

Unclassified

DSTI/CP(99)2/FINAL



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLIS : 12-Feb-1999
Dist. : 15-Feb-1999

PARIS

Or. Eng.

**DIRECTORATE FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY
COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER POLICY**

DSTI/CP(99)2/FINAL
Unclassified

**CONSUMER POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS TO
DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS**

74437

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine
Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

Or. Eng.

FOREWORD

This report was prepared for release by the Secretariat and comprises the work of the Delegate from Finland with input and assistance from the Delegate from Sweden, to address the responses to a questionnaire to Member countries regarding Consumer Policy Contributions to the Development of Sustainable Consumption Patterns. The report was declassified by the Committee on Consumer Policy at its meeting on 3-4 September 1998.

Copyright OECD, 1999

Applications for permission to reproduce or translate all or part of this material should be made to:

Head of Publications Service, OECD, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	2
CONSUMER POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS	4
1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. Background	4
1.2. Opinion forming.....	4
2. The work of the Committee on Consumer Policy	5
2.1. Organisation of work and objectives.....	5
2.2. Questionnaire	6
3. Member country responses to the questionnaire	6
3.1. Studies concerning consumer attitudes and concerns for environmental issues	6
3.2. Information and education campaigns	8
3.3. Environmental claims in advertising.....	9
3.4. The role of manufacturing and the retail sector	11
3.5. The consumer role in waste separation and disposal	12
3.6. Durability and service life of consumer goods	13
3.7. Other comments in the replies	13
4. Conclusions.....	14
4.1. Conclusions concerning information activities.....	14
5. Recommendations for the future.....	15
ANNEX 1: STUDIES CONDUCTED IN THE MEMBER COUNTRIES CONCERNING CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES AND CONCERNS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	16
ANNEX 2: INFORMATION AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS INTENDED TO RAISE CONSUMER AWARENESS AND TO INITIATE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE.....	18

CONSUMER POLICY CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

OECD work on sustainable consumption and production was initiated in 1993, by a Ministerial Council request that the OECD examine the relationship between consumption and production patterns and sustainable development. A number of activities were undertaken in response to this request including several expert seminars, support for the Ministerial Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption held in Oslo, Norway (February 1995) and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), and an OECD Workshop "Sustainable Consumption and Production: Clarifying the Concepts" held in Rosendal, Norway (July 1995). The background report prepared for the Rosendal Workshop gives a comprehensive overview of the intellectual, conceptual and ideological background of the issue. While this paper recognises the complexity of the various concepts and policy ideas, it concludes with a number of pragmatic suggestions for possible future work: "The concepts under review vary in the extent to which they are concerned with the realities of implementation. In general, they appear to favour government action in three broad areas: administrative and regulatory frameworks, pricing reform and opinion forming".

This work has been taken forward by the Environment Directorate, whose programme for 1995-96 centred on three specific elements:

- clarifying the conceptual framework;
- identifying policy options and tools; and
- monitoring and evaluating progress.

1.2. Opinion forming

With regard to 'opinion forming', the report notes generally universal agreement that it will require a change in social attitudes and culture to achieve greater recognition of the importance of these issues and progress toward more sustainable consumption. The majority opinion also looks to governments to provide the leadership necessary to facilitate that change. This could, however, be a difficult task, as government agencies may have neither the knowledge nor the moral authority to determine how best to resolve the problems related to sustainable consumption and effectively encourage a change in the behavioural patterns of the general public. Any attempts to do so will find governments

competing for attention with many other opinion-shapers such as the advertising industry, the media, educational institutions and businesses. Still, the report urges governments to begin putting forth much greater effort to provide consumers with information on:

- the environmental impacts of their behaviour and product choices;
- the potential environmental benefits of alternative consumption patterns; and
- examples of progress with government and independent actions already undertaken.

