



History of IMPEL

Collaborating across Europe to achieve a better environment

The history of the IMPEL network can be traced back to the early 1990's. The Dutch Presidency of the EU commissioned a study of EU environmental agencies in 1991 against a background of a concern that the growth of environmental legislation was not matched by improvements in the quality of the environment.

One of the principal recommendations was that an environmental enforcement network should be created within member States. The result was the formation of the Network of EC Environmental Enforcement Agencies whose first meeting was held in Chester UK under the UK Presidency in 1992 – hence the Chester network. The basic structure of the IMPEL network we know today was established at that time. There were to be Plenary Meetings every six months chaired by the current Presidency. National Coordinators were appointed to assist with the organisation and to be a focal point within individual Member States. Four Working Groups were established to look at the Technical Aspects of Permitting; Procedural and Legal Aspects of Permitting; Compliance Monitoring and Inspection; and Managing the Enforcement Process.

The 5th Environmental Action Programme¹ recognised the importance of an Implementation and Enforcement network with the Commission also taking part. Common sense prevailed and rather than setting up a separate network, it was agreed that the Chester network could readily take on this role.

The Commission's involvement in the network as co-chair began in 1994. In the Communication of the European Commission of 5 November 1996 on implementing Community environmental law² it was said that: The Commission will consider the existing position of the informal IMPEL network as a useful instrument of cooperation and capacity building, and will make proposals for improving, developing and reorganising its tasks.

The Communication also recognised: “the need to ensure that minimum inspection tasks are carried out,” because: “the wide disparity which exists until now cannot be considered as satisfactory with reference to the objective of correct and level enforcement at Community level”. Finally, the Communication indicated that the IMPEL network could also assist in defining these minimum criteria for inspections. Further encouragement came from the Council Resolution of 7 October 1997 on the drafting, implementation and enforcement of Community environmental law (97/C 321/01) which suggested that IMPEL could be further developed, inter alia by asking it to consider whether it should broaden the scope of its mandate and the focus of its current work.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/newprg/5th.htm>

² [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31997Y1022\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31997Y1022(01))



At its Plenary meeting in December 1997 IMPEL agreed to a new structure and a broader scope as suggested by the Environment Council Resolution. The four Working Groups, together with the sub-group on transboundary shipment of waste, were replaced by task-oriented project groups, much in the way that IMPEL operates now. The work of the project groups was to be commissioned and supervised by two Standing Committees and dissolved upon completion of their tasks. The Commission agreed to share the costs of the work programme and to host the IMPEL secretariat.

The Standing Committees performed a useful role but in order to minimise the bureaucracy in IMPEL it was agreed that the Standing Committees should be disbanded: this happened in 1999. The Plenary meetings were therefore required to give consideration final reports on projects and progress with projects as well as developing ideas for new projects. In the event this proved too onerous for the Plenary and this work was gradually transferred to the Clusters of which there are now two – on practical and technical aspects of permitting, inspection, enforcement and smart regulation, and trans-frontier shipment of waste. The role of the Clusters has developed over time, reducing the need for detailed discussion at the plenary meetings. They play a role in quality reviewing projects and examining reports in detail.

IMPEL continued to develop as it moved towards its next phase. For some time the IMPEL network had been considering the possibility of turning itself into an independent association with legal status. These considerations were given added impetus by the wish of the Commission to redefine its position vis-à-vis IMPEL and the fact that the Commission planned to fund IMPEL's activities through the LIFE+ Regulation in the future. These developments suggested a more pronounced profile of IMPEL, a more professional organization, stronger and more thought-out financial engagement and commitment of IMPEL countries and clearer roles and responsibilities of the Commission and IMPEL countries. It was likely that a legal status would be essential to satisfy these needs. On the assumption that IMPEL should remain closely linked to the Brussels based EU Institutions and taking into account that the legal status should be light touch and leave IMPEL structures as much as possible, IMPEL was transformed into an international non-profit association under Belgian law. The association was established in 2008 with the first Board elected at the first meeting of the new General Assembly in Ljubljana in June 2008.

In 2009 a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between IMPEL and the European Commission was signed.