



## 4th Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform meeting

Thursday, 20 April 2023, 10h30-16h30

### Summary Report

#### 1. Introduction

Ahead of the second anniversary of the Zero Pollution Action Plan (ZPAP) in May, the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform can take stock of the progress made in achieving the EU's zero pollution ambition. Given the transboundary nature of pollution, the focus is to ensure that the zero pollution approach makes a real difference to citizens and nature across countries and regions in Europe. This Platform meeting set out to explore collaborative efforts to implement digital, local and circular solutions supporting the Zero Pollution agenda. These were some of the [key messages](#) shared by the co-chairs, **Veronica Manfredi** (*Director on Zero Pollution, European Commission, Directorate General for the Environment, DG ENV C*) and **Marieke Schouten** (*Alderman of the municipality of Nieuwegein, the Netherlands, and Member of the Committee of the Regions*), in welcoming the members and observers of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform.

#### 2. Towards zero pollution from production and consumption

The ZPAP's Flagship 4, '*Facilitating zero pollution choices*', has a holistic approach at its core and aims to facilitate zero pollution choices in production and consumption with concrete legislative initiatives. This is to lay the groundwork for economic operators to make efforts to increase their environmental sustainability, reducing pollution via communication, labelling schemes, verification, enforcement, and monitoring. In this context **Aurel Ciobanu Dordea** (*Director, DG ENV B on Circular Economy*) presented the ambition and progress of the Circular Economy Action Plan in the wider political context, highlighting the interplay between the Circular Economy and Zero Pollution, and the significant synergies that exist between the two. The EU Ecolabel, the proposal for the Green Claims Directive, and 'Safe and Sustainable by Design' were among the concrete examples used to illustrate the EU initiatives and actions contributing to this ambition (also see the [presentation](#))

The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform (ZPSP) shared thoughts on how the circularity approach can be further enhanced, including questions on whether the ambition regarding circularity and zero pollution can be aligned with existing initiatives such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism or EU strategic autonomy (e.g. on phosphorus recycling). Moreover, the importance of not overlooking the application of existing EU regulatory instruments was also emphasised.

Several stakeholders also contributed to discussions on the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP). There was widespread support for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as a critical instrument for enforcing the PPP. At the same time, some stakeholders raised concerns about its insufficient utilisation and enforcement in many Member States. The Commission was urged to be more ambitious in setting rules and standards using the PPP, and to improve EPR schemes and their enforcement with an emphasis on transparency, clear guidelines, and a comprehensive approach to their application, including the strategy on how to use these mechanisms to fund environmental protection investments.

The Stakeholder Platform also welcomed the Commission proposal to revise the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD), but stressed the need to make it more effective, including the need for stronger restrictions and a swift ban of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Innovation to replace PFAS in products essential for the climate and energy transition (e.g. some solar, hydrogen and other technologies) needs to be prioritised. On that note, some stakeholders also called for the inclusion of more sectors beyond pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, endorsed data gathering on litter, and called for all costs, including litter, to be covered in discussions on the



Polluter Pays Principle. The Commission informed the Stakeholder Platform about the upcoming public consultation regarding the fitness check of the PP P, designed to make it more effective.

In terms of indoor air pollution, the Stakeholder Platform addressed the need to focus on primary sources, including pollution from energy sources as well as chemical detergents and products. In view of the cross-cutting nature of pollution, joining efforts across topics and expertise is key.

### 3. Green Deal Going Local

Joint efforts in implementing the Green Deal locally, particularly in relation to zero pollution, are crucial for cities and regions to achieve the EU's zero pollution ambition. Cities are at the forefront of action and therefore local and regional voices are very important in the zero pollution discussions, stressed **Veronica Manfredi** (*European Commission, Director DG ENV C on Zero Pollution*). The Commission has put multiple initiatives in place, such as the Green City Accord, the European Green Capital and European Green Leaf Awards.