2. The work of the Committee on Consumer Policy

Determining the value and benefit of making such information available to consumers to use as they make their purchasing decisions broadly corresponds to the approach undertaken by the Committee on Consumer Policy. The Committee agreed to make a concrete contribution to this debate by outlining what has been done and what could be done to educate consumers about sustainable consumption patterns and encourage them to take some personal responsibility for the environment and resource management while making purchasing decisions.

2.1. Organisation of work and objectives

The issue of sustainable consumption patterns is vast and complex and the Committee on Consumer Policy determined that it would only attempt to examine the issue of sustainable consumption from a consumer policy perspective. The Committee's work could provide a valuable contribution to the ongoing efforts within the United Nations to include sustainable consumption in the 1985 United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection. The Committee is also interested in exchanging information with, and providing input to the Environment Policy Committee whenever necessary, both to ensure close co-operation in areas of common interest and to avoid duplicative activities. In addition, the Committee will invite and include the views of international consumer organisations and the business sector, both of which have done considerable work in this field.

The Committee originally intended to provide an overview of consumer related activities in recent years and a stocktaking of their results. However, even if this overview were centred upon the information and education issues directly related to the act of buying consumer goods and services, the scope still remains relatively broad and it would be necessary to include:

- studies concerning consumer attitudes toward environmental issues in general;
- information and education activities intended to raise consumer awareness and to initiate behaviour change;
- environmental claims in marketing;
- the role of the manufacturing and retail industries in providing consumer information and education;
- eco-labelling;

- the consumer's role and participation in waste separation and disposal;
- studies concerning product durability and moves towards a service based economy; and
- the environmental aspects of product testing.

While all of these subjects are of interest to consumers, some of them are being discussed within more specialised bodies, at both national and international levels. This is particularly the case for questions concerning housing and energy consumption, public and private means of transport and eco-labelling which, for example, has already been discussed by the Committee on Consumer Policy and by the Environment Directorate in a comprehensive report issued in 1991. The Committee therefore decided to focus on the issues related to the core activities of consumer policy and consumer information.

2.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire on *Consumer Policy Contributions to the Development of Sustainable Consumption Patterns* was distributed to all OECD Member countries in July 1996. Thus far, Norway, the United States, Japan, Finland, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Mexico, Sweden, Korea and Canada have submitted replies. This report summarises the various responses to the questionnaire, providing a snapshot view of the consumer-related activities in the area of sustainable consumption. The replies have been analysed in Finland by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

3. Member country responses to the questionnaire

3.1. Studies concerning consumer attitudes and concerns for environmental issues

3.1.1. Studies of environmental awareness

The results received from the Member countries that have replied to the questionnaire show that many consumers already consider environmental issues to be important (Annex 1). However, while consumer knowledge of the environmental effects of consumption has grown, there is still much to be done to further increase and expand the level of knowledge and awareness. Today, shoppers can, for example, make a conscious choice to buy an individual product because it is less environmentally harmful than another, but they often completely ignore other environmental factors related to their purchase, such as the impact of using a private motor vehicle to go shopping, the environmental effects of goods transport, and so on. The environmental impacts of certain products and packaging over the full span of their life cycle can also easily be forgotten as consumers often take only some immediate and sometimes minor details into account.

The studies also show that while conceptually many people are willing to assume more responsibility for the environment, in reality they do very little to change their consumption patterns. It should also be noted however, that a number of outside factors may make it difficult for consumers to change their behaviour, including the lack of information about making appropriate choices and inadequate or unavailable recycling programmes.

3.1.2. Studies of product choices

A number of national studies indicated a consumer need and desire for environmental information, including general facts about the environment, energy conservation, ecologically responsible consumption, and suggestions as to how a consumer can change his or her buying habits. Many of the participants in these studies had difficulties choosing environmentally sound product alternatives and the lack of product information was the most frequently cited obstacle to making more environmentally sound purchases. An increasing number of consumers are concerned and interested in making environmentally sound product choices. However many also feel that they are too busy to spend extra time in a grocery shop to compare one product with another to determine which is the best for the environment, while at the same time considering the price, quality and the potential risk of selecting a new, untried product.

