

Intervention at Aarhus WGP-24 by Jeremy Wates on behalf of the European ECO Forum

Agenda Item 3(b) Access to Information

We welcome the report of the Task Force on Access to Information and the note from the TF Chair, including the suggested list of priority topics for consideration in the next intersessional period. Among these, we believe there is particular scope for making progress in relation to **environment-related product information** in order to deliver on the promise of AC Art. 5(8) (“Each Party shall develop mechanisms with a view to ensuring that sufficient product information is made available to the public in a manner which enables consumers to make informed environmental choices”) and we are happy that the Bureau at its last meeting saw merit in exploring this idea. Digital advances have made it possible to e.g. give products a ‘**product passport**’ whereby their environment-relevant properties can be read through a QR code. There is an opportunity to bring together the environmental, digital and consumer agendas to enable consumers to make ‘informed environmental choices’. Incidentally, the first two of these, environmental and digital, are key priorities for the EU and we are aware of the EU’s work on circular economy and product environmental footprint but by addressing it at the level of the Aarhus Convention it would broaden the impact and facilitate trade in products between a broader range of countries than if it were to be only done by the EU. So we would like to see an instrument developed under AC 5(8) – from our side we would prefer to see something legally binding like a Protocol, some Parties might prefer recommendations, the form of it could be discussed alongside the content, but we hope that all Parties would see this as an opportunity to be seized, where the Convention can bring real added value.

Second, we welcome the fact that the **recommendations on electronic information tools** are to be updated. These recommendations were drafted in the run-up to MoP-2 in 2005, which in IT terms is an eternity ago. You have received various submissions from NGOs on this and we note that some of our proposals have been taken into account, but regret that in the latest proposal some key proposals have not been incorporated. For example, an important part of the original 2005 recommendations was the identification of types of environmental information which should be accessible in electronic form through the internet (para. 20 (d) and (e)), but reflecting the situation at the time, the language was very soft, allowing that those types of information only be ‘*progressively made available*’, and for some types of information only ‘to the extent *feasible and appropriate*’. This was in order to give Parties time to put the mechanisms in place for that to happen. More than 15 years later, we find it really unacceptable that this qualifying language still remains and in fact there is no longer a need for

European Environmental Bureau

Europe's largest network of

environmental citizens' organisations

www.eeb.org

International non-profit association –

Association internationale sans but lucratif

Rue des Deux Eglises, 14-16 - B-1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 2 289 10 90

Email: eeb@eeb.org

EC register for interest representatives:

Identification number: 06798511314-27

two lists. They should be merged, and it should be a clear and unequivocal recommendation that all of the items listed are **legally required** to be available in electronic form through the internet. While the recommendations are themselves not legally binding, they can and should recommend that Parties introduce legally binding requirements within their own jurisdictions that give rights to the public with respect to this matter. Aarhus is about guaranteeing rights, not just promoting technology.

European Environmental Bureau

Europe's largest network of
environmental citizens' organisations

www.eeb.org

International non-profit association –

Association internationale sans but lucratif

Rue des Deux Eglises, 14-16 - B-1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 2 289 10 90
Email: eeb@eeb.org

EC register for interest representatives:

Identification number: 06798511314-27