

Alliance of NGOs and companies express strong criticism on electronic waste report

European Commission consultant suggests removing eco-design incentive from the WEEE Directive

In a report, released on November 12, United Nations University¹ (UNU, a consultant to the European Commission) proposes to scrap the incentives for better design, one of the main objectives of the EU WEEE Directive, introduced in 2003. The report from UNU is one of the elements in the European Commissions ongoing review of the EU WEEE Directive.

"The alliance of NGOs and companies for Individual Producer Responsibility (IPR) is concerned about the conclusions drawn by UNU on producer responsibility", said Martin Besieux, of Greenpeace, part of the alliance. "Watering down the producer responsibility in the Directive would eliminate very effective incentives for producers to improve their products' eco-design. Without these incentives the WEEE Directive will be deprived of a vital tool to reduce electrical and electronic waste, which has proven to be effective in other parts of the world. It would be nothing but a waste law and take EU environmental policy-making back to the early 1990s."

The Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) was launched in 2003 by the EU to reduce the negative impact from rapidly increasing amounts of electronic waste. An important provision of the directive is that each producer bears an individual responsibility to ensure that discarded products from its own brand are collected and treated in an appropriate way, which in turn creates an incentive for producers to design products that are easier to recycle.

Already in the mid 1990s, the EU identified individual producer responsibility as the tool to create a market incentive for better design, because individual responsibility would reward producers economically when making products easier to recycle.

UNU argues that the WEEE directive has not lead to design improvements and that eco-design should instead be addressed by other EU directives such as the new Energy-using Products (EuP) Directive.

Viktor Sundberg of Electrolux, part of the alliance, responded: "UNU fails to recognize that the lack of design improvement is due to an inappropriate transposition and implementation of the IPR provisions of the Directive, rather than to the principle of IPR itself. Failure to correctly transpose the WEEE Directive by Member States cannot become a reason to drop a central piece of the Directive. This would risk setting a worrying precedent for future EU policy making. Instead the correct transposition into Member States legislation should be secured by enforcement actions by the European Commission."

Hans Korfmacher, Braun said "EuP will set minimum **requirements** for products, but does not establish incentives to reward manufacturers who go beyond these minimum requirements. Individual Producer Responsibility provides producers with **incentives** to improve their own-brand products in creative and flexible ways".

¹ UNU is part of the project team of five consultants for the study: TU Delft, Gaiker, AEA Technology and REC

The Alliance urges the European Commission to reject the conclusions of UNU on producer responsibility and to maintain IPR in the WEEE Directive. In addition the Alliance asks the European Commission to ensure that Member States correctly implement the IPR provision of the WEEE Directive.

The Alliance welcomes the conclusions of the report on the Producer Responsibility Principle by Ökopol², which was also released yesterday by the European Commission. The Ökopol report recommends to keep and properly implement the IPR provisions of the WEEE Directive.

(ends)

For further quotes and comments from participants to the Alliance, please contact:

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Notes for Editors:

More information on IPR working today in countries such as Japan, Sweden, and the USA, and how it may work in the future, can be found at www.IPRworks.org

1. The alliance of NGOs and companies issued a statement in March 2007 urging the EU institutions and the Member States to ensure that individual producer responsibility of article 8.2 is correctly transposed and implemented in national legislation. This statement was signed by over 30 organisations representing producers, recyclers and environmental organisations.

2. Members of the Alliance include Greenpeace International, European Environmental Bureau, Bellona, Braun, Electrolux, Hewlett-Packard, Länsförsäkringar Insurance Alliance, Sony Europe, and Stena.

3. Directive 2002/96/EC on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment was published in January 2003. The Directive entered into force in August 2005, from which date each producer of EE equipment should be responsible for the waste from his own products.

4. The two reports from the Commission can be found at the following address:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/weee/studies_en.htm

² Ökopol is part of the project team of three consultants for the study: Ökopol, IIIIEE at Lund University and RPA of United Kingdom.