

OECD WORKSHOP ON ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION AND GLOBAL MARKETS

Subgroup on Effective Cooperation to promote innovation and diffusion of environmental technologies.

EEB is focused on EU-policy development and implementation, so at first sight, I would be better placed in the other sub-group. But do have some contributions to make on basis of my experience:

1. Env. Organisations can be important allies for both companies and governments in promoting ecological industrial innovation, in different ways:
 - Our campaigns for ambitious environmental policies, mobilizing support, putting pressure, creating therewith an environment for positive decisions.
 - Our participation in supporting processes and negotiations, in particular for the EEB: definitions on Best Available Technologies, as part of the implementation of the Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control, formulation of EU Eco-label criteria, EU standards for products, etc.
 - Our communication to the public, such as NGO-led ecolabel systems, ranking of companies on basis of environmental criteria, testing products, etc. Therewith giving credibility to the best performing products with the public.
 - Direct support to specific products, a practice particularly from WWF: green electricity in NL is major success (1 million households?) thanks to the verification role WWF has with the providers.

2. Env. Organisations also have concerns about partnership approach if it replaces what we consider as potentially more effective policies:
 - Our demands in particular for clear targets and timetables: companies often do not like that, rather see politicians and society relying on goodwill of companies, but we think this is too unsecure, not transparent, too voluntary
 - We are skeptical of voluntary agreements, think they can only work in specific circumstances and probably only on the national level. The OECD has repeatedly confirmed our analysis about this.
 - In a partnership approach, based on broad stakeholder involvement, governments, and certainly the Commission, tend to see NGOs as a balancing factor towards industry representatives. In practice, whenever governments/Commission give stakeholders an important role to play in a decisionmaking process, we indeed want to be there as well, to provide this balance. The problem comes when the stakeholder processes start without clear and firm proposals from the governments, but are very open ended. In essence this is not a sustainable alternative to a more pro-active government. NGOs can never mobilize the same quantity of human resources and specialist knowledge than companies can. And why should we? The public authorities are there to defend the public interests, and not delegate that task to voluntary organizations.

A final advise to governments: stop listening to European and national federations of business and industry when developing new policies. They are presenting the most conservative, most scared part of their members. Focus on the frontrunners. It can make a vast difference. A concrete example: a couple of years ago the European Commission proposed EU legislation on how to deal with waste from electric and electronic equipments. A big and growing stream: computers, video, TV, washing machines, refrigerators, mobile phones, etc. It promoted “shared responsibility” leading to collection and waste treatment schemes supported by the producers as a whole, together with consumers and public authorities. We opposed this, promoted “individual producer responsibility”. In this way every producer of a good would be responsible for the waste treatment later. A direct incentive to think about the waste phase when designing the product. The branch organizations of electric and electronic companies opposed such a producer responsibility system. Then Electrolux contacted EEB, said it agreed with us, and that several other large companies did so also. But Commission, DG Enterprise had told Electrolux it did not want to talk. It referred Electrolux to the branch organization.

EEB and Electrolux coordinated their work. I was chairing a hearing in the European Parliament where a set of companies presented their views, where they showed that certain things that the branch organization said were impossible or very costly, were actually already put in place, such as alternatives for brominated flame retardants. Our coordinated efforts were successful, European Parliament, Environmental Ministers, the Commission got convinced. And now we have the individual producer responsibility as part of the Directive.

Lesson: with frontrunners you can drive change, not with the lowest common denominator in the industrial sector.