

Europe still off mark on sustainability goals: report

March 3 2015, by Mariette Le Roux



Air pollution in Europe continued to wreak havoc, a new report says, with 430,000 premature deaths blamed on breathing in fine particulate matter in 2011

Europe could miss several key targets for safeguarding its species, water, air and land, said a study Tuesday that warned economic recovery would add to the pressure on natural resources.

While it has made great strides in recycling and greener energy, the

continent has failed to stop habitat destruction, overfishing and pollution, said a five-yearly assessment by the European Environmental Agency (EEA).

"(W)e continue to harm the natural systems that sustain our prosperity," warned EEA Executive Director Hans Bruyninckx.

The 28-nation European Union set itself the goal of living within ecological limits by 2050, but it was a "long way" from achieving this target, said the [report](#).

The task will get tougher if the global economy and population numbers swell in the decades to come, as forecast.

"These developments raise the question of whether the planet's ecological limits can sustain the economic growth upon which our consumption and production patterns rely," said the report.

Europe's ecological footprint—the area needed to provide resources and absorb waste—is already double its land area.

"Europe is not on track to meet its 2020 target of halting biodiversity loss," said the report.

Sixty percent of species assessed for the report, and 77 percent of habitat types, had a conservation status of "unfavourable".

While freshwater quality has improved, half of Europe's freshwater bodies were unlikely to meet the requirements for "good ecological status" in 2015, said the document.

More than 40 percent of rivers and coastal waters are affected by leaching of pesticides and fertilisers from farms, and 20-25 percent by

pollution at the source—factories and sewage and wastewater plants.



The report found that less than six percent of farmland in Europe was used for organic production in 2012

"Marine and coastal biodiversity is a particular area of concern," said the EEA, citing sea-floor damage, pollution, invasive species and acidification.

In the Mediterranean, 91 percent of assessed stocks were overfished in 2014.

The report included data on the EU plus Albania, Bosnia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Macedonia and Turkey.

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Recycling and energy

But there was good news too.

Consumers wasted less, with recycling rates rising in 21 countries from 2004-2012 and landfill rates declining in 27 of 31 countries measured.

Domestic resource consumption dropped from 16.7 tonnes per person in 2007 to 13.7 tonnes in 2012, partly due to a construction downturn in many countries.



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Fossil fuel use declined, said the report, but still accounted for three-quarters of EU energy supply.

It noted a 19-percent drop in greenhouse-gas emissions since 1990 despite a 45-percent increase in economic output.

Even so, current policies are "not sufficient" for achieving a 80-95 percent reduction goal by 2050.

The overall picture could have been bleaker had it not been for the financial downturn putting the brakes on consumption.

"The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent economic difficulties... contributed to the reductions in some environment pressures," said the report.

And it "remains to be seen whether all improvements will be sustained."

The environment industry, however, grew by more than 50 percent from 2000-2011.

It was one of the few sectors to flourish in terms of revenue and jobs since the [global financial crisis](#) erupted in 2008.

"While living within planetary limits is an immense challenge, there are huge benefits in responding to it," said Bruyninckx.

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