Despite these difficulties, many consumers say that they are willing to pay to protect the environment, sort their waste for recycling and shop in an environmentally sound way. As evidence of the growing consumer awareness and concern, a study conducted in Canada in February 1997, revealed that 77% of the people surveyed answered "yes" when asked whether or not in the last year or two he or she had selected one product over another because of its environmental-friendly packaging, formulation or advertising.

3.1.3. Eco-label studies

Study results such as these suggest that consumers can be encouraged to buy more eco-labelled products through the use of advertising and media campaigns, in short, by improving marketing. Through the use of the media, consumers could generally be informed that, as they make their purchasing decisions, there are products available that are less harmful to the environment than others, and they could be encouraged to make that choice. The European Union has developed an eco-labelling plan, the Nordic countries share a common system, and a number of other OECD Member countries also have national eco-labelling schemes. Raising consumer awareness and helping to influence consumer behaviour could, in turn, encourage manufacturers to develop products and production methods that can reduce the burden on the environment.

There is still much to be done to increase consumer awareness of eco-labelled products and to promote environmentally sound consumer choices. Although some eco-labelling schemes have quality specifications, consumers may harbour some doubts that eco-labelled products are of equal quality to other products. An environmentally sound detergent that does not clean, does more harm than good by discouraging consumers and may cause them to believe that "eco-labelled" equals "inferior". Manufacturers of ecologically sound products should be encouraged to focus more attention on producing quality goods and, in turn, providing consumers with assurances about that quality.

Consumer purchasing decisions can also be influenced by making eco-labelled products more visible and more commonly available in shops.

3.1.4. Studies of recycling

A number of national studies were undertaken in an attempt to understand how best to initiate and maintain recycling programmes. Individual attitudes are critical to the success of an effective and sustained recycling programme. It is important that people are willing to fully participate and contribute to recycling programmes by sorting waste so that the various recycling systems can work practically and

efficiently. The studies revealed that the older generation was more environmentally concerned than the young both in deed and attitude. Another finding showed that, on average, women could be characterised as more environmentally concerned than men. A number of demographic studies showed that those most likely to fully understand the ramifications and benefits of recycling programmes tended to be younger and middle-aged, better educated, working adults with higher incomes.

Many people seem to think that environmental issues related to packaging and recycling include only waste separation and disposal arrangements. Consumers tend to overlook the fact that the product choices they make when they are shopping and their consumption patterns in general are very central in this respect. Relatively few studies have been conducted to determine how the consideration of environmental impacts can influence purchasing decisions, which could indicate that the importance of consumer choice has not been fully recognised.

Governments could also work to help influence the choices made by both consumers and businesses through the use of voluntary agreements with industries such as differential taxes that favour green products and penalise those that are harmful to the environment.

3.2. Information and education campaigns

The consumer information and education campaigns carried out in the OECD Member countries that responded to the questionnaire, fell into four categories:

1. Product Choices/Purchase
2. Product Use
3. Consumption Patterns/Other Environmental Issues
4. Waste Processing Campaigns (Annex 2).

3.2.1. Product choice campaigns

A number of government-sponsored campaigns were developed and launched to help promote the use of environmentally sound products. The Danish campaigns 'Recycling or Racing' and 'Environment and Washing Clothes' were addressed to schoolchildren. The campaigns were intended to change the way schoolchildren lead their daily lives and to alter their consumption pattern by teaching them to make better environmental choices. A Finnish book entitled 'Eco-Buyer' and a related educational campaign were addressed to all consumers, as was the 'Green Purchasing Network' undertaken in Japan. The book and the two educational campaigns were aimed at consumers who want to make environmentally sound purchases but face considerable problems when they try to do so in practice. They were also specifically intended to create a greater market demand for environmentally sound goods and services. A Nordic eco-labelling campaign (the Swan label) was also introduced to help consumers more easily identify more environmentally sound products.

