

REPORT TO COUNCIL: NO: 00-01

RE: Summary of Plenary Discussion on Future Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Program Initiatives

Introduction

JPAC is pleased to present this report to the Council members of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). It has been prepared following presentations and discussions among the JPAC members, program managers and the public during a plenary discussion on future initiatives for the CEC's Program Initiatives. It was held on 23 March 2000, attended by approximately 100 members of the public, representatives from the Parties and the National Advisory Committees and the United States Governmental Advisory Committee.

The public also participated in three additional plenary discussions during the JPAC Regular Session. The first was on the North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. The second was on Emerging Environmental Trends in North America organized in conjunction with the Mexican National Advisory Committee. The third was organized to receive comments on the draft Guide: Elements for Improving Environmental Performance and Compliance through Effective Environmental Management Systems. A resume of these discussions can be found in the Summary Record for JPAC Regular Session 00-01.

The following comments and recommendations were presented during the plenary discussion.

- Efforts should be made to engage municipalities in the development and delivery of programs. In this way, issues such as water management could be addressed in a way that would ensure more local participation.
- The CEC should consider ways to improve follow up and reporting on projects. The public is becoming discouraged by the lack of clear, measurable results.
- Humid areas should receive more attention in the Conservation of Biodiversity Program.
- Adequate enforcement requires a standard or compatible regulatory system. Legal instruments are necessary to ensure that Mexico participates in the North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. This is a very important tool for environmental protection. Without full reporting and comparable data, there can be no continental assessment and protection. New methodologies for measuring and estimating pollutants should be included in the Annual Certificate of Operation (COA).
- Public participation has no borders. The CEC should increase its efforts to mobilize and inform civil society. Involvement of local communities is critical to the success of the CEC. This is lacking at present. Improvement should become a priority. Without the involvement of a dedicated NGO network, the CEC will fail.
- The lack of legal instruments to implement or enforce a CEC biodiversity strategy is an issue.
- There is an alarming lack of transparency developing in the Article 14 & 15 submission process. Canadian NGOs are concerned that trade is again taking over the environmental agenda. Citizens are not being well served. We saw that in Seattle and will soon see it again in Washington DC. Canadian NGOs will mount a campaign against the move to further amend the guidelines. JPAC should make this message very clear to Council.
- Citizens need to be better integrated into the program. Communities and local peoples are not being taken into account.
- More information is needed on the use, regulation and impacts of pesticides. These substances are still being used despite the dangers involved. A better regulatory and enforcement system is required.
- The CEC should direct efforts towards evaluating the impacts and benefits of developing green goods and services. It is not as simple as it is sometimes portrayed. Also, the process of certification is very confusing for farmers and other producers. Support is needed to develop an information network to assist producers.
- The Environment, Trade and Economy Program should consider the following proposals: (a) include a study of trends and patterns in North America; (b) conduct pilot projects on selected products and services; (c) results of the trends work should be shared with the NACs and others; and (d) promote adequate regulation and enforcement.
- The Mexican NAC presented a list of priorities for the Pollutants and Health Program:
 1. Listing of pesticides currently in use
 2. Grouping of chemicals

3. Release of information to the public
 4. Seek alternatives for mercury
 5. Standards for data collection
 6. Mexican involvement in the PRTR
 7. Methodology for monitoring, control and reduction of pollution
 8. Evaluate financial alternatives for the *Fondo de Prevención de la Contaminación*(Fiprev)
 9. A strategic plan, for the next 10 years on the sustainable development of the Atlantic Ocean/Caribbean Gulf coastal region.
- Government agencies are not supporting organic farmers in Mexico. The environmental cost of using chemicals in agriculture is not being considered. A new methodology for comparing and evaluating the full costs and benefits is needed.
 - Certification is very expensive. Support is required if ever Mexican producers are expected to compete.
 - A national inventory of PCB sites in Mexico is required. Incineration and production of these substances should be banned.
 - The effects of contaminants on human health should be a cross-cutting theme of the CEC's work. The epidemiological effects are of major concern to local people. The Indigenous representatives at the Stakeholder meeting yesterday raised this again.
 - Current trade rules and environmental policy are stricter on organic producers than non-organic producers. Organic producers are required to show that their product does not contain toxic substances. Conventional producers are not required to declare the contents.
 - Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) should continue to be on the Council's agenda. A trinational workshop should be organized by the CEC. The CEC could act as a lead in identifying how the precautionary principle can be applied to regulating the development and use of GMOs.
 - World War III will be over water. This is a very important global issue. So are issues related to fossil fuels. These are not being adequately dealt with in the CEC Program.
 - Methodologies for analyzing the impacts of trade on the environment must include social costs. For example, many producers in Mexico cannot afford to be certified. It is less expensive to produce food using chemicals. Also, in many communities water is previously contaminated from sources outside community control, making it impossible for producers to achieve certification. Social justice and equity must be factored into analysis.
 - There is too much emphasis in the Program on the use of so-called 'experts' and not enough participation of local communities, who have their own expertise.
 - The full social and environmental impact of the border industries that have emerged since NAFTA was signed should be evaluated.
 - Local farmers are the last to be taken into account, but are the first to suffer from the lack of respect for the environment and its resources. Our waters are contaminated and our health threatened. We are trying to re-establish organic production practices, but receive very little support. Decisions are taken in offices, not in the fields. Everything is being driven by globalization at the expense of family level production. Local communities and Indigenous peoples are not being involved. If they really were, then things would change. Instead, we grow more and more miserable.

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APPROVED BY THE JPAC MEMBERS 29 APRIL 2000