



YouPEC: European Youth PErerspective on Consumption

Bakkum, July 4th 2008

This is an urgent plea by the youth of Europe for a reduction of Europe's ecological footprint. We are tremendously concerned about the consequences of our consumption patterns on a global scale. Europe's consumption patterns are contributing to ongoing problems of over-exploitation, unequal distribution and degradation of global natural resources. Resource accounting shows that the current human population has overshoot the long-term carrying capacity of the earth. These problems are caused by clinging to the status quo and systematic prioritisation of short-term efficiency goals over and above long term goals such as sustainability and equity.

The ecological footprint is a useful measuring tool and illustrates that Europe is over-consuming. Today, the ecological footprint of the European Union is 4.8 ha per person (non EU: 3.8 ha/pp), while the carrying capacity of the earth is 1.8 ha per person. Europe's citizens represent only 7% of Earth's total population, but consume 15% of the world's energy, 15% of meat and 24% of paper produced¹. If Europe lifestyles were replicated worldwide, humanity would need more than two and half earths² to sustain it.

Currently proposed policy changes such as the 'European Commission Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy' are encouraging but merely represent improvements in the efficiency of resource use. Improvements in the environmental performance of products are not sufficient to guarantee human economic activity to remain within the carrying capacity of the biosphere. Ultimately, raw materials and land cannot be fully substituted by technological innovation or other added human capital. Improvements in environmental performance do not necessarily prevent increased resource use. Expected rates of population growth exacerbate the existing problem. For the human population to adjust resource use to fit within the carrying capacity of the Earth, Europe needs to acknowledge the true limits of natural resource use.

This declaration urges the European Commission and member states to set concrete goals to reduce the absolute European consumption of resources.

In doing so, we broadly support the Declaration of Tilburg which calls for a re-orientation of our economies. Economic growth should not be an unquestioned policy objective but should be open to debate. Gross Domestic Product as the sole indicator of economic performance and as the primary measure in public finance planning fails to integrate social and environmental values. We need our governments and the European Commission to have the courage to complement GDP with indicators such as the Sustainable National Income and the Index for Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). We urge the European Commission and member states to ensure that this transformation is carefully managed to ensure social security of parties that are negatively affected.

This declaration is the result of a conference that took place from the 30th of June until the 5th of July 2008 entitled "European Youth Perspective on Consumption (YouPEC 2008)". During this conference, 160 participants from 29 European countries agreed on the urgent necessity for Europe to reduce its ecological footprint. This Declaration recounts participants' recommendations to reduce Europe's ecological footprint in order to support sustainable consumption.

We encourage our governments and the European Commission to take giant leaps towards sustainability.



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1. "Please eat less meat ..." (Rajendra Pachauri/Nobel prize winner 2008)

In striving to reduce our ecological footprint, it is vital to address our protein consumption. Among other products, meat consumption causes a disproportionately large footprint. Animal protein production uses 6 to 17 times more land than soy-based protein³. Nevertheless, the negative consequences of meat consumption have generally been neglected. Meat production has been shown to be an inefficient way of producing proteins for consumption⁴. This year, the head of the United Nation's Nobel Prize-winning International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Rajendra Pachauri, pleaded for reduced meat consumption, claiming that it is a very carbon intensive commodity. According to the FAO's study 'Livestock's long shadow'⁴, the livestock sector plays a significant role in climate change, accounting for 18% of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions, which is a higher share than transport. The resource intensive livestock sector is also a major driver for consumption and pollution of water, land degradation, deforestation and biodiversity loss. Reducing meat consumption will have a direct effect on decreasing the absolute consumption of resources.

To meet our sustainability targets and reduce our ecological footprint, governments have the responsibility to put the issue of the quantity of animal protein we consume on the political agenda.

- We urge the governments to actively design and implement appropriate measures including economic instruments, information campaigns, and education to **encourage reduced meat consumption** by European citizens.
- We emphasise the necessity for the European Commission and member states to **remove subsidies for animal feed, export restitution on meat and funds for advertising meat products**.
- We strongly believe that **internalising external costs of meat production** (eg. water pollution), is important and could be realised by means of taxation or full cost-recovery.
- We recognise the potential benefit of **taxing the green house gases emissions of meat production** as well as **taxing meat as a luxury product**. The money collected could be reinvested to achieve a shift towards more sustainable protein sources.

Similar strategies can also be applied to other consumer products such as clothing and soy.

2. Prevent waste

Improved waste management could significantly reduce Europe's ecological footprint. However, EU countries currently recycle only approximately 37% of their municipal waste on average. There are also big differences between countries. Only 4 countries have a recycling rate of more than 50%, while 11 EU countries recycle less than 20%. Recycling can contribute to mitigating climate change and reducing the use of primary natural resources. We are pleased that the European Parliament agreed on a minimum target of 50% recycling level for all member states by 2020. However, given energy demands associated with recycling, we ask the European Commission to focus on waste prevention as well as recycling.

- The European Commission and member states should **set long term targets for companies to prevent waste throughout the production and consumption of commodities**, as well as short term evaluation targets. In this way companies can prepare in advance for stringent waste policies and the process of preventing waste can be monitored.



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- The European Commission and member states should provide **innovation incentives that stimulate waste prevention within product design** in such a way that a large part of used materials of a product can be re-used at a high quality for other products.
- **We urge implementation of monetary incentives to reduce household waste.** Recent efforts to introduce packaging taxes (NL) were encouraging but too low to be effective. Packaging taxes should be designed to change purchasing behaviour. Progressive waste removal taxes could motivate people to reduce waste.
- **The European Commission and member states should promote management of waste to be implemented within Europe** instead of overseas. Emissions associated with transportation of waste abroad reduce the environmental benefits of recycling. Other concerns are a lack of health and safety standards for the processing of waste overseas.

