

European commissioners bid to dump soil directive

A furious row among European commissioners has knocked the proposed Soil Thematic Strategy back on the eve of its adoption over the issue of contaminated land registers and compulsory remediation.

The **European Commission** had been expected to adopt the Strategy on 7 June but instead it mysteriously disappeared from its agenda. The Strategy, which would have proposed a new soil directive, is one of seven under the Sixth Environment Action Programme and was intended to be approved with the other six last autumn.

But months of inter-service consultation have failed to head off objections led by Commission president **José Manuel Barroso** and industry commissioner **Günter Verheugen**, supported by internal market commissioner **Charlie McCreevy** and information commissioner **Viviane Reding**. The row is symptomatic of attempts by free marketers and globalization enthusiasts to undermine EC environment protection and is being fought by environment commissioner **Stavros Dimas**. He reportedly is threatening to “defend his project to the death”.

The current draft of the strategy is believed to propose:

- national registers of contaminated sites within five years;
- investigation and risk assessment of sites;
- remediation of problem sites;
- land status reports for buyers;
- national remediation strategies;
- a common definition of contamination.

The Strategy’s opponents reportedly want mandatory registration limited to cross-boundary, large-scale or very contaminated sites and no mandatory remediation.

The **European Environmental Bureau** said it is deeply dismayed at the move and pointed out over 3.5m sites have already been identified with a €59-109bn estimated remediation cost.

“DG Environment’s earlier plans for soil protection have already been dramatically weakened,” said EEB policy director **Stefan Scheuer**. “Instead of submitting the resulting, much depleted, document to Parliament and governments to allow discussion on how best to proceed, President Barroso is planning to bury it altogether.”

http://www.eeb.org/press/pr_soiling_its_reputation_080606.htm