Additionally, many European Community (EC) countries participated in the European Young Consumer Competition related to the impact of consumer behaviour on the environment. The competition was open to secondary schoolchildren and the aim was to encourage them to find ways of taking better care of the earth's natural resources.

3.2.2. Product use campaigns

Only one campaign was reported in this category: 'Recycling or Racing' in Denmark.

3.2.3. Campaigns concerning consumption patterns

The Danish campaign 'Consumption and Environment' and the Norwegian edition of a booklet on sustainable consumption, were both aimed at schoolchildren to teach them how to reduce the strain on the environment and encourage them to change attitudes in a way that can contribute to making both private and public consumption environmentally safe. The Austrian campaign 'Ecological Lifestyle' was addressed to all consumers, and was intended to provide additional information on environmental and consumer issues with a special emphasis on energy conservation.

The permanent campaigns "Local Agenda 21" in Denmark and Sweden, 'Educating for Consumption' in Mexico, and the one-off 'Save Our Planet' in Switzerland are aimed at all consumers. The intention with these permanent campaigns is to educate citizens, strengthen their environmental awareness and encourage manufacturers to develop products that are less environmentally harmful. 'Save Our Planet' was intended to protect the climate and species diversity, and to promote sustainable consumption, a similar campaign is also being carried out in Canada.

3.2.4. Waste processing campaigns

The various waste processing campaigns underway in the responding countries were not addressed to any specific consumer groups. The aim of the 'National Waste Campaign' in Switzerland was to save both natural resources and money and to inform the public about efficient waste management and separation. Information campaigns on the separation of household waste have also been carried out in Sweden, and Mexico is running a permanent campaign concerning separation and disposal.

3.3. Environmental claims in advertising

Information about the environmental impact of products is important to consumers and it is crucial that this information be accurate and truthful. With the exception of the Nordic countries and Canada, the respondents provided little information about issues regarding the use of environmental claims. Responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of environmental claims varies, however; in some OECD Member countries, the supervision of environmental claims is primarily the responsibility of government authorities. In others, misleading environmental claims are dealt with more often through self-regulatory measures and consumer and marketplace reaction. In the United States, for example, consumer protection is coupled with competition policy under the authority of the US Federal Trade Commission. In Japan, consumer issues are enshrined in legislation: the 'Act against Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations' and as yet, there are no voluntary guidelines.

Issues relating to environmental claims in marketing have been the focus of much attention in the Nordic countries. Nordic marketing legislation prohibits the use of improper and misleading marketing and manufacturing claims. The primary enforcement bodies in the Nordic countries include the Consumer Ombudsmen and the Market Courts.

The Nordic Consumer Ombudsmen have developed common guidelines concerning environmentally oriented claims in marketing which are intended to advise advertisers and advertising agencies. Consumer Ombudsmen give legal advice to enterprises regarding proper marketing, and may also prosecute manufacturers and distributors if their marketing has been demonstrated to be either illegal or misleading. If a ruling to this effect is issued, it may include a conditional fine (i.e. one that will be payable only if the marketing is continued in the same form). If a marketing entrepreneur does not agree with a ruling of the Consumer Ombudsman, he can ask for the case to be presented to the Marketing Council, which will then decide if the ruling stands or is to be overruled.

In Canada, the Environmentally Sound Packaging Coalition of Canada (ESPPC), a coalition of consumer and environmental organisations, has undertaken a project entitled 'Truth in Environmental Labelling and Advertising'. The aim has been to help avoid the misleading use of environmental or green labelling and advertising. The major stakeholders in the project were invited to workshops where they discussed and evaluated new government guidelines entitled 'Guiding Principles for Environmental Labelling and Advertising'. As a result of the workshops, a number of changes to the guidelines were put forth as well as a recommendation that the government take a more visible and proactive stance responding to consumer complaints.

