

Keynote statement by Margaret Beckett
on the
Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

1. I am very pleased to be here in Kiev to sign the Protocol for the UK. This is an important commitment, and it should do much to promote environmental protection throughout the UNECE Region. I congratulate the UNECE and all those who took part in the successful negotiations, and I would urge other countries - both Parties and non-Parties to Espoo - to sign.
2. In the UK we have built up a fair amount of experience of SEA over the past 10 years or so. Our aim has always been to integrate the environment into the mainstream of decision-making. We understand how useful international measures like the Protocol can be, in promoting environmental concerns and raising standards of assessment.
3. But signing up is only the first step. I would like here to stress the importance of getting implementation right. For the UK it is extremely important that we now concentrate on putting into effect those instruments we have agreed. We cannot go forward until we have implemented our existing commitments. We need to demonstrate the effectiveness of measures like the Protocol. Then more countries are likely to sign up.
4. We also support the Resolution on the Protocol to be signed today. This focuses our attention on what should happen next.
5. Firstly a task force will prepare proposals for decision in Croatia next year. Signatories will then agree priorities for implementation. I am therefore very pleased to announce that we have just made a contribution to funding the next Meeting of Parties in Croatia.
6. So what should the priorities be?
7. The UK thinks that implementation of the SEA Protocol should build on synergies with existing work under the parent Espoo Convention. We need to sort out the institutional arrangements, so that the relationship between the two instruments is clear. And we should take forward the important work by the compliance and implementation committees.
8. The UK has been heavily involved in developing these consensual approaches to putting into effect international commitments on the environment. We currently chair both the Espoo and the Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution Implementation Committees. We think it makes sense for the Espoo Implementation Committee to carry out the same work for the SEA Protocol. We are committed to taking what works and making it work better.
9. Another important element of the Protocol is its provisions on public participation. The UK has long experience of involving the public in decision-making, and its benefits are widely accepted. But the Protocol, like the SEA Directive, will extend such consultation across national frontiers. This will be a new experience for many of us.

10. The UK is providing funding and working closely with the Russian Federation and the NGO Ecoterra to produce guidance on public participation at project level in a transboundary context. The guidance will be completed later this year. We hope that will come to be accepted as good practice for international consultations, and we expect it to provide useful lessons for consultation on plans and programmes.
11. We also need to draw on the experience gained by the European Community in implementing the SEA Directive. Community-level guidance will be issued shortly. Later this summer, we in the UK will be publishing our own more detailed guidance on the Directive, following public consultation in our country. We look forward to sharing our experience with other Parties, especially the EECCA group of countries.
12. Let me conclude by repeating that the UK commends this Protocol. We look forward to hearing about effective implementation after careful consideration of priorities at the next meeting of the Environment for Europe Conference.