

E U R O P E A N E C O N O M I C A R E A
FORUM OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

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Opinion on the revision of European waste policy, legislation and targets

Rapporteur: Gunnar Þorgeirsson

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities:

- A. Having regard to Annex XX of the EEA Agreement on the environment;
- B. Having regard to the European Commission's on-going review of European waste legislation and policy, in particular the waste targets contained in the Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC), the Landfill Directive (99/31/EC) and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (94/62/EC);
- C. Having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'The review of the European Union's key waste targets' (2013/C 280/09) and the position of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions on the review of the waste targets of 24 May 2013;
- D. Emphasising the key role played by local authorities in the implementation of European waste legislation and the creation, operation and financing of waste treatment and disposal infrastructures;
- E. Emphasising that local and regional authorities in the EEA EFTA countries Iceland and Norway face several challenges in waste management different to their counterparts in the European Union;
- F. Noting the reinforced subsidiarity principle set out in the Lisbon Treaty and its explicit reference to the local and regional dimension and self-government;
- G. Noting the proportionality principle as laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- H. Acknowledging the impact of European Union law on local and regional authorities in the EEA EFTA States through the EEA Agreement;
- I. Noting the role of the Forum as a body in the EFTA structure:
 1. Welcomes the European Commission's review of the European waste policy and legislation with the aim of reducing the negative environmental and health impacts of waste generation and management, preserving natural resources and promoting reuse and recycling;

2. Emphasises that waste prevention should be the priority and principal means of reducing the burden on the environment. Sustainable waste management should be encouraged, promoting the replacement of natural resources with materials produced from waste;
3. Is of the view that before the adoption of new waste targets, priority action should be taken at the source. Improving the design of products to be reusable, repairable and recyclable, and optimising packaging thus moving towards more effective waste prevention and the 'polluter pays' principle would benefit local authorities and tax payers by reducing the costs of waste management and creating opportunities for optimisation of waste services;
4. Stresses that proposals for more ambitious waste targets at the European level must take into consideration local and regional experiences of the implementation of current waste legislation and targets and the challenges in each region, even if transitional periods and intermediate targets are established;
5. Emphasises the need for certainty and clarity in waste legislation to help inform local decisions on investment and policy choices but stresses that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is not viable. Overly restrictive legislation may hinder innovation in waste management at the local level, (e.g. technical, organizational, communicational, financial innovation);
6. Calls for harmonized calculation methods, definitions and reporting in relation to all the EU waste directives in order to allow comparisons between countries and adequate assessment of the progress made in reaching waste targets;
7. Acknowledges that landfill diversion measures are necessary and should be implemented in line with the waste hierarchy but asks for understanding of the role of local authorities which requires their on-going use of landfills for emergencies and rest products from resource efficient incineration;
8. Calls for prevention measures to limit construction and demolition waste and to increase recycling and reuse of such materials;
9. Calls for increased cooperation of national actors involved in waste management and increased transparency regarding cost, statistics and treatment measures;
10. Emphasises that local and regional authorities, as the competent authorities and in line with the principle of subsidiarity, should be free to choose the most appropriate methods for environmentally friendly and efficient waste management adapted to local needs. Furthermore, as a service of general interest and a vital means to reach European targets on resource efficiency and renewable energy, waste management should not be challenged by market forces or general competition legislation;
11. Asks the EFTA Ministers to take into account the opinion of the Forum in future discussions on waste management.