In recent years, the Nordic Consumer Ombudsmen have taken action against misleading environmental claims in advertising. The Ombudsmen have noted that in environmental marketing, the truthfulness and relevance of the information given is very important, particularly in the case of products such as cars, which typically represent a major environmental burden. For example the use of the phrase 'environmentally friendly' and similar expressions should not be used unless a thorough study has been made of the environmental impact during the entire life-span of the product.

In Canada, the major regulatory measures available against false environmental claims in advertising are provided by section 7 of the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act and by section 52 of the Competition Act. The primary enforcement bodies for the Act are the Competition Bureau of Industry Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

3.3.1. Examples of landmark cases dealt with by enforcement bodies

In 1988, CRIOC (Centre de Recherche et d'Information des Organisations de Consommateurs) in Belgium filed a case against Procter & Gamble, manufacturers of a phosphate-free detergent, because it polluted the environment despite a claim to the contrary. CRIOC also cited Opel with misleading consumers because the company marketed itself as 'environmentally friendly' a claim that was said to be untrue, because all cars pollute.

In Denmark, an association of market gardeners had given their products an environmental label on the grounds that they had reduced the use of certain plant sprays. The Consumer Ombudsman insisted that the label, 'Green Environment' be removed because, while the products in question had been improved in some respects, they had had not been subjected to an environmental Life Cycle Analysis.

In 1992, the Finnish Market Court ordered General Motors to discontinue the use of the expression 'for a cleaner environment' in the marketing of cars, or face a fine of 200 000 markkaa, unless the claim was set out in detail with enough evidence to support it. The song and pictures used in the commercial were regarded as having an undue influence on consumers.

For a product to be marketed as having an environmental advantage over others, the Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman requires it to be among the best of corresponding products in the market. For example, the Consumer Ombudsman reviewed a case involving the use of the term 'environmentally friendly' in marketing disposable kitchen towels. The CO ruled in this case that the environmental merit must at all times be judged in relation to the availability of similar articles. If a significant number of these products meet a higher environmental standard, it must be deemed misleading to characterise a product as environmentally friendly. The CO ruled that the product ought to be among the best third of similar products with respect to environmental effects.

In 1991, the Swedish Market Court also prohibited General Motors from using the expression 'environmentally friendly' in an ad for the Opel Omega. In the same manner as the Belgian CRIOC, the Market Court considered it clearly misleading to use the phrase 'environmentally friendly' in this context.

3.4. The role of manufacturing and the retail sector

A number of OECD Member countries reported private sector and joint government-private sector initiatives to provide consumers with environmental product information.

The Japanese have established a 'Green Purchasing' campaign to protect the environment by raising consumer awareness of the environmental effects of products. Consumers can receive additional environmental information from the publications 'Report on the Environment' and 'Plan for Eco-Activity'.

The Canadian Environmental Technology Verification Program is a joint initiative between Environment Canada and Industry Canada which provides a certification of the authenticity on the efficiency and capacity of environmental technologies.

The Association of Swiss Recycling Organisations has published a guide outlining the efforts underway by manufacturers and retailers to achieve more sustainable product use. Recycling arrangements have been made for aluminium, glass, paper, board, tinplate cans, bottles and textile products and co-operative arrangements are primarily conducted between the organisations representing manufacturers and retailers. The Swiss consumer organisations regularly include environmental issues in their programmes and there are a number of special environmental bodies.

The manufacturing and retail sectors participate in Nordic eco-labelling work by nominating representatives to hold seats on committees of experts that draft criteria for different product groups. The criteria are then given final approval by the Nordic co-operation body that stipulates the rules for Nordic eco-labelling. Similar co-operative efforts are in effect in other OECD Member countries, such as the Canadian Environmental Choice program.

