

Preface

This third *Environmental Performance Review* of Switzerland examines the progress made in achieving the country's environmental objectives since the OECD's previous review, published in 2007. Much has changed since then. Just last May, on 21 May 2017 precisely, the Swiss population voted "yes" on a government proposal to revise the Energy Act to allow a gradual phase-out of nuclear energy while increasing reliance on local renewable energy sources. This is expected to lead to investment and jobs in Switzerland, benefiting not only the environment, but also the population and the economy. The Swiss carbon tax has been increased last year to EUR 77 per tonne and compares very favourably with that in the few OECD countries which introduced such a tax. The Swiss Emissions Trading Scheme will soon be linked to that of the European Union after a long negotiation period.

There have also been significant efforts undertaken by Switzerland to improve the environmental performance of its agricultural sector. In particular, in recent years, a large share of payments under the agricultural policy have been explicitly devoted to the protection of farm biodiversity and the Swiss landscape. Switzerland has also been proactive in the field of transport. It is one of three OECD countries that tax diesel at a higher rate than petrol. A modal shift of freight from road to rail is encouraged through road pricing for heavy goods vehicles and, with the December 2016 opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, the world's longest rail tunnel.

On some environmental scores, Switzerland comes out rather well. Most notably, the country is a top OECD performer in terms of greenhouse gas emissions intensity as well as material productivity. Switzerland should also be commended for its innovative approach to strengthening the nexus between water and biodiversity. In particular, since 2011, with the in-depth revision of the Water Protection Act, it has embarked on a long journey towards the "renaturation" of its rivers. This is a fascinating example of a policy initiative that crosses many boundaries since it deals not only with water and biodiversity policy but also energy policy and land use planning.

Recent polling showed that a large majority of Swiss believe the environment in Switzerland is doing very well. However, there is plenty to suggest that Swiss satisfaction with the environment is disconnected from the reality of the situation. Municipal waste has increased by 27% since 2000, in line with private final consumption. Switzerland has some of the highest percentages of threatened species across OECD countries, including mammals. Half the 20 largest Swiss lakes still suffer from eutrophication and lack of oxygen, some of them to the point of having to be artificially ventilated.

Beyond that, Switzerland has a huge ecological footprint associated with unsustainable consumption patterns. Swiss consumption is imposing significant pressure far beyond its borders. The Green Economy Action Plan, which Switzerland adopted in 2013, recognises the need for a shift towards more sustainable consumption patterns consistent with living within the planet's limits.

This Review presents 42 recommendations to strengthen Switzerland's environmental policies and performance. I hope that it will also make a useful contribution to current efforts to improve policy coherence and promote the environment as a source of economic growth.



Angel Gurría
OECD Secretary-General



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