

NOTE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE MALTESE ISLANDS

Note presented by Professor Lino Briguglio to the Prime Minister Hon Lawrence Gonzi on 9 March 2007.

It is important that the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) be institutionalised and implemented as an ongoing process rather than as a one-off activity. For this reason, the Strategy needs to be coordinated, monitored, efficiently implemented and suitably promoted.

The proposed NSSD recommends, in Chapter 4, that there should be a permanent structure, appropriately staffed and funded to:

- coordinate the activities of the NCSD;
- act as a watchdog to ensure that legislation reflects the National Strategy for Sustainable Development objectives;
- ensure that Government departments and other state bodies adequately undertake their share of implementing the Strategy;
- update the Strategy as and when required, in accordance with other national strategies that are issued from time to time;
- inform all relevant bodies, public and private, about specific aspects of the Strategy so that these are incorporated in any new strategies that are prepared by such bodies;
- communicate with the public to promote participation and foster ownership of the Strategy;
- develop methods for evaluating and monitoring public- and private-sector activities;
- promote society's responsibility towards future generations; and
- develop and foster a culture conducive towards sustainable development.

Commissioner for Sustainable Development

It is being recommended that the permanent structure should consist of a secretariat, appropriately staffed and funded, and ideally headed by a person at Director-General level. The head of the secretariat should be styled as the Commissioner for Sustainable Development.

It is further recommended that this structure should be put in place by the end of 2007. The estimated recurrent cost will be in the region of Lm60,000 annually including wages salaries and associated running costs. The office should be located within the Office of the Prime Minister, but should work in close liaison with all Government Ministries and departments, particularly with the Ministry of the Environment and with MEPA.

It is being recommended that this structure should not be a new government body or agency, but should fall within the remit of the Prime Minister's Office to support the Prime Minister in fulfilling his role as Chair of the Commission and to ensure appropriate coordination and consistency within government bodies.

2. A Sustainable Development Focal point within Government Ministries

The NSSD states that given that sustainable development is multi-sectoral and multi-levelled, it is important to ensure coherence and to avoid duplication of effort in the implementation of the Strategy among the different sectors, layers and actors in government departments.

For this reason, it is being recommended that a sustainable development focal point, headed by a person at Director level or higher, should be set up within each Ministry to ensure that the strategy aspects involving the respective ministry are implemented and that such implementation is carried out in a coherent manner.

The role of these focal points should be:

- to draw up an action plan for their Ministry, setting out how the Ministry would deliver its lead role on specific sustainable development strategic directions, and the contribution that the Ministry will make to issues under the remit of other Ministries. The action plan will have to be drawn up by Mid-2008 and approved and adopted by end of the same year, as indicated in section 5.1 of the proposed NSSD.
- to participate in advisory committees/working groups of the NCSD on topics relating to their Ministries' specific portfolio.
- to foster a culture of sustainable development within their Ministries' decision-making process and to ensure that sustainable development principles are formally reflected in their Ministries' policies.
- to ensure that each ministry will have a clear terms of reference as to its lead role on the strategic directions set out in the proposed NSSD.
- To keep their Minister updated on the work of the NCSD and the development of the Action Plan for the Ministry.

In undertaking their role, the focal points would liaise closely with the Commissioner for Sustainable Development. In turn the Commission will support the focal points in building capacity.

It is also being recommended that there should be a lead Ministry for each strategic direction identified in the proposed NSSD to ensure its coherent implementation across government. In the case of cross-cutting issues, the lead Ministry should liaise with other Ministries or government agencies, as appropriate.

3. Setting Targets and Monitoring

The effective monitoring of the sustainable development strategy requires the compilation of appropriate indicators. For this reason, sustainability indicators for key sectors, accompanied by targets, have been identified in the proposed NSSD and these can be used to assess the extent to which sustainable development goals are being reached.

The compilation of indicators and targets will also help in facilitating the reporting obligations of Malta to the EU and other international bodies.

It is recommended that the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainable Development undertakes the task of monitoring and reporting progress on sustainability indicators and targets. The findings should be presented to the public in a manner that can be easily understood and interpreted.

It is further recommended that the attainment of appropriate sustainable development targets should feature in the development of future funding mechanisms for Local Councils, to promote the attainment of sustainable development goals at the local and regional level.