The manufacturing and retail sectors play a prominent role in the eco-labelling scheme. The environmental effects of eco-labelling depend largely on the relevance and significance of the criteria applied as well as on the market share and placement of eco-labelled products, which in turn depends on the strength of consumer preference for these products and the responsiveness of producers and suppliers. Thus, in order for eco-labelling to be an effective marketing instrument, the public must be aware of eco-labelled products and their advantages, and manufacturers and the retailers should provide consumers with more information about their eco-labelled products.

The retail sector also has an important role to play in organising recycling and waste disposal. The major Finnish wholesale/retail organisations (Kesko, Tuko, SOK, Tradeka) each have their own environmental programmes.

3.5. The consumer role in waste separation and disposal

A variety of systems for recycling and waste disposal exist in different countries that enable consumers to either recycle or sort wastes, or do both.

3.5.1. Recycling

In Switzerland, since 1990 the recovery rate has increased as a result of refuse bag fees, increasing consumer awareness, and an improved infrastructure allowing for separate collection. Recovered materials include glass, paper and board. Earlier, a large proportion of waste was still being processed in incinerators without flue gas scrubbers.

Using a number of incentives, attempts to increase the sorting of waste by the general public have already achieved some success in parts of Finland and Sweden. The recycling rate is generally very high for glass bottles, aluminium cans, cardboard and paper. As a result of the deposit-refund system for bottles which makes recycling convenient and cost-effective, the glass bottle recycling rate in Finland and Sweden is now more than 90%. Packaging producers are responsible for packaging even after it has been used, and all waste to be sent for final disposal is sorted into categories on the basis of their suitability for further processing.

In Norway most municipal waste is deposited into landfill dumps, and the limited amount of land available for dumping has necessitated an increased reliance on recycling. Recovered materials include paper, cardboard, packaging, food waste, bio-waste, glass, tyres, plastics, metals, textiles and waste oil. There is also a system for dealing with hazardous wastes.

In Canada, manufacturers and retail industry have attempted to promote sustainable consumption by reducing the waste associated with the use of their products. Companies are also making some limited efforts to increase the durability of their products (e.g. cars). The high-tech industry is seeking to increase the ability to upgrade its products, allowing products to be updated through the use of renewed software rather than replacing hardware.

3.5.2. Separate collection

In many countries, local authorities are responsible for the waste collection service, ensuring the separate collection of glass and paper by providing containers for voluntary disposal of newspapers, cardboard and glass containers. Local authorities have special disposal arrangements for, among other items, garden refuse, bulky waste, oil and chemical wastes. In Austria, for example, municipalities are required to provide or arrange for separate collection of hazardous waste at least twice per year. However, waste collection is not just a service that citizens are entitled to - each individual has a role to play and responsibilities to carry out. The success of such a system depends on consumer participation and, while voluntary consumer co-operation and participation is the most desirable option, it is not always easily achieved. Local authorities could offer a "carrot and stick" approach by invoking the threat of penalties

for inadequate participation such as imposing extra charges for unsorted waste or through the imposition of fines.

3.5.3. Problems arising

The number of waste separation facilities provided by producers is typically too few relative to the population they serve. This, in turn, leads to a transport burden for individual households, as some consumers may have to use their car to take their wastes to separate disposal points. In addition, many countries have difficulty arranging for the disposal of hazardous wastes in a way that suits consumers. In Japan such wastes are collected by licensed operators. A further issue stems from the fact that more stringent requirements related to waste management inevitably lead to higher costs.

3.6. Durability and service life of consumer goods

Studies relating to consumer goods indicate that durability has not yet become a prominent issue in consumer policy. Furthermore, little or no information is available in relation to the technical durability of consumer goods.

One study revealed that the most effective tool to help consumers extend the service life of home appliances is an instructive and easy to use product manual. User friendly product manuals must be developed that take into consideration both information content and lay-out. A number of government authorities have produced consumer information based on the findings of this study and have urged manufacturers to take account of its results.

For product durability to be perceived as a valuable characteristic and have an impact on purchasing choices, consumers should be provided with reliable information about the durability of the goods they are offered. For this reason, consumer test organisations should produce more publications that contain test information and guide users' toward consumption patterns that give priority to products with long life spans. However, it is evident that such tests are expensive and time-consuming, and frequent new product launches swiftly render their results outdated.

