

Report of the Meeting of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation

Guadalajara, Mexico, 28 June 2001

1. New Vision

The Council members of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) held a meeting where they set out a new long-term vision for the activities to be carried out by the Commission.

Based on the wealth of experience acquired to the present, they indicated the policy guidelines to be followed, the priority areas to be pursued and expanded, and certain emerging matters which, in preparation for the future, should be addressed by the Commission.

Bearing in mind the statements of the heads of state and government of the member countries, the well-being of the people of North America and the existence of shared environmental goals and objectives, they stressed the importance of following the path of integration, along which NAFTA and the CEC itself are among the first steps.

As an introduction to the discussions between the Council members, the Secretariat presented a summary of the work carried out so far and the progress achieved on implementation of the strategy laid down in 1998 by the Council. This strategy was fundamentally based on an analysis of the relationships between the economy, trade and the environment; public participation and transparency in environmental stewardship, and regional capacity building.

2. Policy Guidelines for Collaborative Work

The leaders of environmental action by governments in the region collectively confirmed their will for the CEC to focus on:

- a) strengthening regional integration;
- b) promoting a sense of partnership between the members in order to achieve the shared goals and objectives;
- c) advocating for the development of market-based schemes;
- d) strengthening cooperation with the private sector;
- e) expanding public participation;
- f) increasing the exchange of and access to environmental information in the region, and
- g) working together on emerging environmental issues and on preventive action for future problems.

The Council members reiterated the importance of incorporating a technological dimension into the work of the Commission. In terms of the implementation of environmental policies in the region, statements were made in favor of analyzing the efficacy and mutual acknowledgement of standards, processes, management systems and mutual recognition of professionals specializing in environment, in order to create closer ties and afford greater certainty to the integration process.

Further recognized was the importance of prioritizing the theme of water in the work of the Commission with a long-term vision including a strategic framework for its conservation and sustainable use, as well as technological and price-related aspects, by means of actions based on information about its availability and quality.

In order to improve the work of the Commission, the desirability of closer ties with other sectors, especially water, agriculture, health care, energy and international trade, was expressed. For the last of these, there was agreement on the desirability of holding a joint meeting with trade officials in 2003.

Gaps in information must be filled for specific subjects such as water, climate change and natural disasters. Programs relating to the pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR) will be strengthened so as to enhance public awareness and transparency. The Mexican representative announced the transformation of the Mexican voluntary systems into legally prescribed schemes. He was congratulated on this matter by the other members. Progress achieved on this issue will be presented at the ninth regular session of Council.

In regard to the funding of programs, it was noted that the Secretariat, in its work program, will propose the timelines and mechanisms whereby it will address the priorities laid down by Council. In addition, mention was made of the importance of flexible funding mechanisms for the work of the Commission, without altering the essentials of the Agreement (NAAEC) that created it. In this regard, it was recommended that commonalities and synergies be sought between the themes and objectives addressed by the Commission and those addressed by other international public and private entities, as well as the member countries. Such commonalities may serve as the basis for procuring additional external resources.

3. Areas to be Pursued and Expanded :

The Council members decided to strengthen several existing initiatives and pursue new ones. Specifically they decided to:

- a.) Continue with those programs that have begun to develop a record of success, including, for example, the Sound Management of Chemicals (SMOC) program, the North American Biodiversity Information Network (NABIN), and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI);
- b.) Also mentioned was the advisability of focusing activities for the sound management of chemicals on groups of substances, like pesticides;
- c.) Continue examining the environmental dimensions of regional integration of energy markets, with special emphasis on technology and economic instruments, and renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency;
- d.) Follow-up on earlier CEC initiatives related to regional cooperation on carbon emission mitigation and sequestration, by exploring regional market-based approaches with private sector participation for carbon sequestration, energy efficiency and renewable sources, and to examine potential partnerships with international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank, as well as to explore the expansion of existing schemes to Central America;
- e.) Increase collaboration with the private sector in areas related to clean production and capacity building, including promotion of environmental management systems, technology transfer, professional development and exploration of mutual recognition;
- f.) Continue work on trade transportation in North America by identifying priority corridors and examining cooperation opportunities for compatible standards related to fuel and vehicle emissions;
- g.) Expand efforts to develop a common environmental agenda aimed at protecting children's health to include other vulnerable populations such as migratory workers, and explore ways to prepare for the hemispheric ministerial meeting on health and the environment;
- h.) Incorporate water issues into the CEC program, with a goal towards developing a North American strategic framework for the sustainable use and conservation of water that includes technology and water pricing that can enhance water availability and quality;
- i.) Develop regionally compatible approaches to hazardous waste, transport, disposal and tracking; and
- j.) Enhance environmental information so that North American decision makers, members of the public and institutions can have access to comprehensive, timely, and useful information. The Commission will work with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to include the core set of OECD indicators in its future state of the environment reports.