

The EPA Network

Sharing experiences across Europe



European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies

EPA 
Network



European Network of the Heads
of Environment Protection Agencies

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EPA Network – The European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies

Evolution and structure



EPA Network Mission

To share experiences at a strategic level on the implementation of environmental policy and state of the environment in Europe

The EPA Network is an informal grouping bringing together the heads of environment protection agencies and similar bodies across Europe. The Network exchanges views and experiences on issues of common interest to organisations involved in the practical day-to-day implementation of environmental policy, assessing the state of the environment and communication of environmental issues.

Environmental policy is one of the most important and far-reaching areas of EU legislation. The vast majority of national environmental policies and laws have their origins in EU law. The Network is therefore in a unique position to provide vision and advice on European environmental issues.

There were 26 countries present at the first meeting of the Network in 2003. Since then the number of countries has expanded to 33, comprising 39 organisations in total. This includes West Balkan countries that also benefit from the chance to share experiences on environmental issues and implementation of EU legislation. The Network works closely with the European Commission as well as with other networks with complementary roles such as the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) and European Network of Heads of Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA).

Evolution

The idea to establish a network of environment protection agencies came about in the summer of 2002. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and European Environment Agency (EEA) identified a need to create a network where heads of environment agencies across Europe could share experiences. This proposal was supported by the Environment Agency of England & Wales and also Italy and preparation began for the inaugural meeting to be held in Copenhagen in November 2003.

It was decided at this meeting that the Network should have an **informal character** and that all European countries could have membership and should decide themselves which relevant agencies should participate. Participation would be self-funded and plenary meetings would take place twice a year. Importantly, it was agreed that the European Commission would be invited to

participate in the Network as an observer. This would help connect the implementers with the policymakers.

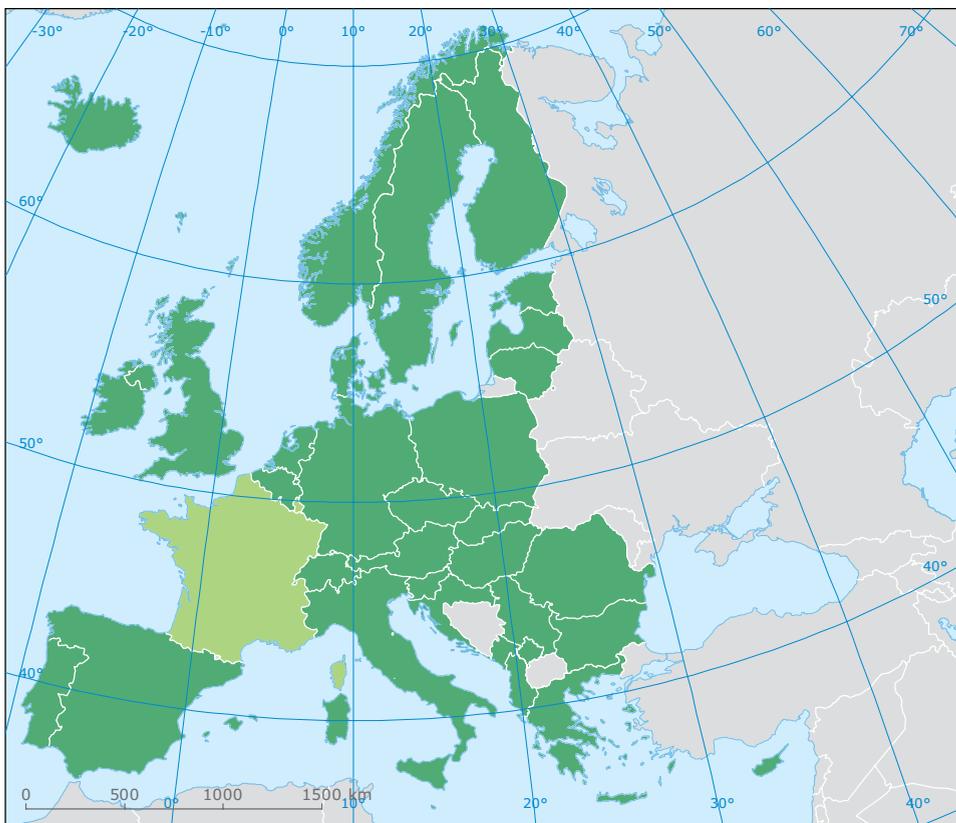
Jacqueline McGlade – Executive Director, European Environment Agency



“The need for greater cooperation amongst EPAs was rapidly becoming clear, but how to do it? This was the question I encountered on my arrival at the EEA in 2003. Now 10 years on it is such a great pleasure to see how this idea has developed from a fledgling group into a network that strengthens by the day to deliver a healthier and better environment for Europe.”



