

EU ISSUES UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2019



INFORMATION

The European Commission platform on climate change

The new European Commission came into post on 1 December with a commitment for the EU to become the climate-neutral by 2050 i.e. the objective is to emit less carbon dioxide and to remove from the atmosphere the carbon dioxide emitted. In practice, this means reducing emissions and counteracted by the greenhouse gases created by cars and power plants by the planting of new forests or through carbon capture technologies which would see the CO₂ buried underground. The EU says that this can be done with existing technologies such as solar and wind energy which would have to be ramped up to provide 80% of electricity. Energy efficiency measures such as home insulation would also need to be boosted to reduce energy consumption by half by the middle of the century. The Commission claims that it is already on track to meet the 20% emissions reduction target for 2020 (as compared to 1990) even though emissions which are not covered by the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (i.e. from transport, buildings, agriculture and waste) have only just stated on a downward trajectory; and has already put in place legislation to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 40% by 2030. Policy initiatives to reduce CO₂ emission from road transport (notably regulating for lower-emission new vehicles) are a part of the programme.

European Parliament declares climate emergency

The European Parliament passed motions in November declaring a climate emergency and calling on the EU to increase its 2030 emission reduction target from 40% to 55% in the European Green Deal package (due within the Commission's first 100 days) and to commit to carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest. Even so, Environmental groups WWF Europe and Climate Action Network Europe have already said that 55% is too low saying that a reduction of at least 65% is necessary to limit the average temperature increase to 1.5°C. The Parliament also called on the European Commission to ensure all relevant budget and legislative proposals are aligned with the Paris climate agreement to limit global heating to below 1.5°C.

The resolution on declaring a climate and environmental emergency was adopted with 429 votes for, 225 votes against and 19 abstentions.

Germany wants to increase the rate of electric vehicle transition

The German government has indicated that it wants the German car industry to help to significantly expand the country's electric car charging network – particularly in less densely populated areas - with the objective of installing a million charging points across the country by 2030. The aim is to help consumers to choose with confidence to buy electric cars. In parallel, a mix of government and industry money is also envisaged to increase incentives to purchase zero emissions cars.

Reactions to the plan include the energy industry group GDEW saying that the existing charging charging-points already in operation cover the current demand and that the network should only be expanded to meet demand; while the Green Group, BUND, in welcoming the plan also urged the government to focus on making cars as energy efficient as possible and to reduce the number of heavy SUVs which are one of the major drivers of global emissions growth.

Air quality data

The European Commission has reported on its two Ambient Air Quality Directives saying that they are “fit for purpose” and that they have contributed to a downward trend in air pollution. But the Commission also noted that the key failing is that too many member states are not meeting the legally binding limits on air pollutants – this is evidenced by the fact that the Commission has 30 open infringement procedures against 20 Member States for breaching limits on particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide, while 2 member states – Slovakia and Romania – are also in breach of the Directives' air quality monitoring requirements.

However, further amendment of the Directives is likely in the future, notably as:

- The European Environment Agency has already reported that EU city dwellers remain exposed to air pollution in excess of WHO guidelines
- External pressure from organisations will continue call for stricter limits – e.g. the Health and Environment Alliance has called on the incoming Commission to put forward a strong and ambitious Zero Pollution Strategy as part of the European Green Deal.

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The FIVA Legislation Commission members are: Lars Genild (Chairman), Wolfgang Eckel, Carla Fiocchi, Laurent Heriou, Johann König, Stanislav Minářík, Bob Owen, Christos Petridis and Andrew Turner of EPPA works with the Committee.