

STRUCTURAL FUNDS 2007-13
ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP

Terms of Reference

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Working Group was envisaged by the Northern Ireland Competitiveness and Employment Programmes for 2007-13 as a method for taking forward the cross-cutting theme of sustainability (ERDF Programme paras 2.51 to 2.70 and 4.16, ESF Programme paras 4.57 to 4.60). The membership of the Working Group is drawn from the membership of the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee.

The Sustainable Development Strategy adopted by the European Council on 15-16 June 2006 urges Member States and the European Commission to work together to promote synergies between the EU Structural Funds Programmes and other sources of EU financing mechanisms such as LIFE and the 7th Framework Research and Development Programme and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

Sustainability is a cross-cutting theme for all four Northern Ireland Structural Funds Programmes for 2007-13. To avoid duplication and ensure a consistent approach across the programmes, the Peace III and INTERREG IV Monitoring Committees have also nominated members to this Working Group.

The Working Group will make recommendations to and give technical advice on environmental and sustainability issues to the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committees. For synergy, the Peace III and INTERREG IV members of the Working Group may also take the recommendations and technical advice from the group to their Monitoring Committees for consideration as appropriate.

BACKGROUND

Respecting the environment is one of the key principles of the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland. In seeking to create a strong and stable economy, we must, above all, make sure it is a sustainable economy by becoming more resource-efficient and reduce the amount we waste. In this way, we will improve business competitiveness, stimulate innovation, create new markets and encourage sustainable product design and processes.

The Competitiveness and Employment Programmes will observe the six guiding priorities of the NI Sustainable Development Strategy:

(i) *Living within environment limits*

Respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity – to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.

(ii) *Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society*

Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.

(iii) *Achieving a sustainable economy*

Building a strong, stable and sustainable economy that provides prosperity and opportunities for all, in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays) and efficient resource use is incentivised.

(iv) *Promoting good governance*

Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people's creativity, energy and diversity.

(v) *Using sound science responsibly*

Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty as well as public attitudes and values.

(vi) *Promoting opportunity and innovation*

Innovation is the successful exploitation of new ideas; incorporating new technologies, design and best practice. Opportunities lie in the development of new markets in environmental technologies and other sustainable development related areas/fields.

As a cross cutting theme, sustainable development will be integrated at all levels of implementation of the programmes.

Funding will be conditional on projects complying with the requirements of both EU directives and national legislation, so as to safeguard or enhance sustainable development.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of the Working Group is to support the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee and to contribute to the overall monitoring and co-ordination of its Operational Programmes and the planning of the actions arising from the review of those Programmes.

The Working group will:-

- report to the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee on and give technical advice about environmental issues taking cognisance of relevant environmental and sustainable development. It will also make recommendations with regard to environmental performance and impacts of the Programmes;
- assess the environmental and environmentally related policies underpinning investment under the Programmes, and the

environmental impact of that investment, within the overall perspective of Sustainable Development;

- assess and report on the degree of environmental integration achieved in the implementation of the Programmes;
- act as a forum for the promotion of environmentally sustainable policies and practices among Departments, implementing agencies, social partners and others involved in the Programmes, with particular emphasis on the development of monitoring methodologies and mechanisms to facilitate the achievement of environmental objectives;
- consider utilising publicity to raise awareness, to project promoters and project applicants, of the environment and of highlighting the work and role of the Programmes;
- encourage the utilisation of innovative environmental considerations into the Programmes;
- ensure the Programme SEA reports are complied with and carry out analyses on Environmental Reports;
- encourage and facilitate networking arrangements both on a North/South and East/West basis involving the management and use of Structural Funds; and
- liaise and share good practice through the offices of the EC.

Where the issues and policies being considered by the Working Group also impact on the areas covered by the other Structural Funds Programmes for Northern Ireland or where a joint approach would provide significant benefit, it may also provide advice and recommendations for consideration by the Peace III and INTERREG IV Monitoring Committees.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the group will be drawn from the three main Monitoring Committees i.e. Competitiveness and Employment, Peace III and INTERREG IV and the community representing urban, rural and the private sector. The final make-up of the Working Group should recognise a gender balance taking cognisance of Human Rights and Equality Commission aims.

There may be occasions when the subject matter under discussion could benefit from input from other specialist representatives. When such occasions arise the Working Group may agree additional representation.

The Working Group will meet as often as necessary and not less than twice each calendar year, provided a quorum is present. A quorum is defined as 9 members of the Working Group, of whom 3 are also members of a Monitoring Committee. In the absence of the appointed chairperson or vice-chair, those present shall elect a temporary chairperson.

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The working arrangements for the Working Group are:-

- Secretariat duties will be performed by the Department of Finance & Personnel, European Division;
- Informed by the wishes of the Working Group the Secretariat will draw up agendas for meetings and the Chairperson will authorise them. The agenda and supporting documentation will normally be issued 15 days in advance of the meeting. Members can request the inclusion of agenda items by writing to the Secretariat for onward transmission to the Chairperson. This should normally be done at least 10 working days ahead of the scheduled meeting;
- AOB can be tabled at the discretion of the Chair;
- Draft minutes and summary action points of each meeting will be produced and sent to members and relevant advisors within 10 working days of each meeting;
- The Working Group will meet at least twice per calendar year and as often as necessary. It will also conduct its business in a transparent manner. Minutes will be placed on the Managing Authorities' websites;
- The Working Group can form sub-committees to take forward particular issues;

- The Working Group will report formally to the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee at least once per calendar year, and shall provide ongoing reports as required. It may also report to the Peace III and INTERREG IV Monitoring Committees as appropriate and with the agreement with the members of the Working Group nominated by those Committees.
- The Working Group will agree a work programme, including a budget and submit it to the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee for approval. Work to be undertaken specific to the Peace III and INTERREG IV Programmes and associated costs will also require the agreement of their respective Monitoring Committees; and
- The Terms of Reference for the Working Group, and any subsequent amendments, will be approved by the Programme Monitoring Committees.