3. Reduction in energy consumption

A reduction of Europe's ecological footprint will not be successful without the implementation of an alternative energy policy. Acknowledging that there are indeed some member states that have made bold steps on the path towards renewable energy policy, we ask for clear-cut EU legislation to promote further improvements across Europe.

We recommend increasing energy efficiency while decreasing absolute energy use.

In striving towards these goals and establishing the EU as a role-model, first-mover advantages can be realised. These will yield development possibilities at both economic and social levels, such as employment opportunities and export benefits (including technology and surplus energy). Our focus is on energy consumption and efficiency in public sector buildings, as it is this sector which generates the greatest impact after the transportation sector. The enormous impact of energy savings in transport has already been addressed in the YouPEC 2007 declaration. Realisation of these goals can be achieved through the following:

- **We strongly support the setting of energy consumption reduction goals.** The European Union has set goals to increase the renewable energy percentage in total consumption. However, in order to supply all Europeans with sustainable energy we urge the European Commission and member states to take measures for consistent reduction of fossil fuel consumption.
- **We propose the exploration of biofuels that can be produced sustainably.** Considering both environmental and social impacts, sustainability criteria must be established with regard to biofuel production. The ecological footprint of biofuels must be smaller than the footprint of fossil fuels, also taking into account greenhouse gas emissions during the production process. Without question, biofuel production cannot compete with food production. Food crops are more important than biofuels and biofuels resulting in food scarcity and hunger are a violation of human rights.



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- **We advocate the promotion of energy efficiency in public sector buildings.** Consumption of energy in public sector buildings must be more efficient. To achieve this, all buildings should have sensor driven lighting systems and only use energy-saving light bulbs. Energy use must also be minimised by regulating the temperature range of heating/cooling systems in public buildings. The European Commission should also promote micro renewables such as solar power and wind power to be incorporated into buildings. This can be encouraged through monetary incentives.
- **We encourage the promotion of energy awareness at all levels of society.** Realising the importance of energy-conscious behaviour, we want to enable people to make smart choices. This can be done by creating a system of public recognition and reward for the most energy-efficient product(s). There should also be investment in research and development, for example financially supporting academic chairs for renewable energy research in universities and other educational institutions.

4. Education and Awareness

4.1. Nurturing green values

Having green values will influence a person's lifelong consumption behaviour and ecological footprint. Therefore, raising awareness through education and utilising the media to this effect is a prerequisite in establishing the changes required on the consumer's part, as recommended in this declaration.

- **We urge the European Commission and member states to integrate environmental education into the curriculum of the education system**

Regarding children, education plays a pivotal role in their early lives. We need to target education to allow children to develop informed opinions and sustainable consumption patterns. Children must be taught, in a practical way, about the value of nature and the importance of maintaining it. The changes to the educational system need to be directed towards all ages, ranging from young children to adults. One example, as proposed by Peadar Kirby in Ireland, demonstrates a potential to educate university level students by implementing compulsory ecology-oriented modules in their first year of study.

- **The European Commission and member states should widen incentives for people to “go green”**

Currently adult consumers' sustainable consumption behaviour can be stimulated through media channels. Governments should not only promote consumers to “go green”, but also communicate the understanding of the consequences of doing so. These range from direct benefits like money efficiency, health, energy efficiency, and increased water quality, to avoiding loss of bio-diversity and reducing global poverty. For example, reducing meat consumption has beneficial effects on health⁵.

- **We emphasise the need to ensure that advertisements are in line with awareness-raising campaigns for sustainability**

Sustainable consumption cannot be achieved when consumers are confronted with increasing amounts of misleading “greenwashing” advertisements. Coherence between advertisements and implemented policies needs to be emphasised.



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- **We urge the European Commission to compel each member state to implement social advertising campaigns tackling perceptions which create the gap between thinking green and acting green**

Previous experience indicates that there is a marked rise in consumerism within member states following entry into the EU. We wish to draw attention to this issue and suggest that media advertising has a vital role to play in ensuring that the change in perception necessary for avoiding this problem occurs. This must be country-specific, taking into consideration the individual history and related cultural norms of each member state - both new and old.

4.2. Give consumers tools to make sustainable choices

We propose a compulsory and transparent product-wide labeling system

This would integrate life cycle impact and social performance of products into consumer choice. The European Commission can play a major role in implementing such a labeling system and to ensure that any ranking system is a reliable standard for social and environmental criteria. This would go hand in hand with education and awareness-raising that allows individuals to accurately assess and compare the social and environmental impacts of products. Systematically giving consumers the opportunity to base their choices on environmental and social values (rather than financial concerns alone) is a powerful tool for societal transformation towards sustainability.

The European Commission has the goal to “create a virtuous circle: improving the overall environmental performance of products throughout their life-cycle, promoting and stimulating the demand of better products and production technologies and helping consumers to make better choices” (European Commission, 2008). The recent rise of a multitude of voluntary eco-labels is an insufficient means to achieve this goal. The range of product-specific labels currently on the market leaves the consumer with inconsistent information regarding the social and environmental impacts of their purchases.

¹ European Environmental Agency – McGlade, J. (3 June 2008), *David and Goliath – opening speech Green Week in Brussels*, www.eea.europa.eu

² WWF (2006), *Living Planet Report: Environmental Issues and Options*

³ Reijnders, L. and Soret, S. (2003), *Quantification of the environmental impact of different dietary protein choices*, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 78

⁴ FAO (2006), *Livestock' long shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*

⁵ Singh, P.N., Sabaté, J. and Fraser, G.E. (2003), *Does low meat consumption increase life expectancy in humans?*, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 78