With regard to regions, and as part of its flagship initiative [Green Deal Going Local](#), the Committee of the Regions (CoR) has developed two opinions on proposals emerging from the Zero Pollution agenda: the revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives and the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

**Una Power** (*rapporteur for the CoR opinion on the revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives and County Councillor for Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Ireland*) emphasised key points of the draft CoR opinion, such as the need to prioritise alternative mobility solutions, including public transport, active transport, and related adequate infrastructure. In that regard, the reduction of the overall need for a daily commute was also stressed, with 15-minute neighbourhoods mentioned as potential urban planning solutions. Overall, the energy transition is an opportunity to reduce air pollution. Attention to energy poverty and adequate research and skills provision for the workforce are also important.

The draft CoR Opinion on the revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive was presented by its rapporteur **Åsa Ågren Wikström** (*Member of Västerbotten County Council, Sweden*). She emphasised that for its implementation it is important to consider local conditions in alignment with an adequate implementation timeline. While the need for a strong and ambitious directive is clear, if it is too rigid and inflexible it could result in heavy investments for some municipalities and regions with little environmental benefits. Therefore, exceptions have to be made and it is crucial to recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; regional and national differences, including considerations for rural or remote areas of Europe, need to be taken into account. As wastewater treatment happens locally, appropriate tailored risk assessment and support measures are necessary to avoid the burden of costs and inefficiencies.

Discussions stressed the importance of reducing the circulation of harmful chemicals, including PFAS in urban environments, along with the need to improve provisions to avoid regulatory loopholes in the Polluter Pays Principle and to develop environment-friendly alternatives.

Members of the Stakeholder Platform also supported the need for increased capacities, training, more access to funding, and support programmes for cities and regions to address pollution issues. While local context and sensitivities are important, not compromising on overall ambition has to remain at the core. In addition, Stakeholder Platform members stressed the importance for governments to collaborate at all policy and governance levels, including on eliminating pollution at its source and ensuring that money collected for penalties is used to compensate for damage caused at different levels. Finally, the potential benefits of using digital tools and citizen science for obtaining tangible and real-time data were acknowledged, including their ability to supplement existing monitoring systems and promote positive outcomes for citizens. These were also supported by citing benefits such as increased awareness and empowerment at local levels.

In terms of funding opportunities and instruments for local authorities, the Stakeholder Platform highlighted the need to improve the connection between local authorities and EU policymakers, to



simplify governance structures to ensure local governments have a say in regulations, and translate the EU level vision and targets into practical on-the-ground implementation strategies. Platform members also stressed that regional authorities should be more informed and educated about regional funding instruments. Access to funding should be made more agile, with assistance, simplified processes and shared learning, to reduce the burden on those seeking funding (especially for smaller cities).

Moreover, for better outcomes, strong alliances with research institutes, other actors on a local level, and local governments need to be established and continuously supported.

#### 4. Digital solutions at the service of citizens' health and the environment

The Zero Pollution Action Plan highlights that digital solutions increasingly offer significant innovative potential to reduce pollution. They can accelerate the zero pollution transition but require timely decisions to make the best use of the available opportunities while mitigating the risks. To underpin these opportunities, the Commission's Staff Working Document sets out "[Digital Solutions for Zero Pollution](#)".

Building on this, Flagship 7, 'Living Labs for green digital solutions and smart zero pollution', intends to develop local actions for green and digital transformation. More specifically, Living Lab members committed, by 2023, "*to develop recommendations for a climate and environment-friendly use of digital solutions to accelerate zero pollution efforts, with a particular focus on citizen engagement*". The European Network of Living Labs (ENOLL) has now implemented this commitment.

In addition, a number of other initiatives have worked on using digital solutions, such as the ICT4Water publication on "[Digitalisation in the water sector recommendations for policy developments at EU Level](#)" or the Living Labs established by [EU Horizon Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe](#).

Introducing the discussions and the political context, the Commission set out how the digital agenda serves the Green Deal, in particular where it is relevant for zero pollution. She stressed that digital solutions have to be designed and applied with a purpose and the Green Deal and zero pollution priorities in mind. In addition, greening IT infrastructure is now a key driver for the digital agenda. She underlined the important role of data to monitor and manage pollution at the local level. She praised the work of ENOLL as an example of working together with stakeholders and identifying general recommendations and concrete examples from practitioners. (see [presentation](#)).