3.7. Other comments in the replies

Japan, Switzerland, Canada and Korea submitted comments in addition to their responses to the questionnaire. Japan suggested that the Committee on Consumer Policy could make unique contributions to global action to promote environmental protection and sustainable development and consumption. Switzerland recommended that the Committee devote itself more to the subject of sustainable consumption patterns, and noted the importance of co-ordinating closely with the OECD Environment Directorate.

Korea commented that although a significant amount of data is available regarding consumption patterns and environmental protection, some of the associated theories have not been scientifically proven and can sometimes appear to be contradictory. Korea suggests therefore, that consumers be given more precise and universally accepted information concerning these issues to help them to make environmentally sound and practical purchasing choices.

Canada submitted information regarding a requirement under the Auditor General Act which directs federal departments to prepare strategies for integrating sustainable development into their policies, programmes and operations.

4. Conclusions

Surveys of consumer attitudes show that many consumers recognise the importance of environmental issues and are willing to assume more responsibility for the environment. However, they often believe that their personal contribution to these issues is limited only to waste separation and disposal arrangements and do not recognise the wider sphere of influence they can have. On a practical level, even willing consumers are often unable to change their behaviour as they may not have access to satisfactory recycling programmes or adequate environmental and product information to help them make educated purchasing and lifestyle decisions.

Manufacturers have an important role to play in affecting consumer choice and encouraging the purchase and use of more environmentally sound products. In addition to providing complete and effective product information and user manuals, manufacturers should be encouraged to focus more attention on producing quality goods and services and, in turn, providing consumers with assurances about that quality. Raising consumer awareness and helping to influence consumer behaviour could, in turn, encourage more manufacturers to develop products and production methods that can reduce the burden on the environment.

4.1. Conclusions concerning information activities

The respondents did not provide any information regarding the effects of any specific consumer education activities or campaigns. While following up on these initiatives can be difficult and time-consuming, such studies could prove valuable in the preparation of future consumer outreach programmes.

However, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the information gained from the studies themselves. The responses indicated that, in general, consumers are not very well informed on environmental issues and that they need additional and more accurate information to help them make environmentally sound purchasing decisions. Governments, businesses, consumer and environmental organisations should work together to provide consumers with easy access to information and educational materials on environmental issues. Product guidebooks or separate appliance lists would make it possible for consumers to quickly assess and learn about the more ecologically sound products available in the marketplace.

One strategy to improve consumer awareness and encourage consumers to change the way they shop and buy is to arrange more concrete and sectoral education campaigns, such as those found in Finland which concentrate more on specific product and service choices, rather than common consumption patterns. Targeting information can help improve the effectiveness of environmental and consumer information and education campaigns.

Different consumer groups have different needs with respect to environmental information, and their potential to be influenced by information also varies. In certain circumstances, consumers can be encouraged to work together to view the environment and sustainable consumption as a community effort.

For example, families living in blocks of flats or groups of friends can often buy in bulk or can organise the sharing of consumer goods, and several families could use common household appliances.

5. Recommendations for the future

From the results of this initial effort by the Committee on Consumer Policy, it is clear that there is still much to be done to study and affect consumer attitudes and behaviour with respect to the environment and the importance of sustainable consumption and production patterns. To help further the ongoing efforts in this regard, the Committee may consider examining and preparing a set of recommendations (or Guidelines) concerning consumer policy measures intended to obtain sustainable consumption and production patterns.

ANNEX 1: STUDIES CONDUCTED IN THE MEMBER COUNTRIES CONCERNING CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES AND CONCERNS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Austria

Ernährungsstruktur in Österreich. 1994. Bundesministerium für Land- und Fortswirtschaft; Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung; Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, Sport und Konsumentenschutz.

