

Conclusions and Recommendations

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Conclusions

1. The principal conclusion arising from the Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the European Soil Bureau is that few countries of the EU and EFTA have an adequate comprehensive knowledge-base of their soil resources. Only four countries have complete soil maps of their national territory at 1: 250,000 scale and only two have a complete cover at detailed scales (1:25,000 and 1:50,000).
2. Because over the past two decades, responsibility for the organisation of soil survey has passed from central government organisations to independent institutes, universities and private sector consultancies, there is a grave danger of a lack of uniformity of methodology, use of different classification systems, and a general lack of coordination between the mapping groups. Bringing together the information from these different sources into an integrated system will prove increasingly difficult as more and more information is collected.
3. In most of the EU and EFTA countries, there have been impressive advances in the development of soil databases and computerised information systems, enabling the data that do exist to be easily available.
4. There is now a range of monitoring programmes in most of countries that provide additional information about the quality of soil resources. At present these programmes tend to be established by different groups for particular purposes. There is a lack of integration and there would be an advantage in moving to coordinated national monitoring programme in most countries.
5. Some of the European schemes, such as the UNECE Trans-Boundary Long Range Pollution Convention, adopt a rigorous well-coordinated approach to monitoring, involving collaboration between a number

of countries, and leading to an inter-country consistency in approach.

6. The demand for information about soil resources at global, European and national levels has escalated over the last decade and is likely to continue to increase. Attention and the resources available for developing an adequate knowledge-base for soil has lagged behind those on water and air, partly because up to the present, soil has been linked with agriculture. Now that there is burgeoning interest in the environment, soil is recognised as a major natural resource alongside air and water.

Recommendations

- 1 All member countries should complete surveys of their soils at a scale of 1:250,000 and compile associated attribute databases. Eventually this would enable a 1:250,000 map of the whole of the EU to be constructed under the leadership of the European Soil Bureau. This should be regarded as a minimum required for developing national and European strategies for the sustainable development of soil resources.
- 2 There should be a central coordinating body within each country for soil survey and its applications and that there should be improved coordination of monitoring programmes.
- 3 There are many new technologies for identifying spatial patterns of soil distribution and ultimately constructing soil maps but so far integration into current soil survey operations has been slow. In view of the cost of traditional soil survey operations and the need to make rapid progress, there should be an early in-depth assessment of the role that can be played by new technologies in the future.
- 4 Soil needs to be respected as one of the three major natural resource components, alongside air and water. The fact that the soil is a particularly complex medium, and requires more time and resources to

assemble an adequate knowledge base,
needs to be recognised.