



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 26 February 2009 (27.02)  
(OR. fr)**

**6969/09**

**ENV 147  
DEVGEN 54**

**NOTE**

---

from : General Secretariat  
to : Delegations  
Subject : The importance of sustained action against methane  
- Information from the French delegation

---

Delegations will find in annex information provided by the French delegation on the above subject.  
The Council meeting on the environment will examine it under "Other business" at its meeting on  
2 March 2009.

**The importance of sustained action against methane**

**- Note from the French delegation -**

The French delegation would draw the attention of the Presidency and of the other delegations to the major importance of methane-reduction policies in the context of the fight against climate change.

Methane is a more powerful greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>. While CO<sub>2</sub> can persist in the atmosphere for several centuries, methane disappears in a few decades. Its impact therefore varies over time: over twenty years its warming power is seventy times that of CO<sub>2</sub>; over a hundred years, only twenty-four times; and over five hundred years only seven times. Methane's contribution to warming is therefore much greater in the short term. The action taken to reduce it over the next ten to twenty years will be crucial in preventing world temperatures' exceeding a dangerous threshold, such as 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures. Accordingly, sustained action to reduce methane emissions will be an important factor in restricting the scope and speed of warming over the next two decades even if its effect on long-term stabilisation - dominated by CO<sub>2</sub> - is limited.

It was agreed in the 1990s that heating power over a hundred years (twenty-four for methane) would be used for the preparation of inventories of the developed countries' emissions and targets for the purposes of the Kyoto Protocol. Certain developing countries (Brazil in particular) challenge that choice and propose using a period of five hundred years instead, which would have the effect of reducing the calculation of their emissions as methane plays a larger part in their inventories than in those of the developed countries. New Zealand is an exception among the developed countries and supports the proposal of changing to a timetable of five hundred years. Changing the weighting used in the inventories and taking a period of twenty years would give greater weight to methane, but would be unacceptable to most parties to the Convention. Nor is it a question of reducing the impact of essential short-term action on CO<sub>2</sub> but rather of supplementing it. A distinction must be made between medium- and long-term inventories on the one hand and immediate action to reduce actual emissions on the other.

Unlike CO<sub>2</sub> today, methane has an economic value. Projects to recover and exploit methane from dumps, coal mines and oil wells are generally profitable even in the absence of a price for carbon: there are already numerous methane projects in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) (and the additionality of those projects is sometimes challenged). There is nothing to suggest that the rules of the climate system restrict action to reduce methane in those important sectors. It is not, however, always sufficient to be economically profitable to initiate action and a number of initiatives have been launched to strengthen action - including the "Methane to Markets" partnership launched by the United States in 2004 and the "Global Gas Flaring Reduction Initiative" of the World Bank. It would therefore be advisable to consider speeding those initiatives up in the light of scientific estimates of the short-term importance of methane.

The situation is different in agriculture, a major source of methane in the industrialised countries and particularly in the developing countries. Exploitation of methane produced by livestock and rice fields is not a practical option; on the other hand, there are very productive methods in use in Asia and in Africa regarding rice, without its being necessary to flood fields and therefore emitting less methane. That is an area in which action and rapid and enhanced information would be justified.

In conclusion, the French delegation believes it is necessary to recognise the particular importance of concerted action to reduce methane in the short term (2010, 2020) in order to restrict warming between now and 2050 and avoid crossing thresholds irrevocably. It suggests that the EU consider the arrangements that would make it possible to maintain and even enhance, in the Copenhagen agreement, incentives to exploit methane in industry, the energy-production sector, and waste management. In that connection, mention must in particular be made of the recovery and use of the methane emitted by waste storage. The French delegation also proposes examining an initiative that would help farmers in developing countries to reduce emissions of methane and other greenhouse gases (N<sub>2</sub>O) by agriculture - there is great potential for reductions between 2010 and 2030 - by searching for synergies to ensure food safety, underground storage of carbon and adaptation.

---