Views by the International Solid Waste Association on the need for the European Commission to develop measures to support the sustainable management of biowastes

22 February 2005

This paper sets out a summary of the views of the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) on the development of initiatives by the European Commission on the management of biowastes. It has been compiled by its Biological Treatment Working Group, which comprises international experts on biological waste treatment methods (such as composting and anaerobic digestion).

ISWA submitted a detailed paper to the Commission on the 19 February 2004 setting out its reasons for urging the Commission to develop appropriate policy instruments as a matter of priority. This supplementary paper summarizes these key issues.

ISWA believes that the principal reasons for an urgent call for European-wide policy instruments governing the management of biowastes are as follows:

- To ensure the safe and effective handling and treatment of biowastes in a range of biological treatment plants
- To promote the production of quality composts and application to land to benefit soils in line with the developing Soil Strategy. This will involve the appropriate promotion of source separated biowastes whenever feasible
- To provide clear legislative drivers in order to facilitate strategic investment decisions by the public and private sectors. These are needed to develop suitable biowaste collection systems and biological treatment facilities to meet the Article 5 Landfill Directive diversion targets

The recycling of organic matter through source separation and biological treatment is in line with current thinking set out in current Commission’s thematic strategies on sustainability and environmental protection. Drivers are required to move materials up the waste hierarchy, whilst ensuring that contaminated or residual wastes are managed and disposed of in a sustainable manner.

A policy instrument on biowaste management is required in order to develop integrated waste management systems that meet current and future waste needs of member states, whilst maximizing the benefits of returning organic matter back to land.

Failure to develop this will mean that:

- Investment in collection and treatment infrastructure will be unduly slow, as investors will deem the financial risks to be too great. Many member states are in danger of either implementing unsuitable systems, or of failing to invest at all which will result in net environmental disbenefits

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1 The thematic strategies: on soil protection, on prevention and recycling of waste, on sustainable use of natural resources and the CAP reform that states the need to maintain soil organic matter.
• There will not be a common platform for local authorities, investors and waste managers to plan and finance appropriate biowaste management systems. This is important considering changing regional political situations within many member states that often thwart long-term strategic planning

• There will not be a ‘critical mass’ to develop collection, treatment and end product marketing initiatives

**ISWA welcomes the opportunity to work with the Commission to assist in the development of appropriate policy instruments to promote the sustainable, integrated management of biowastes. It specifically requests clarification on the proposed timescales by the Commission for such work.**