



Brussels, 8 March 2010

To: EU Environment Ministers

Cc: Mr. Janez Potočnik, Commissioner for Environment  
Permanent Representatives Environment Attachés  
Mr. Jo Leinen, Chair of the Environment Committee at the European Parliament

**Concerns: Input to the EU Environment Council Meeting, 15 March 2010 – Need for a continuously robust Community Strategy Concerning Mercury**

Dear Environment Minister,

In relation to the relevant AOB point at the upcoming EU Environment Council meeting, the EEB asks you to underline the importance of a continuously robust EU Mercury policy. The current Mercury strategy should be reviewed by the end of 2010. We call upon you to ensure that the European Commission does not only carry out the review but proposes soon a revised strategy with new actions. If then also the Council reacts with priority, the EU can continue to have its leadership role at the global (UNEP) level towards developing a vigorous mercury treaty.

Mercury is a global pollutant that travels long distances. Its most toxic form – methylmercury - accumulates in large predatory fish and is taken up in our bodies through eating fish, with the worst impacts on babies *in utero* and small children.

The EU's 2005 Strategy Concerning Mercury aims to reduce emissions, supply and demand of mercury in the EU. Many of the Strategy actions have been implemented (e.g. *export ban by 2011 and safe storage of metallic mercury, market restrictions of certain mercury-containing measuring devices*). These initiatives, among others, have and will have great impact not only within the EU but also globally; the EU is currently still the biggest mercury exporter - mercury is exported to developing countries with very little or non-existent control measures; and mercury is haphazardly used, eventually ending up in the environment and contaminating food resources and populations.

With the EU mercury strategy as its flag, the EU has played a leadership role at the global level, and has been instrumental in reaching the UNEP Governing Council decision where world governments agreed to develop a legally binding instrument on mercury by 2013.

A prompt review of the EU mercury strategy is therefore very important. The EU needs to assess what has been accomplished so far and propose and implement new actions in view of reducing and where possible eliminating mercury emissions, supply and demand.

This is imperative not only for the protection of EU citizens, but also fundamental to ensure that the leadership role of EU is maintained at global level and in view of the intergovernmental negotiations towards the mercury treaty that will start in June 2010. The EU should lead the negotiations with own examples, and not fall behind just following global decisions.

Areas where EEB would expect further action from the strategy include phasing out the use of mercury in the chlor-alkali industry, and in dental care since safe mercury-free alternatives are available. Action is seriously needed regarding emissions from coal-fired power plants, since this is the biggest source of mercury emissions in the air – in Europe and globally. Also at global level, there is a growing understanding that in these areas there is a need and possibility to move away from mercury.

The EU's mercury strategy has a key role to play in reducing mercury exposure within the EU but also in ensuring a strong EU presence in the UNEP discussions. So, to conclude, we count on you to ensure a swift and transparent review of the EU mercury strategy allowing for the timely input of all interested bodies and stakeholders.

Thank you in advance for addressing our concerns

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

John Hontelez  
Secretary General  
European Environmental Bureau