Membership of the EPA Network (2013)

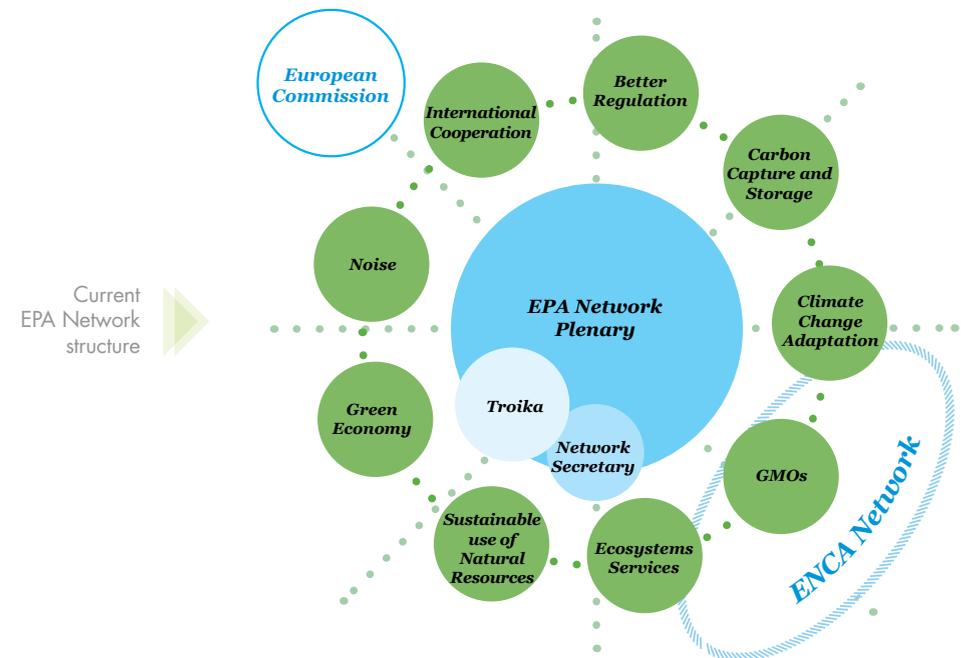


● EPA Network member countries
● Ad-hoc member countries

Structure of the Network

At an early stage it was agreed that a steering committee (Troika) would be beneficial to give the Network a strategic direction. The EEA agreed to provide secretarial support. It was decided that the Network would consider coordination, information sharing and advice to the European Commission on environment policy implementation and that it would be beneficial to set up so-called interest groups to look in more detail at specific topics outside the plenary meetings.

The EPA Network structure has developed over time and remains flexible in order to meet evolving needs. The illustration below shows the current structure of the Network, with the plenary supported by interest groups and by the secretariat and Troika. There are also links to the European Commission and joint working with other relevant networks.





Will Fawcett – EPA Network Secretary

“The roles of EPAs in Europe differ greatly, so the Network provides a unique chance for heads to consider a wide range of topics from different perspectives. My job is to make that as easy as possible with efficient planning, issue spotting and regular clear communication.”



Secretariat

The Network has one full-time secretary whose job it is to coordinate the Network, arrange the plenary meetings, support the interest groups and maintain the website and communications. The secretary also identifies issues for discussion and liaises with other relevant networks and organisations. Currently the secretary is seconded from one of the member organisations and is based at the EEA in Copenhagen.

Troika

The Troika is made up of the hosts of each of the preceding, present and future plenary meetings and provides a strategic steer for the Network. It ensures there is regular communication between the plenary meetings of the Network and can deal with any ongoing issues. Troika meetings are held by teleconference and just before plenary meetings to minimise costs and time required.

