Introduction: About EGSF & Buy-Environmental Initiatives

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) defined the EGS industry as follows: " The environmental goods and services industry consists of activities which produce goods and services to measure, prevent, limit, minimise or correct environmental damage to water, air and soil, as well as problems related to waste, noise and eco-systems. This includes cleaner technologies, products and services that reduce environmental risk and minimise pollution and resource use (OECD, 1999)."

A recent study by the Department of Trade and Industry in the United Kingdom revealed that the international environmental goods and services (EGS) market was worth \$548 billion in 2004, with an estimated worth of \$688 billion by 2010 and just under \$800 billion by 2015.

The South African Department of Trade and Industry and industry stakeholders completed a study in early 2006 that investigated the domestic EGS sector. The study updated the South African EGS profile that was drawn up in 2000 and provided more detail. Strengths and weaknesses were analysed with a view to recommending an EGS sector growth strategy and action plan.

Growth in the EGS sector is driven by the need to comply with government regulation on the one hand and voluntary intervention – driven by market forces on the other. Market force pressure is essentially driven by compliance to standards such as ISO 14001, a minimum standard in certain procurement policies, and also by the growing understanding among businesses that offering the Best Environmental Choice products (BEC) to the market, competitive advantage can be gained.

Having recognised the environmental goods and services sector as a growth sector in South Africa, with the potential to make a significant contribution to national economic objectives, the South African Department of Trade and Industry initiated the formation of the Environmental Goods and Services Forum, directing it to seek membership and a mandate from industry to represent the sector and lobby in its interests.

In broad terms the EGS sector covers traditional sub-sectors such as energy efficiency, the supply of drinking water, wastewater treatment and solid waste management and pollution control and reversal as well as new and emerging sub-sectors that include environmentally preferred or 'cleaner' technologies and renewable energy supply. Most environmental goods are supplied by the sector manufacturing electrical and electronic goods (eg. testing and measuring instruments), and the sector manufacturing capital goods (eg. chimney scrubbers, coal washing equipment and water treatment plants). Environmental services mostly comprise advocacy and consultancy for example assessment, design, auditing, verification and monitoring, and compliance.

The approach to establishing an enabling structure for the EGS industry in SA is firstly to define the sector and secondly to look at international trends that provide context for forming an understanding of trade in environmental goods and services internationally and from a South African perspective. The strategy concept will conclude by providing recommendations for a South African EGS action plan.

The buying decisions of government, business and consumers shapes the world – for better or worse! With knowledge buyers can vote for sustainability by always making the Best Environmental Choice available. The revolution has begun and is being led by the world's leading cities and companies as they endeavour to offer the Best Environmental Choice.

In the short to medium term going green is about making changes – about interventions that minimise impact and create gains through efficiency, but in the longer term, and starting right now, going green is about paradigm shifting innovation that will completely revolutionise what we produce and how we produce it.