

## Preface

This third *OECD Environmental Performance Review of Spain* assesses progress achieved since the last review carried out in 2004. It demonstrates the impressive progress made in many aspects of environmental performance, including declines in the carbon, energy and resource intensity of the economy, as well as the significant expansion of protected natural areas. Overall, the Spanish population is satisfied with the quality of its environment.

Nevertheless, this *Environmental Performance Review* highlights that important environmental pressures remain, driven in part by land conversion during the construction boom of the early 2000s and the rise in population, which has been significant in some coastal areas. It calls for further efforts to decouple environmental pressures from economic growth.

Spain's dynamic economy was hit hard by the global economic crisis, resulting in stringent budget cuts and high unemployment. Yet the economic recovery has opened up opportunities for greener, more sustainable growth. Although Spain's industrial sector has a smaller environmental footprint than many other countries, environmental pressures from industry are likely to increase as the economy recovers. The *Review* recommends that environmental considerations be further integrated into recent policies to spur the economic recovery, including advancing a green tax reform agenda. In addition, it calls for continued efforts to capitalise on the economic opportunities provided by eco-innovation and an expanding environmental goods and services sector.

The *Review* also provides useful guidance on how to continue improving the process of environmental policy-making. Over the past decade, Spain has consolidated its environmental policy, streamlined regulations to reduce the burden on firms and strengthened co-ordination among levels of a highly decentralised government. The *Review* takes stock of progress on all of these fronts and recommends reinforcing and advancing such efforts, without compromising environmental ambitions. It also points out that Spain has made significant investments in promoting renewable energy and improving energy efficiency, which have imposed a heavy financial burden. The *Review* recommends that the government's ongoing reform of the electricity system should aim to provide a clear and stable framework for the further development of the renewable energy sector.

This *Review* presents 28 policy recommendations, with a particular emphasis on the conservation and sustainable use of the marine and terrestrial environment, and the environmental performance of the industrial sector. As one of the world's biodiversity hotspots with remarkable landscapes, Spain has relied on rich natural endowments to support a strong tourism sector. To protect this heritage, the country has one of the most ambitious biodiversity laws in the OECD and has made significant strides in developing an inventory and data bank to address the major challenge of inconsistent and incomplete data on biodiversity resources. Spain has actively supported international and regional initiatives on biodiversity and was recognised for such efforts as one of the first recipients

of the Natura 2000 awards in 2012. However, the implementation of these ambitious policies and initiatives has faced challenges, including reductions in public budgets. The *Review* recommends that existing resources are used more effectively and alternative economic instruments are developed. Such instruments can provide incentives for the sustainable use of biodiversity as well as revenues to support such efforts.

This *Environmental Performance Review* is the result of a constructive policy dialogue between the Spanish authorities and the other members and observers of the OECD Working Party on Environmental Performance. Spain's experience provides a number of valuable lessons for countries promoting greener and more sustainable growth. I am confident that this collaborative effort will help to improve our understanding of how to tackle the many shared environmental challenges faced by OECD members and its partner countries.



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