

Workshop Report

Biowaste in the Circular Economy

On the 6 September 2017, ECN organised a workshop in Brussels in collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). It was held under the patronage of Dr Babette Winter, CoR Member and Rapporteur of the Circular Economy, and State Secretary for Culture and Europe in the Thuringian State Chancellery, Germany. Over 80 delegates heard from representatives of the European Commission, European Parliament, member states, industry organisations and municipalities about biowaste and revisions to the Waste Framework Directive.

The workshop was timed to coincide with trilogue discussions about biowaste in the revised Waste Framework Directive (WFD). It was formally introduced by ECN board member, Arjen Brinkmann, who also chaired the day's proceedings. The morning session focussed on policy, with the afternoon session concentrating on practice.

Dr **Babette Winter**, provided the keynote address, explaining the role the Committee of the Regions plays and how it provides 'grass roots' information and opinion in the development and implementation of EU legislation. Dr Winter explained that there were five issues that needed addressing, namely:

1. Raising consumer and education;
2. Improving waste prevention, in particular, food waste;
3. Improving waste collection and recycling, especially biowaste (noting that the revised Waste Framework Directive should ban landfill and restrict incineration);
4. Stimulating markets for recyclates; and
5. Exchanging information and best practices, especially between local and regional authorities.

ECN's chair, **Henrik Lystad**, then set out ECN's vision of the role of biowaste in the nascent circular bioeconomy. He explained some of the many ways in which biowaste treatment can benefit both the economy and the environment (such as conserving phosphorus and peatlands). Henrik then concluded with ECN's key recommendations for the new WFD, which include a separate target for separately collected biowaste and establishing separate European waste classification codes for biowaste.

The views of the European Commission were presented by **Silvija Aile**, who set out the current status of the WFD. She updated delegates on the ongoing trilogue discussions, noting that the two principal areas under discussion at present are:

1. **Obligations for separate biowaste collection**, including whether the 'technically, environmentally and economically practicable' (TEEP) conditionalities should be kept, with the Parliament in favour of deleting these requirements, and member states seeking flexibility. A compromise position, for example for sparsely populated areas, may need to be reached; and
2. **Rules for calculating recycling**, with the Parliament requesting that only separately collected biowaste be permitted as a recycling option, with some member states seeking to include mixed waste-derived material in recycling calculations when it is used on land for soil improvement purposes.

Ms Aile suggested that compromises on both these issues would need to be made, and would need to be resolved before the end of the year.

MEP Mark Demesmaeker (Flanders), then presented the views of the European Parliament. He stressed the importance of the transition towards a circular economy and the role of biowaste, suggesting that the current legislative framework limits opportunities for biowaste. He highlighted some Flemish examples of innovation and good practice, such as growing insects on biowaste to manufacture protein.

Mr Demesmaeker then described the stance of the European Parliament: which requires a clear definition of organic recycling; mandatory separate collection at source and deletion of the 'TEEP' conditionality; food waste reduction targets; limiting landfilling; and, European-wide end-of-waste criteria. He concluded that "biowaste is a valuable and abundant resource which we cannot afford to squander", and we have the opportunity to "turn wastelands into fields of gold".

The final speaker of the morning session was **Nico Vanaken**, from the Flemish Waste Agency, OVAM, who set out the vision and experience of managing biowaste in Flanders. He described the ways in which OVAM has translated its vision into a strategy for a sustainable and competitive bioeconomy by 2030, which includes an action plan for the sustainable management of biomass streams.

The morning session concluded with a panel debate with the speakers and representatives from Municipal Waste Europe and the Republic of Slovakia. Much of the debate focussed around the 'TEEP' conditionalities, with **Vanya Veras** from Municipal Waste Europe explaining that some municipalities are in need of flexibility to meet revised biowaste recycling targets. This was echoed by **Katarina Butkovska**, who explained that Slovakia currently relies heavily on landfilling and now needs to invest heavily in new infrastructure in line with its national waste law.