Vanya Grigorova – Executive Director of the Bulgarian EPA, and host of the plenary in autumn 2012, described the role of the Troika

“Passing the torch from the previous host to the next one smoothly, leading the next one on the trodden path of the Network’s traditions and experience... helping the organisers to develop adequately the topics and the agenda as well as to reflect all the top-interest issues of the many and varying members of the Network.”



Plenary meetings

The plenary sets the strategic direction of the Network and is held biannually in one of the member countries.

As well as considering and approving the outputs from the interest groups, the plenary discusses issues of strategic importance such as improving implementation of environmental legislation, as well as monitoring and assessing the state of the environment. The plenary has recently agreed a position on priorities for a 7th EAP (1) and contributed to the review of EU water policy as well as considering emerging issues such as ecosystems services and shale gas regulation. The plenary is where the EPA heads have the chance to meet and discuss issues informally. Around 45–55 participants take part in plenary meetings. Participation at a senior level by the European Commission provides enormous benefit, both to discuss recent and upcoming policy developments and to give feedback on challenges and successes.

(1) 7th Environment Action Programme of the European Commission

Case study – Working in plenary – the 7th EAP

John Seager – Head of Environment Strategy at the Environment Agency in England – on the development of an EPA Network position on the 7th EAP



“This is a really good example of Network members working together to influence the development of European environmental policy. As the term of the 6th EAP was coming to an end there was a debate on whether it should be followed by a 7th EAP, and if so, what issues it needed to focus on. In plenary discussion, members agreed that the Network should make a contribution to the emerging debate on priorities for a 7th EAP.

A working group was set up to develop ideas. We held meetings with senior

officials in the Commission. We contributed to workshops and conferences which were influential in shaping emerging thinking, such as the European Conference “Towards a genuine 7th Environment Action Programme”, organised by the Belgian Presidency.

In 2010 the Network wrote to Commissioners Potočník and Hedegaard with initial views on why a 7th EAP was important and the main priorities to be included. Following a request for more information and examples from the Commission, we developed and agreed a more comprehensive position paper with inputs from organisations across the Network. This was received very positively by the Commission.

When the Commission published its proposal for a 7th EAP, “Living well within the limits of our planet”, in November 2012, it was gratifying to see that the majority of the issues that the Network had highlighted as priorities were included in the proposal. It was a great experience to work with so many different organisations across Europe to develop and agree a shared and influential position on the development of this important policy instrument.”



Interest groups

The EPA Network arranges its work on specific topics through various interest groups. Examples of current (2013) working interest groups are:





Any Network member can propose the establishment of an interest group and the work may be carried out over a fixed time frame or be on-going, as long as there is sufficient interest. Members try to ensure that participation in the Network is a low cost activity, therefore work is carried out by email and teleconference in addition to face to face meetings.

Examples of some interest groups that have completed their work include agriculture, environment and health, contaminated sites and soil protection, performance and evaluation and quality management.

The tasks of an interest group range from a simple forum for exchanging good practice examples and sharing experiences, to a group trying to promote specific issues and engage with policymakers. Interest groups consider emerging issues and discuss national approaches which help to raise awareness. In 2012, over 150 experts from EPAs and other relevant organisations, including the European Commission, took part in interest group meetings.

A number of interest groups engage directly with the European Commission and share their knowledge as day to day practitioners in implementing environmental measures and assessing the state of the environment. Although the focus is primarily on EU policy, the interest groups also provide an important contribution to work at the global level, such as that carried out by UNEP ⁽²⁾ and OECD ⁽³⁾.

Interest groups report on their activities to the plenary meetings and any outputs from the groups are discussed and approved.

⁽²⁾ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
⁽³⁾ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Case study – Interest Group on Traffic Noise Abatement

Urs Walker – Co-chair of IGNA from the Federal Office of the Environment in Switzerland

“The Interest Group on Traffic Noise Abatement (IGNA) is a successful forum to share information between colleagues from different Environment Agencies. IGNA provides a great opportunity to learn from each other, to present good practice examples and discuss current and future noise abatement measures and strategies.”

In 2011 and 2012 the interest group concentrated its work on road traffic noise abatement. Particular focus was set on the ongoing discussion in the EU regarding noise level regulation for cars and trucks. As a result of the discussions, the EPA Network sent letters to the European Commission and the European Parliament committees on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety; Transport and Tourism and Internal Market; and Consumer Protection, asking for tighter noise emission regulations of vehicles in the EU.

