



PRESS RELEASE

Is soil the first failure of the French Presidency?

[Brussels, July 23, 2008] – Today the European Environmental Bureau, Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations, challenged the French Presidency to start delivering on their promise to move forward on the Soil Framework Directive and to improve upon the last compromise reached during the Portuguese presidency in December[1].

John Hontelez, EEB Secretary General, explained: *We welcome the decision of the French Presidency to re-open the debate about a European soil protection directive, but we are seriously concerned about their intention to water the directive down to a useless minimum. We organised a seminar this week to give the French Ministry an opportunity to discuss its plans with environmentalists, farmers, other governments and the Commission, but the Presidency did not even show up as they had promised. This is not a good sign at all. We insist that the Presidency listens to the other 22 Member States that want a strong soil directive.*

A leaked document dated May 19th shows that France wants to give Member States complete freedom on how and when they will identify and remediate contaminated soils [2]. More recent information from sources close to the negotiations reveals that Member States may also be free from obligation to designate areas at risk of soil degradation or any requirement to address problems of soil sealing [3].

Pieter de Pous, EEB Soil Policy Officer, continued: *These proposals would be a major concession, giving in to certain demands, especially from the UK and German governments, and ignoring the position of not only the vast majority of Member States but also the Parliament and Commission. Most troubling, though, is the fact that they would essentially dismantle the Directive and leave this crucial resource without effective protection [4].*

EEB has called on the French Presidency to not only put the Soil Directive back on the agenda but also to start formal negotiations to ensure the final outcome will deliver significant improvements to soil protection.

For more information contact:

Pieter de Pous, EEB Soil Policy Officer, pieter.depous@eeb.org, +32 2-289 1306

Vanessa Bulkacz, EEB Press and Publications Officer, press@eeb.org, +32 2-289 1309

Editors notes:

1. EEB's expectations for the French Presidency are attached. These have also been sent to the French Presidency.
2. Document available from EEB on request.
3. Soil sealing is the process by which a soil is covered with an impermeable surface (e.g., roads and buildings.)
4. Given the slow rate at which soils are formed, soils are effectively a non-renewable resource. Evidence from the European Environment Agency's State of the Environment assessments show that soil degradation is a widespread problem in the EU with unsustainable land use practices being one of the main drivers.

European Environmental Bureau (aisbl)

Blvd de Waterloo 34, 1000 Brussels, Belgium – Tel: +32 2 289 1090 – Fax: +32 2 289 1099 – Email: eeb@eeb.org Websites:

www.eeb.org www.participate.org www.chemicalreaction.org www.zeromercury.org