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European NSSD Network Office

**Concept/Memorandum for a Permanent Support
Mechanism of the European NSSD Network**

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Environment and Water Management

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Context

> "One way to move things forward is to be positive – to report on the success stories and show people how this can be done. To share best practice between companies, citizens groups and Member States."
>
> José Manuel Barroso on "Sustainable development: a strategy to do more and better". Concluding speech to the Stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development, Brussels, 15 April 2005; SPEECH/05/232

(1)   In the course of the 2000s, most EU member states have put a National Strategy for Sustainable Development" (NSSD) in place. **NSSDs** guide, co-ordinate, and monitor the different policies related to the guiding model of sustainable development.

(2)   In 2002, public administrators in charge of their national strategy processes met the first time for an exchange of experience in a workshop in The Hague. In the years since then, **annual meetings** took place in Austria (2003), Ireland (2004). The group will convene again in the UK July 2005. and in Austria in June, 2006 (first announcement to be made at the Windsor Meeting)

(3)   With the Vienna meeting in 2003, the **target group** was broadened considerably. Besides the national co-ordinators of SSDs, their colleagues from the European Commission, national coordinators of EU environmental integration & SD policies, representatives from various National Councils for Sustainable Development, and members of the SD Group from the network of the European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC) have joined the meetings.

(4)   The annual meetings facilitate an **exchange of experience and knowledge** in various respects: major challenges are discussed in depth in working groups, good practices are exchanged in guided poster exhibitions, and the results are documented in workshop summaries. The fact that the workshops were repeated annually on a voluntary basis indicates that the participants recognize that they add value to their work. Obviously, there is a lot to learn from each other's experience.

A network evolves

(5)   The annual meetings have resulted in a **loose network** of NSSD coordinators and other sustainability experts. However, the key weakness of the network is that, so far, it is held together by the annual meetings only. Different hosts, supported by external consultants, initiate and prepare the annual meetings as a one-off initiative out of their own budget. Since these meetings are the defining event of the network, it tends to become an annual **one-off initiative** as well.

(6)   Based on the conviction that (a) the NSSD network is a valuable tool for improving the sustainability strategy processes in Europe and (b) that the network's value-added can be increased by **intensifying the exchange of experience** throughout the year, we propose to strengthen the network accordingly.

(7)   A good way to do so is to **establish an office** which supports the network's activities throughout the year in various ways.

Mission and purposes of a network office – a preliminary outline

(8)   The mission of the network office is to **help improving NSSD processes in Europe by intensifying the exchange of experience** throughout the year. Thus, the network office serves the following purposes:

(9)   The network office is responsible for the establishment of a **website** which serves two basic purposes: First, the website serves the network members (and possibly also the wider public) as an **up-to-date "one-stop-shop" for European NSSD processes**. Currently, each country has its own website on its NSSD. If one is, for example, interested in the different monitoring schemes applied in Europe, one has to search through every single national homepage. The network website can offer an overview and links regarding the different monitoring schemes applied. Second, the website should also serve as the **communication platform of the network**. As such it facilitates a rapid dissemination of relevant news on NSSDs, good practices and lessons learned among the network members.

(10)   The network office can **assist the network members also individually** in finding information on NSSD processes and in making contact with other network members. In this respect it can improve in particular the collaboration between the European Commission and the NSSD coordinators in member states.

(11)   The network office can **help network members in finding and articulating common interests**.

(12)   The network office can **support the development and the formulation of common "products"** (be it guidelines for peer reviews or good practice guides). This may also require an adequate process management.

Steps towards a network office

(13)   Given the assumptions outlined here are shared widely, we suggest the formation Steering Group[1] (ideally encompassing a Commission representative and a limited number odf MS representatives). This   Group (consisting   of MS representatives particularly willing to support and to provide guidance for this mechanism))   should advice and finance the web-based network office and its "secretariat".   Ideally, we would be able build this mechanism on a **financial commitment (of possibly at least three MS and the Commission)** for a period of four to five years.

(14)   A minimum annual budget of an effective network office may amount to about € 50.000. With this budget, a junior and a senior expert on NSSDs may be employed part time.

(15)   The steering group should discuss modalities   of   selecting and contracting the external experts serving as network secretariat, and should come up with a proposal for network membership criteria.

(16)   Austria is willing to act as a member of the Steering group and to contribute to the financial support of the Network office. We propose to   present the above proposal at the

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[1] DEFRA have drawn up some possible terms of reference (see annex below)

Windsor Conference in July 2005, and would like to foresee Network office services in Place by the beginning of 2006.

ANNEX – (TEXT PROPOSED BY DEFRA)

Terms of Reference for EU Sustainable Development Network Steering Group

The following terms of reference were agreed at the EU Sustainable Development Networking Event, Windsor 14-15 July 2005:

1. The role of the Steering Group is to:

- establish and maintain an EU sustainable development network of Member State administrations with the aim of promoting the effective sharing of experience and knowledge on sustainable development in Member States and at EU level;

- support the organisation of annual network meetings in collaboration with the host country;

- develop the terms of reference and a work programme for a network office to be established, providing a permanent contact mechanism and a one stop information desk on NSDS to network members.

2. Membership of the Steering Group:

Renewal of membership of the steering group will happen every two years during the annual network meetings.

The chairman will be taken from the host country for the following year's meeting.