Case study – Interest Group on Contaminated Sites and Soil Protection

The Interest Group on Contaminated Sites and Soil Protection exchanged case studies regarding the selection process of remediation technologies and related costs and benefits in EU countries. It helped the EPAs involved to achieve a better

understanding of the planning process at national and European level with respect to gaps and/or barriers associated to soil protection policies and triggered inputs into successive projects in the EU’s Seventh Framework Programme for Research

The roles of EPAs in Europe



Case study – Interest Group on Climate Change Adaptation

Jelle van Minnen – PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency

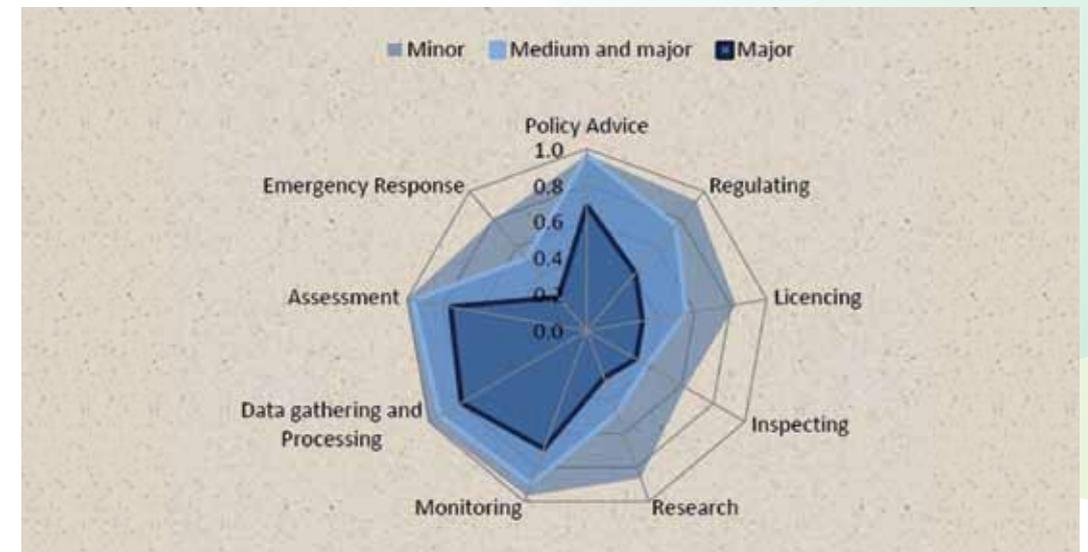
The Interest Group on Climate Change Adaptation was established in 2004 to exchange information and experiences in the area of adaptation to climate change, for example on good practices, and to develop national and European adaptation strategies. Furthermore, the interest group discusses relevant scientific challenges and investigates and stimulates possible collaborations between countries. The group frequently exchanges information with the European Environment Agency and the European Commission, and the members share the knowledge gained in the day-to-day practice of considering and implementing measures in the field of climate change adaptation.

Most recently, the interest group prepared a letter that was sent to Connie Hedegaard,

the European Commissioner for Climate Action, to highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposed EU climate change adaptation strategy. In her response, the Commissioner expressed her appreciation of the EPA Network support in general and of the fact that the Network was willing to also continue this support in the future. The Commissioner also stated that previous submissions from the group on this topic had been very welcome, for example members of the interest group actively participated in the development of CLIMATE-ADAPT, a European platform on the issue of Climate Change Adaptation. The interest group also had multiple meetings with policymakers within the European Commission, who have participated in some interest group meetings in the past.

There is a common understanding among the members of the EPA Network on the strong influence of EU environmental legislation. EU environmental legislation is transposed and implemented in Member States and to some extent in candidate countries, European Economic Area states and Switzerland according to prevailing national legislative frameworks.

These national environmental governance structures vary widely across Europe. Therefore EPAs can have a wide range of roles and tasks depending on the national context. These range from policy advice, environmental monitoring, data gathering and assessment, to regulating, licencing and inspecting. The extent of the EPA role (minor, medium, major) in each area is shown in the figure below.



Extent of EPA roles in key activities



The main fields of work for EPAs are air, freshwater and waste. They also deal substantively with climate change and soil. A number of EPAs have responsibilities for nature and land use/spatial planning. Energy, agriculture, and health are also covered.

