

THE EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE PHOSPHORUS PLATFORM AND ITS ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

A stakeholder group lead by the Dutch Phosphorus Platform initiated and organized the First Sustainable Phosphorus Conference on 6 and 7 March 2013 in Brussels. Besides seven key messages, including smart cooperation, developing EU-policies and incentives for efficient use and recycling, the European Sustainable Phosphorus Platform (ESPP) was launched as result of the conference.

The Platform was established as Belgian a not-for-profit association (statutes online at www.phosphorusplatform.eu, European Transparency Register n° 260483415852-40). ESPP is 100% membership financed, a key to credibility and independence, and has today nearly fifty members (industries, associations, governments, R&D institutes and innovation projects). ESPP supports research, technology and innovation projects, particularly the exchange and dissemination of results, but does not directly participate in European or national projects. It decides by consensus of its members – if no consensus can be achieved, ESPP does not publish or advocate positions but tries to mediate between controversial opinions. The communication tools encompass a continuously updated web-site, social media, eNews and Scope Newsletter, addressing more than 40,000 stakeholders worldwide.

The national nutrient Platform in the Netherlands anticipated the ESPP. Other national platforms followed: in Germany (2015), North America (2017), or are in project in Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy and Switzerland (2018). In addition, ESPP cooperates with initiatives pursuing compatible goals like the Baltic Sea Action Group and the Phosphorus Recycling Promotion Council of Japan that was just renamed to Phosphorus Industry Development Organization of Japan (PIDO). In cooperation with the International Nitrogen Initiative (INI), ESPP supports the Global Partnership for Nutrient Management (UN Environment Program).

Phosphorus stewardship is the wide objective of ESPP including food security, environmental protection, circular economy, food safety and healthier diets. ESPP understands itself as coalition for action bringing together water, waste and animal by-product industries, mineral & organic fertilizers, chemicals, technology suppliers, national & regional governments, knowledge institutes and interested stakeholders from other areas.

ESPP actions focus on closing the nutrient loop by recovery, recycling and sustainable use. Among others, challenges such as improving use, losses to aquatic bodies and eutrophication are addressed. Particular attention is paid to the regulatory framework: European policies like CAP, the Circular Economy Package and the Critical Raw Materials list as well as European regulations and directives such as the proposed new Fertilizing Products Regulation, the Animal By-products Regulations, water policy (including the Nitrates Directive) and the Emission Ceilings Directive and the Industrial Emissions Directive (BAT). In addition to the European legal framework, national and regional nutrient related policies are monitored and reported. In this context, highlights are the new P-recycling obligations in Switzerland (2016) and Germany (2017) as well as recommendations (HELCOM recommendation 38/1, 2017) and objectives (Finland, 2017 goal to process 50% of manure and sewage sludge for recycling).

The organization of meetings, workshops and conferences is also an important part of ESPP activities. After the ESPP1 in Brussels, ESPP2 was organized in Berlin 2015 and ESPP3 in Helsinki 2018 with increasing numbers of delegates from one conference to the next one. ESPP4 is scheduled for May/June 2020 in Vienna. Annual meetings for nutrient related research and innovation projects are organized, 2015 in Berlin, 2017 in Basel and on 8-9 November 2018 in Rimini, Italy. ESPP has also organized stakeholder meetings to develop proposals and enable networking addressing the EU Fertilizing Product Regulation proposal development and the evaluation of new Component Material Categories (CMCs) by the EU Joint Research Centre's (JRC) STRUBIAS Expert Group, recycled nutrient products in Organic Farming, contaminants in sewage sludge and economic tools for the Circular Economy. Meetings with representatives of relevant Directorates of the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representatives of national authorities (e.g. of the country presiding the European Council and countries opposing joint European solutions) complement ESPP's networking activities.

In response to the initiative of Commissioner Moedas and a report by the well-known economist Mariana Mazzucato, a joint Nutrient Mission "To halve the nutrient footprint of food by 2030, for more resilient farms,

healthier diets and a better environment” was drafted and presented to DG ENVI, DG AGRI, DG Santé and DG Grow. It aims at selecting, coordinating and disseminating nutrient related research and innovation activities following a clear mission.

Finally, ESPP disseminates success stories of its members, provides a platform for networking between solution providers, regulators and users and raises the public awareness for nutrient stewardship. Due to its varied and balanced membership base, capacity in developing shared opinions and its commitment to science-based arguments, ESPP has been acknowledged as preferred partner of European and national policy makers for exchange of opinions and consultation.