

ESSC statement in support of the EU Soil Framework Directive (Palermo, 27 June 2007)

At the 5th Congress of the European Society for Soil Conservation (ESSC) held in Palermo from 25-30 July 2007, the following statement was presented, discussed and adopted by the General Assembly of the ESSC. The Statement has been forwarded to the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The initiatives developed in 2002 by the EU Commission to address the problems of soil degradation and the ways to prevent further degradation represents a historical achievement and is summarized in the EU Communication entitled 'Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection' (COM 2002-179).

This Communication raised the expectation of EU citizens, academic bodies and research organizations on institutional measures and actions aimed to achieve the adequate appraisal of soil as a crucial and essentially non-renewable natural resource and as a natural system, which provides many economic benefits and important ecological functions.

However, further developments of the Commission substantially lowered the scope and goals of the previous communication of 2002, mainly through: a) the Communication on the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection (COM 2006-231), b) a Directive (COM 2006-232) establishing a framework for the protection of soil and amending Directive 2004/35/EC and c) an impact assessment (SEC 2006-620) of the 'Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection'.

The ESSC, as a pan-European research network founded and acting since 1988, with representatives from all European countries and including most important individuals and institutions actively involved in soil conservation, is concerned with the diminution of the political level of ambition at some institutional stages and with the restriction and limitations expressed by some organizations.

These developments represent a menace to the adequate and essential common European framework for protecting our soil resources. The increasing ecological, social, economic and cultural demands placed on soil at the European level should be addressed by a robust and ample set of actions and measures to guarantee a sound Soil Framework Directive that will prevent further soil degradation and stimulate the development of new strategies for the sustainable management of European soil resources.

The ESSC, through this document approved by its General Assembly held during the 5th ESSC Congress (Palermo, 27 June 2007), wish to transmit to the EU Commission its collaboration and support for the vision and commitment to protect European soil as a common asset and valuable economic and ecological resource.