In general, EPAs have quite strong ties to the EEA as around 60% provide members to the EEA Management Board and 85% of them provide the National Focal Point (NFP) to the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet), the partnership network of the EEA and its member and cooperating countries.

Around half of the EPAs are involved in IMPEL and some 20% are represented in ENCA. The table overleaf provides a summary of relevant European environmental networks. The EPA Network and its members are also increasing their engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, for example the judiciary and prosecutors.

Effective environmental governance at all levels is crucial in maintaining and improving the European environment. This makes the opportunity to come together and exchange information and experiences all the more important.

Network	Full title	Established	Organisations involved	Network type	Level of participation	Topics covered
EPA Network	European Network of the Heads of Environment Protection Agencies	2003	EPAs only (ministries where no EPA exists)	Informal	Heads/ Directors of EPAs. Technical experts in interest groups	Strategic issues and emerging topics dealt with by Plenary on an ad hoc basis. Technical discussions in interest groups on topics from better regulation to natural resources and noise
ENCA	The Heads of European Nature Conservation Agencies	2007	Nature Conservation Agencies and EPAs (ministries where no EPA exists)	Informal	Heads/ Directors of Nature Conservation Agencies. Technical experts in interest groups	Nature/ conservation issues, technical discussions in interest groups on topics from sustainable land use to biodiversity
IMPEL	European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law	1992	Relevant authorities for permitting, inspection and enforcement, includes ministries, EPAs and regional authorities	Formal	Heads of inspection departments and inspectors, permitters and lawyers.	Improving implementation and enforcement of environmental law. Clusters on permitting and inspection and transfrontier shipments of waste
Eionet	The European environment information and observation network	1994	European Environment Agency (EEA) and organisations from its member and cooperating countries	Formal	Technical experts dealing with environmental data, information and assessments from national organisations	Wide range of issues

Overview of selected environmental networks in Europe

A good example of informal networking

A good example of informal networking



The EPA Network is a unique example of informal cooperation at chief executive/director level. It is the only network bringing together the heads of environment protection agencies in Europe. Over the last 10 years the Network has established itself as a respected voice on environmental issues.

Extensive cooperation in the Network, both in plenary meetings and interest groups, means that EPAs have a chance to share experiences and learn from others within Europe on a wide range of common environmental issues. These opportunities are often unavailable to national agencies, so the Network helps build capacity and contributes to a level playing field across Europe.

Philippe D'Hondt – Head of Department of the Flemish Environment Agency

“The informal character of the Network is a great asset. This allows us to discuss environmental problems and solutions in an outspoken way, without being hampered by official positions. This provides a better insight into the matter and improves mutual understanding.”



Many members have built good relationships within the Network allowing informal cooperation to continue outside the regular meetings.

Campbell Gemmell is the head of the South Australia EPA and former CEO of the Scottish EPA (2003–2012). He has been able to draw on contacts made during his time participating in the EPA Network to contribute to the Australasian approach to regulation, feeding this in to the Australasian Environmental Law Enforcement and Regulators network (AELERT) as well as to specific work on smelting, wind energy and regulatory policy.

“I found the Network invaluable on several fronts: for formulating policy around implementation issues, including critically, engaging with the Commission, as well as private exchanges of views and experience, benchmarking, intelligence sharing and exploring best practice and challenges in a safe, informed context with one’s peers. The Network’s statements on good practice and barriers [to good environmental regulation], as well as work on carbon capture and storage for example, were ground breaking.”

A good example of informal networking



The Network has provided a platform for better coordinated engagement between the EPAs, the EEA and the European Commission.

The website of the EPA Network has grown from a platform for exchanging files to a useful resource both to the Network itself as well as to other interested stakeholders. The site also provides a forum for EPAs to promote their national work to a wider audience.

Encouraging this cooperation through partnerships and sharing of information and experiences is a successful model that is being explored in other parts of the globe.

Laura Burke – Director General of the Environment Protection Agency in Ireland

“A key benefit for me of the EPA Network is the interaction with other Environment Agencies and the ability outside the plenary meetings to engage on how different Agencies and countries have different approaches to the implementation of the same European Directives.”



A powerful voice

The aim of the Network is to contribute to maintaining and improving the environment in Europe and, in doing so, to create a level playing field.

