

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AGREEMENTS BETWEEN FARMER ORGANISATIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE EXCESSIVE NUTRIENTS IN FLEMISH AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

The Decree of 15/6/1994 (Belgian Official Journal, 8/7/1994) on Environmental Policy Agreements provides a legal basis for agreements between, on the one hand, the Flemish Region, represented by the Flemish Government and, on the other hand, one or more umbrella organisations, having legal personality and representing enterprises which either operate in the same field of business or are faced with a common environmental problem, or are located in the same area, for the purpose of preventing environmental pollution, limiting or removing the consequences thereof, or of promoting effective management of the environment.

A growing sense of environmental awareness on the part of industry, as well as a conscious attempt by the authorities to secure voluntary co-operation with the private sector, constitute novel elements in environmental policy as it has developed over the past few years. It is in this context that environmental policy agreements have seen the light of day, i.e. voluntary agreements between the authorities and private industry under which the latter undertake to make a determined effort to counter certain forms of environmental pollution (Bocken & Ryckbost, 1996).

The use of environmental policy agreements in order to supplement the more traditional environmental policy instruments has in recent years become increasingly widespread throughout the world. Nearly twenty such agreements have already been concluded in Belgium, and cover such areas as reducing the amount of mercury contained in primary batteries, scaling down the use of CFCs, reductions in emissions of SO₂ and NO_x in electricity generating plants, phosphates in detergents, the waste caused by packaging, and so on. At this moment there is an intention declaration to conclude an environmental policy agreement in the framework of the Decree on the Protection of the Environment against the Pollution caused by Fertilisers (Belgian Official Journal, 23/01/1991), between on the one hand two farmer organisations (ABS Algemeen Boerensyndicaat and BB Boerenbond) and BEMEFA (BEroepsvereniging van MEngvoederFABricanten) and on the other hand the Flemish Government. Numerous other organisations are asking to conclude an environmental policy agreement or to join the environmental policy agreement wherefore the intention declaration is signed.

Objectives

Environmental policy agreements can not replace the existing legislation or regulations nor depart from them in a less strict sense. In other words an

environmental policy agreement has to realise at least the same objectives as for seen in the Decree on the Protection of the Environment against the Pollution caused by Fertilisers.

The mentioned environmental policy agreement become engaged, as described in the general objectives, especially to strive for:

- The contribution from agricultural sources becomes lower and stays lower than 50 mg nitrates per l groundwater and surface freshwater;
- The emission of ammonia from agriculture in 2002 will be reduced until 60 % of the ammonia emission in 1990.

Policy

The option taken by the Flemish minister of Environment, Theo Kelchtermans, and the Flemish Region to realise the objectives of the Decree on the Protection of the Environment against the Pollution caused by Fertilisers by flanking the Decree with an environmental policy agreement is to create and stimulate the engagement of the agricultural sector to realise the objectives. The own responsibility of the farmers organisations, the producers of animal manure (animal breeders) and the users of animal manure, to solve the problem and to realise the objectives is centralised in this way.

This policy is original, contemporary and has enormous perspectives. The participating organisations, producers and users of animal manure are responsible to realise in an active way the general objectives of the environmental policy agreement with result commitment.

The Decree on the Protection of the Environment against the Pollution caused by Fertilisers stimulates the producer and/or user of animal manure to realise the environmental objectives in a way adapted to his farm. Some important

elements are: to tackle the nutrient problem at the source by increasing fodder efficiency, to reduce the emission of ammonia, the rational use of fertilisers. The environmental policy agreement supports also this stimulating policy.

Elaboration

Every producer of animal manure and every user of animal manure have for several aspects of the Decree the possibility to choice between the standard approach or the real declaration of nutrients. In other words there are several justified ways to reach the same objectives, but which way is taken, always the same result is required (result commitment). To not damage the equality principle every producer and/or user of animal manure who choose for the real declaration of nutrients can fulfil this declaration by environmental policy agreement or by an individual nutrient balance.

With the environmental policy agreement the farmer organisations are called to engage their selves to reach more than simply the benefits provided in the Decree. Some examples: Replacing the standard excretion norms by the real excretion norms by proving an excretion balance is directly rewarded in the Decree. Using and proving a soil balance can also be directly rewarded in the Decree because the user of animal manure can choose within certain limits the fertilisation norm for animal manure. On the contrary, the use of a farm gate balance has no direct benefit in the Decree for the farmer, but has an important role to play to create insight in the farm management and in environmental friendly farm management. In this way a farm gate balance has an important role in realising the objectives of the Decree on the Protection of the Environment against the Pollution caused by Fertilisers. If the agricultural sector takes his responsibility for hundred percent it can be expected that all engagements are full filled: those with direct and those with indirect benefits in the Decree.

Engagements

The most important engagements in this environmental policy agreement with regard to the farmer organisations are:

- to inform their members about farm management with regard to good agricultural practice, to tackle the nutrient problem at the source, to reduce the loss of nutrients, to make nutrient balances and the control of nitrate residues at field level;
- to set up a non-profit association with among other things the task to inform their members as mentioned above;
- to strive for the realisation of a capacity 8 million kg of P_2O_5 of animal manure treatment in January 2003, and to hold this capacity in operation;
- to strive for a yearly export outside Flanders of 2 million kg P_2O_5 from animal manure;
- to strive for a reduction of the P_2O_5 -production with 4 million kg and a reduction of N-production with 10 %, both by tackle at the source.

The most important engagements in this environmental policy agreement with regard to the Flemish government are:

- to subsidise the organisations;
- to support at maximum particular initiatives for manure storage and manure treatment;
- to help striving for agreements with neighbouring country's and region to realise 2 million kg P_2O_5 of manure export;
- to enlarge the measurement main of surface water from the Flemish Environmental Agency (VMM Vlaamse MilieuMaatschappij) with specific "agricultural" measuring points, where possible present pollution with nitrates is demonstrable from agriculture; and to pass the results of this

measurement main to the farmer organisations in behalf of their task to inform the farmers about good agricultural practice, etc...;

- to draw up the rules for nutrient balances;
- to create the possibility for scientific research with the aim to translate technically the norm of 50 mg nitrate per litre ground- and surface water in a nitrate residue norm in the soil.

References

Codification of Environmental Law. Draft Decree in Environmental Policy.
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