On behalf of European Network of Living Labs (ENOLL), **Georgia Aifandopoulou** (*Deputy Director of the Hellenic Institute of Transport (HIT) of the Centre of Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH), Head of Thessaloniki Smart Mobility Living Lab and co-leader of ENOLL working group on mobility*) and **Valentino Piana** (*Economist and international consultant, Senior Academic Associate at the University of Applied Science Western Switzerland Institute of Sustainable Energy, Co-Coordinator of the ENOLL Action-oriented Task-Force Energy and Environment*) presented the draft recommendations, which ENOLL prepared in a co-creation process over the last 18 months (see [presentation](#)). The 11 recommendations are underpinned by some examples of digital solutions from existing Living Labs. They concluded that the Living Lab community embraced the zero pollution and zero emissions ambitions, which solicit action and entrepreneurship as well as institutional and citizen engagement. Digital solutions are a quick win to achieve early successes.

The *European Environment Agency (EEA)* gave a sneak preview of the new Environment and Health Atlas, scheduled for publication on 3 May 2023 (see [presentation and website](#)). The Atlas, one of the actions in the ZPAP, is targeting the general public, is very interactive and shows available and new EEA data at the EU, national and local level, with the 'check your place' function. It will be gradually expanded and further developed, e.g. introducing a new "Environmental Health Impacts Index" which will further develop the analysis published in the first ZP Monitoring and Outlook.



The Stakeholder Platform agrees that digital solutions have a significant potential to improve the following:

- Stakeholders' engagement and interaction
- Citizens' engagement
- Knowledge sharing and transfer
- Digital capabilities to reduce negative effects from pollution
- Testing (in open/real environments) before investing
- Policy making and regulatory learning.

To benefit from such improvements, digital solutions have to be at the service of society and of citizens' health and the environment.

The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform also broadly welcomes and endorses the 11 recommendations in these documents as a useful input for practitioners, namely:

1. Make every solution socially inclusive
2. Develop and apply integrated, multi-sectoral solutions
3. Break silos and communicate across a broad range of people and stakeholders
4. Ensure policy coherence and coordination
5. Make good use of the zero target for simple and robust heuristics for action
6. Use digital solutions to evaluate and monitor pollutant levels and associated socioeconomic costs
7. Invest in the co-design of experimental loops for engaging in experiments, cutting-edge technology trials and investigation
8. Look for adaptive technologies
9. Go beyond the 'Death Valley' of innovation
10. Increase impacts through citizen empowerment and transition capacity building
11. Ensure engagement for cooperation among stakeholders and along the value chain and smart cities and territories.

In particular, the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform highlights the potential of digital solutions to develop and apply integrated, multi-sectoral solutions and thereby help to break silos and communicate across a broad range of people and stakeholders. Moreover, such solutions can significantly improve the collection and sharing of pollution-related data.

Several stakeholders emphasised the importance of underpinning the recommendations with examples and sharing good practices. The available examples were useful but could be expanded. Some additional examples were mentioned, such as [Water-oriented Living Labs](#), which look at use cases in the water industry, or the potential of using digital solutions to reduce administrative burden, e.g. from reporting.

The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform also expressed high interest in the Environment and Health Atlas. The launch was widely welcomed as helping to communicate the health impacts of pollution more widely. Stakeholders called for further development and expansion of the Atlas including other themes and data, e.g. on water and soil pollution or lead, as well as to consider the Atlas as a tool for early warning.

In conclusion, the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform committed to promote digital solutions for zero pollution building on these recommendations and acknowledged that the actions listed in Flagship 7 have been implemented. At the same time, the Platform calls on all actors to continue work to develop and use digital solutions at the service of citizens' health and the environment as well as to continue sharing good practices.

