



ECN statement - European commission roadmap on a climate law

22 January 2020

The European Compost Network (ECN) welcomes the new initiative of the European Commission on a Climate Law that will provide for a **long-term framework to the EU climate policy** and contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Since the initiative aims to transform the way EU policies are made and to lay down fundamental elements that guide all policies, ECN is worried and concerned that the roadmap does not address in any of its parts the contribution of **closed material loops** – i.e. circular economy – to decarbonizing the economy.

ECN supports the purpose of the upcoming initiative to ensure that **all EU policies contribute** to the climate-neutrality objective and that **all sectors play their part**. As a matter of fact, since its inception in 2002, ECN has always advocated to adopt a legislative framework incentivising the development of **sustainable waste management systems** – i.e. based on waste prevention, separate collection, reuse and recycling.

Anaerobic digestion (AD) and composting are the most suitable treatment processes of biowaste:

- They employ safe and easy-to-replicate technology, from small to large scale
- They are perfectly suited for decentralized application
- They provide local jobs, especially in rural areas, and can be built and operated at relatively low cost, compared to incineration plants
- AD contributes to offset fossil fuels by generating renewable energy
- Compost and digestate will provide organic supply of nutrients to agriculture, including phosphorus which is a critical raw material.

However, although the benefits of such approach outweigh the costs of the investment, Member States still struggle to move away from the unsustainable, business-as-usual, practices, which they have been locked in for dozens of years. In many countries bio-waste is still landfilled instead of being safely turned into **organic soil improvers** and sustainably employed in agriculture and horticulture.

ECN calls on the Commission to carefully design its climate policy to incentivise the take-up of climate-friendly and sustainable practices, products and technologies. **Reuse and recycling** should be prioritised over extraction of raw materials, which is a very polluting and energy intensive economic activity.

If the transition to a climate neutral economy is to be irreversible, **organic cycles** for biological materials must be closed. There is the need to develop a **comprehensive strategy to build up organic matter in soils**. Organic matter will help maintaining and restoring soil quality, structure and its much-needed water retention capacity. This means that soils will not dry out quickly in summer months, when water is scarce but also that the likelihood of flooding in winter is reduced.

A healthy soil also works as a huge carbon sink and therefore it can sequester even more carbon. Once applied to soils through compost and digestate, organic matter ensures carbon storage for many decades. Regular application of compost to fields also prevent harvesting peatlands. ECN calls the Commission to propose an **EU mandatory target to build up soil organic matter**.

Peatlands are a type of wetlands which are among the most valuable ecosystems on Earth: they are critical for preserving global biodiversity, provide safe drinking water, minimise flood risk and help address climate change. Peatlands are the largest natural terrestrial carbon store; the area covered by near natural peatland worldwide (>3 million km²) sequesters 0.37 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) a year – storing more carbon than all other vegetation types in the world combined. Damaged peatlands are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, annually releasing almost 6% of global anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. Peatland restoration can therefore bring significant emissions reductions.

ECN also recommend the Commission to design incentives under the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy to **reward farmers protecting soil quality**.

About ECN

The European Compost Network (ECN) is a European non-profit membership organisation promoting sustainable recycling practices in composting, anaerobic digestion and other biological treatment processes of organic resources.

ECN's vision is a Europe in which all organic resources are recycled and recovered in a sustainable way. From this vision, ECN's primary goal is to support the implementation of EU waste policies and thereby contributing to the development of a recycling society, to sustainable agriculture and energy recovery, to improve human health and to create overall added value within the European market. To achieve this, we believe that effective recycling in all Member States should be built on appropriate collection systems for organic waste to promote high quality products derived from biological treatment. ECN supports this development through implementation programmes for Member States; the development of EU quality assurance systems for compost and digestate; and, guidelines for the monitoring of operational processes within compost and digestate facilities