MEP **Demesmaeker**, however, commented that TEEP would be seen as an 'escape route', that could be used by some member states to avoid meeting recycling targets, an opinion that was also echoed by other participants. Henrik Lystad suggested that it would be better to establish a transitional period and introduce stringent criteria for those member states that may struggle to meet recycling targets.

The afternoon session then focussed on practical examples of biowaste management in action.

Michele Giavini from the Italian Composting and Biogas Association (CIC) described the collection of biowaste and how it is 'technically, environmentally and economically practicable'. He provided examples of food waste collection in Lombardy, Italy, and how a 'domino effect' had taken place, where lower performing municipalities copied higher performers. In addition, Mr Giavini noted that, unlike packaging, biowaste recycling does not benefit from any extended producer responsibility scheme.

Francesc Giró from the Catalan Waste Agency (ARC) in Catalonia (Spain) described how most (85 %) municipalities in Catalonia have implemented separate biowaste collection schemes as a result of legal obligations, separate collection targets, strategic planning of infrastructure and economic tools. The latter included a landfill tax (at €10 per tonne in 2004 and at €30 per tonne of waste landfilled in 2017) and an incineration tax (set at €5 per tonne in 2008 and at €14.5 per tonne in 2017). Notably, most (96 %) of this tax is refunded to municipalities, with the rate dependent upon the amount and quality of biowaste that they collect. The rebate criteria are reviewed annually and published in a guide, with the level dependent upon the quality and quantity of biowaste collected. Those municipalities that recycle the most benefit from receiving a rebate greater than the cost of disposing of their residual waste.

Günther Langer, from the city of Munich in Germany, then highlighted the city's long-term experience of collecting biowaste. He explained how the city first started to collect biowaste using a three-bin system; a scheme that started in 1994 and was finalised in 1999. The original composting plant was supplemented with a dry anaerobic digestion plant in 2003, which was subsequently enlarged in 2008. At present green

waste, fruit and vegetables (VGF) is collected in biobins, but not cooked food. Overall, Munich has a recycling rate of 55%, with waste-to-energy accounting for 44% and landfilling only 1%. Mr Langer noted that ongoing awareness campaigns were an important part of the strategy, which included open days, allowing residents to visit the AD and recycling plants.

The final presentation of the afternoon session was given by **Pille Aarma** from Estonia. She noted that by increasing the landfill tax in 2011, the amount of mixed municipal waste sent to landfill decreased; however, this resulted in an increase in incineration, with the result that recycling rates stayed the same. Estonia has started to address this by introducing a regulation on municipal waste sorting, investing in new recycling centres where residents can bring their own waste, promoting home composting and worm composting in offices. A compost certification scheme has also been developed to provide independent certification of compost quality.

The final discussion session covered a range of topics, including TEEP, sewage sludge and the role of biodegradable plastics in facilitating biowaste collection. Concluding, **Henrik Lystad** noted that the examples presented demonstrate that municipalities can tailor separate collection and treatment systems to meet their individual circumstances. Local initiatives, coupled with binding EU targets for recycling and legal obligation for source separation of biowaste, can yield good results – there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Further information:

[Press release](#)

[Workshop presentations](#)

Contact

Dr Stefanie Siebert, Managing Director
European Compost Network
PHONE+49 234 438 944 7
EMAIL info@compostnetwork.info
WEB www.compostnetwork.info

About ECN

The European Compost Network (ECN) is the leading European membership organisation promoting sustainable recycling practices by composting and anaerobic digestion of organic resources and guarding over the quality and safe use of the recovered organic fertilisers/soil improvers.

The European Compost Network is a membership organisation with 67 members from 28 European countries. Members include all European bio-waste organisations and their operating plants, research, policy making, consultants and authorities. ECN represents 21 bio-waste organisations from 13 European countries, 26 companies producing bio-based products, 6 environmental NGOs, 11 academic (research) institutes in environmental, agricultural and natural sciences and three environmental agencies. Through its member organisations, ECN represents more than 3,500 experts and plant operators with a biological waste treatment capacity above 33 million tonnes.