## 5. Information Points

Finally, the co-chairs drew participants' attention to the following opportunities:



- Deadline for applications for the 2025 [European Green Capital Award](#) and [European Green Leaf Award](#) – 30 April 2023
- Zero Pollution Stakeholder Workshop: “[Towards an urban and regional scoring methodology for Zero Pollution](#)” – 25 April 2023
- Zero Pollution Stakeholder Workshop: “[Reducing health inequalities through zero pollution](#)” – 14/15 June, 2023

## 6. Conclusion and next steps

In closing the meeting, the co-chairs thanked the participants for their contributions and participation and emphasised the importance of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform’s contributions to achieving the zero pollution ambition. The next meeting of the Platform is scheduled for autumn 2023, tentatively on 9 November.



## Appendix 1: Meeting agenda

Co-chairs: Veronica Manfredi, Director for Zero Pollution, DG Environment, European Commission and Marieke Schouten, Member of the Committee of the Regions		
Time	No	Agenda Item
10:00		Registration and welcome coffee
10:30	1	<b>Welcome and introduction (Co-chairs)</b>
10:45	2	<p><b>Towards zero pollution from production and consumption</b> (Flagship 4 of the Zero Pollution Action Plan)</p> <p>Presentations on circular economy initiatives and the application of the Polluter Pays Principle (DG ENV)</p> <p>Policy questions for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we strengthen synergies between circular economy and zero pollution?</li> <li>• How can we make the polluter pays principle more effective?</li> </ul> <p>Discussion and views from stakeholders</p>
12:30		<b>Networking lunch</b>
14:00	3	<p><b>Green Deal Going Local</b> – activities of the Committee of Regions on Zero Pollution (including preparation of opinions on Green Deal in Cities and opinions linked to Commission proposals)</p> <p>Presentations by members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>Policy questions for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main challenges and opportunities from a Zero Pollution perspective at urban level?</li> <li>• Do local authorities sufficiently seize the policy and funding opportunities unleashed by the European Green Deal to accelerate progress?</li> <li>• What are your key recommendations in this context?</li> </ul> <p>Discussion and views from stakeholders</p>
15:15	4	<p><b>Digital Solutions at the service of citizens' health and the environment</b> (Flagship 7 of the Zero Pollution Action Plan – discussion and approval)</p> <p>Presentation on the digital agenda serving the Green Deal – priorities of work and first results (DG CNECT)</p> <p>Presentation of the recommendations prepared by the European Network for Living Labs (ENOLL)</p> <p>Presentation of the EEA Environment &amp; Health Atlas (EEA)</p> <p>Policy questions for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main opportunities for using digital solutions for zero pollution serving citizens?</li> <li>• Do you agree with the recommendations presented by ENOLL on how can we foster digital solutions for zero pollution?</li> <li>• What areas of work do stakeholder propose in the future to support digital solutions?</li> </ul>



		Discussion and feedback from stakeholders
		Agreement on conclusions based on the recommendations
16:15	5	<b>Information Point</b> <b>Upcoming Stakeholder Workshops organised in the context of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform</b> <i>(Information by DG ENV)</i>
16:20	6	<b>Conclusion and next steps by the co-chairs</b>
16:30		<b>End of meeting</b>

## Appendix 2: List of participating organisations

### ***EU institutions or bodies***

- European Commission - DG ENV
- European Committee of the Regions
- European Environment Agency
- Joint Research Centre

### ***International governmental organisations***

- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

### ***Regional or local organisations***

- Municipality of Nieuwegein, Netherlands
- Region Västerbotten, Sweden
- Rathdown County Council, Ireland
- Representation of Aosta Valley Region, Italy
- UCR Regione Campania, Italy

### ***Civil society or non-governmental organisations***

- ENoLL
- EurEau
- AESGP
- EFPIA
- Euracoal
- Water Europe
- CER
- Surfrider Foundation Europe
- SedNet
- Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe
- EuChemS



- European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)
- Pure Earth
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Eurelectric
- IEP
- WAREG - European Water Regulators
- European Medical Students Association (EMSA)
- SocietalSystem (StS)
- Aqua Publica Europea