
States dig heels in over waste recycling targets

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European governments are continuing to resist pressure from MEPs to adopt EU-wide recycling targets for source-specific waste streams such as household and industrial waste, it emerged from a first round of talks on Monday to finalise a revision of the bloc's basic waste management law, which dates from 1975.

Last month the parliament's environment committee demanded ambitious targets for half of all household waste and 70 per cent of construction, demolition, industrial and manufacturing waste to be recycled by 2020 (EED 09/04/08 <http://www.endseuropedaily.com/25191>). The targets would be set in the revised EU framework waste directive.

EU governments had previously signalled opposition to these targets and suggested instead a much weaker recycling goal for 2020 of 40 per cent of combined glass, paper, metal and plastic waste from "households or other origins" (EED 09/05/08 <http://www.endseuropedaily.com/25391>). Member states proved unwilling to shift this stance on Monday.

Friends of the Earth waste campaigner Michael Warhurst claimed on Wednesday that the current EU average recycling rate for these materials is nearly 60 per cent, and that in 2004 no EU country failed to achieve a rate of 40 per cent. "Environment ministers would look pretty stupid if they signed up to a new target that every member state is already achieving", he told ENDS.

Sources close to the negotiations say the parliament's rapporteur MEP, Dr Caroline Jackson, could persuade the council to increase its recycling target to 50 per cent by 2020, but this is unlikely to assuage critics. "The key is that the parliament doesn't go for the deal and moves into conciliation talks", Dr Warhurst said.

Several governments, including Denmark, which incinerates much of its waste, are understood to oppose the parliament's formulation of the target because it would require the separate collection and composting of biodegradable waste. Jacques Hoffenberg of Waste Denmark said composting was costly and offers no great environmental benefit over anaerobic digestion or incineration with energy recovery.

"You will not, for the time being, see the council adopting stricter recycling targets than those currently on the table. Many countries have already said they would prefer to stick with the 1975 directive than move an inch more", Mr Hoffenberg said.