG (RFEC), local and regional authorities will play a vital role in the facilitation of access to and the dissemination of information, expertise, and best practice. These partnerships and networks will become increasingly important to enable co-operation between sectors, regions and member states and external partner countries;

19. supports co-operation with developing countries to assist them with adaptation strategies and suggests that EU external actions support this, and believes that local and regional authorities can play a key role in sharing good practice and knowledge with developing countries using existing links and networks. The amount that the EU will reserve for that aim should be in proportion with the need of developing countries and with the responsibility of the EU.

*Regarding the next steps*

20. believes that these issues must be tackled urgently, and that the need for local and regional authorities, in co-operation with the wide group of social and economic partners with whom they already work to manage adaptation to climate change, must be integrated into all future EU communications and directives;

21. appreciates that work on these issues has already begun, and urges the Commission to continue to regard it as a priority;

22. urges the Commission to recognise the importance of local and regional authorities in developing and delivering climate change adaptation measures, and to recognise the need to provide them with the powers and financial support to enable them to develop and implement adaptation strategies;

23. urges the Commission to address not only environmental considerations in the follow-up work to this Green Paper but the social and economic impacts of climate change;

24. believes that the sharing of best practice between local and regional authorities and Member States is absolutely crucial to successful adaptation measures being developed, and considers that the EU has a role to play in ensuring that this exchange of information and sharing of best practice takes place, both within the EU and externally;

25. considers that the EU has a strategic role to play in planning for and managing migration of population;

26. calls for EU budget, programmes, policies and especially key legislation to be revised in the light of the changing parameters that climate change will bring; in particular, the Committee calls for adaptation to climate change to be considered as a specific ringfenced budget line within all key budget items (CAP, Cohesion, Research etc) as part of the 2008 Budget Review;

27. considers that it is important that the EU focuses more of its existing support for research into finding solutions to the problems caused by climate change as well as innovative adaptation measures. Such research can provide innovative solutions to maintain European competitiveness. Research activity must be better coordinated. It is crucial to bridge the biggest information gaps and also to prevent duplication of research activity;

28. is concerned at the potential impact on one region or Member State of adaptation measures taken in another region or Member State, and considers that the EU is the appropriate body for establishing strategic frameworks for dealing with these potential problems;

29. calls for education and communication programmes to encourage the change of individuals' behaviour in relation to such issues as water use, energy use, recycling and resource conservation.

Brussels, 28 November 2007

The President  
of the Committee of the Regions  
Michel DELEBARRE

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