

# Consultation on the evaluation of the Environmental Noise Directive

## - EEB comments -

24 March 2016

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) represents over 150 citizens' environmental organizations throughout Europe.

The EEB believes that the Environmental Noise Directive provides a good basis for improving the health of EU citizens, bringing added value to their everyday life, and should not be repealed. We would also like to use the opportunity of the consultation to reiterate the comments we gave as part of the review of the Environmental Noise Directive in 2012 (full comments available [here](#)). These comments show how the Environmental Noise Directive could be even more effective in addressing noise problems throughout the EU.

### **1. Reducing noise at the source**

While one of the main objectives of the Environmental Noise Directive (END) is “to provide a basis for developing Community measures to reduce noise emitted by the major sources” there is nothing concrete in the END regarding how to reduce these specific sources of noise.

The END should include specific objectives and instruments for the reduction of noise from all sources and in particular transport. Source policies should be reviewed in parallel to the 5-year cycle of the END review or within shorter time frames, requiring that noise levels be reduced by a certain amount in each cycle. The Commission should be obliged to propose legislation whenever there are gaps or where current source measures are insufficient, ineffective or will take unacceptably long to have an effect. Also, the EU should have more a coherent approach across all its policies, e.g. in the field of aviation where traffic is expected to increase.

The need for the Commission to develop a comprehensive source policies framework, also requested by the European Parliament, is an absolute priority. We therefore call upon the Commission to set up a roadmap for tackling the sources of noise more effectively as well as taking up actions which are already behind schedule (see more details in our 2012 recommendations available [here](#)).

### **2. EU wide limits and targets for better health protection**

The experience of EU ambient air legislation over the last decade shows that EU limits provide a strong incentive for competent authorities to take the measures that protect people's health. In the case of noise, targets and limits based on health recommendations could provide a strong incentive to seriously tackle noise sources and develop effective measures in action plans, e.g. quiet road surfaces, quieter rail wagons and equipment, more regular railway maintenance, cycling and traffic management policies.

With the introduction of EU-wide limit or target values, the EU would provide the same right to all citizens of Europe, regardless of the place they live in. On top of being an effective way to improve people's health, the concept of limit values is a way for the EU to guarantee an individual right to all EU citizens: the right to live in areas which don't put their health at risk.

Most importantly, since they are expressed in a maximum number of dB, limit values have the advantage of being precise and measurable objectives. Whereas the attainment of general objectives (such as art.1 of the END) is hard to assess, limit values are objectives which can actually be measured.

**We therefore recommend that the European Commission considers the introduction of limit and/or trigger values within the END.** When doing so, the European Commission should make sure that these limits are designed for the purpose of protecting human health. In particular, we recommend the following:

- Limit or trigger values should be based on the latest health recommendations provided by the WHO;
- Limit or trigger values should focus on the protection of certain vulnerable groups and sensitive areas (e.g. schools, residential areas);
- Limit or trigger values should be developed so as to limit noise from specific sources such as traffic, aviation and railway noise;
- Particular attention should be given to frequency and intensity of peak or single-event noise levels as these can be particularly dangerous to health, e.g. around airports;
- Limit or trigger values should be binding in order to be effective. The introduction of ambitious binding trigger or limit values, together with a close monitoring of their enforcement by the European Commission, would guarantee action to be taken by Member States.

### **3. Smarter and enforceable action plans**

The implementation of the Directive so far has shown that the concept of action plans was one of the points of the Directive which could be significantly improved. The main problem lies in the absence of a clear definition and the fact that the concept and setting up of action plans are very much left to the discretion of competent authorities. This leads to many different situations throughout the EU and different levels of protection for its citizens.