The combined voice of the members of the Network can provide a very powerful

message. This has been communicated through position papers, Network statements and consultation responses. Examples of these outputs have been highlighted throughout this brochure.

Karl Falkenberg – Director General for the Environment, European Commission

“The European Commission values the EPA Network both for its strategic advice and its ability to mobilise useful exchanges with Commission staff at the more technical and operational levels. As the Commission’s proposal for a 7th Environment Action Programme recognises, we need strong network cooperation – including across different networks – if we are to meet all our many implementation challenges. Representing, as it does, such a range



of expertise and covering such a range of environmental sectors, the EPA Network has the potential to help deliver the right results across a very broad spectrum – from the control of pollution from large industrial installations to the wider protection of the environmental media. I believe that the Network can play an especially useful role in ensuring that a range of different functions – monitoring, permitting, inspections, and data processing – work together in smooth and effective way.”

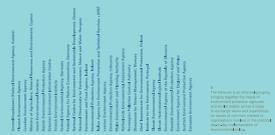


Case study

The Better Regulation Interest Group produced three statements between 2005 and 2008, identifying better regulation practices and setting out a vision for future regulation. The group has had regular contact with the European Commission, for example on the Environment Action Programmes and on examining the implementation of environmental directives. The group developed a checklist with the IMPEL network on the practicability and

enforceability of new and existing legislation. IMPEL used this checklist to examine the recast proposal of the Waste Electronics and Electrical Equipment Directive and the Waste Shipments Regulation.

The Contribution of Good Environmental Regulation to Competitiveness
Paper by the Network of Heads of European Environment Protection Agencies
November 2005



Stefano Laporta – Director General of ISPRA in Italy

“A major advantage for me of the Network is the constructive discussion with other Heads of EPAs on the interaction between policy support to our Ministries and the challenges of operational management to achieve greater effectiveness in our research and assessment work, providing visible benefits to our citizens and to other stakeholders.”



The Network will continue to strive to improve the environment in Europe through cooperation of its members. It will work with other environmental networks and organisations to ensure that new approaches and solutions to common problems can be found.

Member organisations



Albania

Agency of Environment and Forestry of Albania



Austria

Federal Environment Agency



Belgium

The Flemish Environment Agency (VMM)



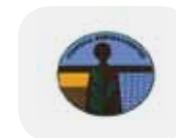
Bulgaria

Executive Environment Agency



Croatia

Croatian Environment Agency



Cyprus

Environment Service Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment Republic of Cyprus



Czech Republic

CENIA – Czech Environmental Information Agency



Denmark

Danish Environmental Protection Agency



Estonia

Estonian Environment Information Centre



Europe

European Environment Agency



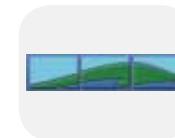
Finland

Finnish Environment Institute – SYKE



Germany

Federal Environment Agency/Umweltbundesamt



Greece

Greece National Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development – EKPA



Hungary

Hungarian National Institute for Environment



Iceland

Environment Agency of Iceland



Ireland

Environmental Protection Agency

Member organisations



Italy

Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA)



Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99

Kosovo Environment Protection Agency



Latvia

Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre



Lithuania

Lithuania Environmental Protection Agency



Malta

Malta Environment and Planning Authority



Montenegro

Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro



Netherlands

PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency



Norway

Norwegian Environment Agency



Poland

Poland Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection



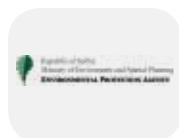
Portugal

Portugal Environment Agency



Romania

Romania - The National Environmental Protection Agency



Serbia

Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Environmental Protection Agency



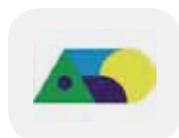
Slovakia

Slovak Environmental Agency



Slovakia

Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute



Slovenia

Slovenian Environment Agency



Spain

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and the Environment



Spain

Iñobe, the Basque Environmental Agency



Sweden

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency



Switzerland

The Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)



UK - England

The Environment Agency



UK - Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Environment Agency



UK - Scotland

Scottish Environment Protection Agency



UK - Wales

Natural Resources Wales

* The Directorate for Nature Management and the Climate and Pollution Agency will be merged to form the Norwegian Environment Agency with effect from 1 July 2013. The logo was not available at the time of printing.



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