Spannungsfeld Umwelt und Entwicklung. 1994. Das Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Österreichischen Komitee für UNICEF.

Canada

Greening the Marketplace. A 'hands-on' guide for concerned individuals, consumers and environmental groups (1990-1991), by the Environmentally Sound Packaging Coalition of Canada (ESPCC)

Truth in Environmental Labelling and Advertising. Report and Workshop Proceedings, (1991-1992), By the Environmentally Sound Packaging Coalition of Canada (ESPCC)

Putting Consumers First: Green and Fair Economic Instruments (1994-1995), By the Environmentally Sound Packaging Coalition of Canada (ESPCC)

Whither Environment? Public and Expert Opinion Projected to 2010 (1996) and earlier, prepared by Doug Miller, Synergistics Syndicated Studies

Denmark

Studies of consumer behaviour in relation to the environment. 1995.

Finland

Heiskanen, E. (1996). Conditions for Product Life Extension. National Consumer Research Centre. Working papers 22/1996.

Heiskanen, E. & Timonen, P. Environmental awareness and consumer behaviour - Report of Conclusions. Consumers' need for environmental information. National Consumer Research Centre. Publications 9/1996.

LINKKI. 1996. Research programme on consumer habits and energy conservation. Summary report. Publication 15/ 1996.

Moisander, J. Attitudes and ecologically responsible consumption. Statistics Finland. Research Report 218.

Pantzar, M. 1996. Consumers as Rubbish Bins in Industrial Society vs. Consumers as Artists. National Consumer Research Centre. Working papers 26/1996.

Japan

Questionnaire on the Environment. 1995.

Korea

A survey on the consumers' attitudes about environmentally depleting products 1995, Consumer Organization.

A study on the environmentally sound consumption 1993, Consumer Organization.

Norway

From rubbish to resource. Information and education work related to recycling. 1993.

Recycling. Consumer's attitude and action. 1995. National Institute for Consumer Research.5/1995.

Strandbakken, P. Sustainable Consumption. Theoretical and empirical approaches to the debate on sustainable consumption. 1995. National Institute for Consumer Research 1/1995.

Sweden

The Consumer and the Environment. 1996. National Board for Consumer Policies. 13/1996.

The Consumer and the Environment. 1995. National Board for Consumer Policies.

The Consumer and the Environment. 1994. National Board for Consumer Policies.

The United States

Consumer's Interpretation of Alternative Environmental Claims. 1996. The Federal Trade Commission.

National Consumer Survey. 1996. The Council of Packaging in the Environment.

Plastic Resin Identification Code Research. 1994. National Recycling Coalition and the Society of the Plastics Industry.

**ANNEX 2: INFORMATION AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS INTENDED TO RAISE
CONSUMER AWARENESS AND TO INITIATE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

Austria

Ecological Lifestyle. 1996.

The Impact of Consumer Behaviour on the Environment, The European Young Consumer Competition. 1996.

Canada

Action 21, information, education and assistance program 1995.

Rescue Mission - Indicators for Action.

Consumers and Environment - Industry Canada's www site Strategies 1997.

Denmark

Recycling and Racing. 1994.

Environment and Washing Clothes. 1995.

Local Agenda 21. 1995.

Consumption and Environment. 1996.

Finland

A book entitled Eco-Buyer and a related campaign. 1995.

Japan

Green Purchasing Network. 1996.

Korea

Consumers' Pledge for Sustainable Consumption, Consumer Organization

Mexico

Education for Consumption. 1994.

The Electricity Commission's permanent campaign on energy saving.

Mexico City's permanent campaign on fuel saving.

Norway

The Nordic eco-labelling.

Nordic booklet on sustainable consumption made for secondary schools.

Sweden

The Nordic eco-labelling (the Swan). 1989.

Good environmental Choice.

Shop-Green week every autumn.

Switzerland

Save Our Planet. 1996.

National Waste Campaign. 1995.

Campaign for Nature-Like Leisure Gardening. 1994.