To ensure a high and uniformed level of protection throughout the EU, we recommend to:

- **Adapt the definition of action plans** (art. 3) so as to make the reduction of excessive noise levels explicit and mandatory;
- Clarify the **objectives and content of action plans** in the text of the Directive. Action plans should include goals which are Specific Measurable Attainable Reportable Timely (SMART);
- **Clarify and strengthen the enforcement regime** of action plans and ensure that it is accompanied by sufficient means to make it effective;
- **Ensure that action plans are mandatory** when WHO recommended values are not met, e.g. when 40 dB  $L_{night}$  is exceeded<sup>1</sup>;
- Require action plans to exploit **synergies between noise, air and other relevant policies**. Bringing together noise, air, and climate policies in urban areas will permit subsequent benefits to society and may lower costs for local authorities;
- **Require competent authorities to assess the social and economic costs of noise pollution** more systematically. More generally, the END should include obligations for Member States to assess noise costs and take them into account in their policies. Such information should be made available and actively communicated to the public. The Commission shall provide a common methodology to assess the social costs of noise;

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<sup>1</sup> See “Night Noise Guidelines for Europe”, World Health Organisation, 2009, available here: [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/43316/E92845.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/43316/E92845.pdf).

- The Commission should provide guidance on best practices for noise management and **on how to assess the costs and benefits of various kinds of noise-reducing measure** (e.g. urban planning, traffic management, designating quiet areas, mitigation measures, limit values etc.).

#### **4. Improved mapping**

Maps are a useful tool to inform both decision makers and the general public about the nature and extent of noise problems on a territory. Maps should bring together all sources of noise and should seek to include additional information such as population density or social index.

The END could ensure the development of additional maps, such as:

- **Night-time maps** to reflect possible serious effects of night-time noise on EU citizens;
- **Annoyance maps:** to be researched and developed, in addition to current noise maps<sup>2</sup>;
- **Predictive mapping:** look into future developments such as the projected increase of traffic;
- Maps indicating the **number of people living** in areas where WHO minimum levels are not met;
- Maps with the **social index** of affected people.

#### **5. Updated definitions and reporting levels**

The implementation of the Directive has shown that many improvements could be made with regard to a number of definitions and reporting obligations, including:

- **Update noise indicators and reporting thresholds.** Currently, Member States are required to report noise exposure for levels equal or superior to 55dB for  $L_{den}$  and 50dB for  $L_{night}$ . These levels are in contradiction with the WHO Night Noise Guidelines for Europe which recommends the indicator value for  $L_{night}$  to be set at 40dB. The reporting bands in Annex VI should therefore be lowered accordingly.
- **Better define quiet areas.** Currently, the definition of quiet areas is very broad, and leaves competent authorities completely free in defining them, resulting in different levels of protection across the EU. The Directive should better define quiet areas, with common EU criteria on how to define them. In addition, the END should include a reference to the protection of quiet areas in open country, with indications on how to define these.
- **Better define action plans.** The definition of action plans shall make the inclusion of measures aimed at reaching WHO recommended levels explicit and mandatory, as detailed in the above section.
- **Update the definition of agglomerations.** Many neighbourhoods may be experiencing severe noise problems, but may not fall into the current definition of agglomeration under the END, i.e. having more than 100.000 inhabitants. We therefore recommend changing the definition of agglomeration so as to cover smaller agglomerations where noise exposure results in harmful effects.
- **Update the definition of airports.** Noise perception research shows that aviation noise is more disturbing than other forms of transport noise. However, the airports falling under the scope of the END are limited to only those which have more than 50.000 movements per year. Smaller airports are shown to be disturbing as well, and the seasonal variations in airport use means that this annoyance can be just as important as that at larger airports during some parts of the year. We therefore recommend a more precise and broader definition of airports, just as for agglomerations.

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<sup>2</sup> See EEA technical report No 11/2012 “Good practice guide on noise exposure and potential health effects” (p. 24), available here: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/good-practice-guide-on-noise>.

## **6. Public information and public participation**

The implementation of the END so far has shown that the consultation period on draft action plans varies drastically from one EU country to another (from 3 weeks to two months). The END should provide a minimum time for consultation to ensure equal treatment across the EU.

In many Member States, people do not know who to complain to regarding traffic noise - as opposed to neighborhood noise, for instance. Complaints therefore may not reflect the magnitude of traffic noise annoyance. The END could designate contact points, such as one or more noise ombudsmen who would be responsible for receiving traffic noise complaints, playing a mediatory role and advising competent authorities.

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