4. Spatial Development Plan

The proposed NSSD states that successful implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development requires an Integrated Spatial Development Plan (ISDP). Given that land is very scarce in the Maltese Islands, there is the need for a clear strategic vision for prioritising the use of land in the context of sustainable development. In addition, land is the basis of a whole series of environmental services, identified in the proposed strategy, including water resources, flood protection and landscape quality.

The strategy states that the ISDP needs to include a wide range of public policy responses and that MEPA should undertake this task, acting on behalf of Government and in close cooperation with the NCSD.

It is therefore recommended that MEPA develops capacity and structures for the preparation of the ISDP, including the engagement of stakeholders, both within government and more widely, in order to ensure that MEPA can effectively undertake this role on a sufficiently coherent and comprehensive manner and to foster ownership of the ISDP.

5. Engaging Stakeholders

The proposed NSSD outlines the way forward for improving stakeholders' involvement, based on promoting effective public participation, education that gives people skills for participating in decision-making, and strengthening the capacity of Local Councils to support the strategy.

It is being recommended that, in support of this, the Commissioner for Sustainable Development should draw up a communications strategy, involving active participation by the media, in order to keep the public informed of the objectives and strategy implementation of the NCSD, and to promote participation and foster ownership of the strategy among the public at large.

6. The NCSD and Consensus Building

The proposed NSSD states that the drawing up of a the Strategy should not be viewed as a static event, but as a long-term process in the course of which decisions which have been taken and solutions which have been identified must be reviewed to check that desired results are being achieved. There is therefore the continuing need for advocacy and consensus

building in line with the Commission's role as specified in the Environment Protection Act (2001).

In order to do this, the proposed NSSD states that the NCSO should be better equipped and funded to enable it to elicit participation by stakeholders and to foster consensus-building so as to ensure that the Strategy has the widest possible ownership.

It is therefore being recommended that additional funding be allocated for the NCSO. Such additional funds are particularly required to support the work of the advisory committees, and to encourage good practice, as envisaged in the Environment Protection Act (Article 8 (7)).

Main Recommendations regarding the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy process:

1. A permanent structure, appropriately staffed and funded consisting of a secretariat, ideally headed by a person at Director-General level should be put in place. The head of this institution will be styled the Commissioner for Sustainable Development. This structure should be established by the end of 2007. The office should be located within the Office of the Prime Minister, but should work in close liaison with all Government Ministries and departments, particularly with the Ministry of the Environment and with MEPA. This structure should not be a new government body or agency, but should fall within the remit of the Prime Minister's Office to support the Prime Minister in fulfilling his role as Chair of the Commission and to ensure appropriate coordination and consistency within government bodies.
2. A sustainable development focal point, headed by a person at Director level or higher, should be set up within each Ministry to ensure that the strategy aspects involving the respective ministry are implemented and that such implementation is carried out in a coherent manner.
3. There should be a lead Ministry for each strategic direction identified in the proposed Sustainable Development Strategy to ensure its coherent implementation across government. In the case of cross-cutting issues, the lead Ministry should liaise with other Ministries or government agencies, as appropriate.
4. The Office of the Commissioner for Sustainable Development should undertake the task of monitoring and reporting progress on sustainability indicators and targets. The findings should be presented to the public in a manner that can be easily understood and interpreted.
5. The attainment of appropriate sustainable development targets should feature in the development of future funding mechanisms for Local Councils, to promote the attainment of sustainable development goals at the local and regional level.
6. MEPA should develop capacity and structures for the preparation of an Integrated Spatial Development Plan (ISDP) both within government and other stakeholders, in order to ensure that MEPA can effectively undertake this role on a sufficiently coherent and comprehensive manner and to foster ownership of the ISDP.
7. The Commissioner for Sustainable Development should draw up a communications strategy, involving active participation by the media, in order to keep the public informed of the objectives and strategy implementation of the NCSO, and to promote participation and foster ownership of the strategy among the public at large.
8. Additional funding should be allocated for the NCSO. Such additional funds are particularly required to support the work of the advisory committees, and to encourage good practice, as envisaged in the Environment Protection Act (Article 8 (7)).