

## Retail forum paves way for sustainable consumption in Europe

[Brussels, 3 March 2009] – European Environmental Bureau (EEB) Europe’s largest federation of environmental citizens’ organisations, welcomes the Retail Forum, launched today by the European Commission, EuroCommerce and the European Retail Round Table. The Retail Forum was created as part of the Commission’s Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy, published in 2008, to provide a framework for retailers to more actively reduce their ecological footprints.

The Forum will create a platform to help identify key areas to be tackled, define the baseline of existing initiatives, share best practices and report on progress on individual retailer actions.

Doreen Fedrigo, EEB’s EU Policy Unit Coordinator, said, “Retailers have an incredible amount of influence on both production and consumption patterns. We believe targeted activity in the retail sector can help achieve significant change in Europe’s currently unsustainable consumption patterns.”

Environmental and consumer organisations have been invited to become involved in the Forum and EEB welcomes the opportunity to work toward change within this important sector. However, EEB questions the voluntary nature of the Forum since such voluntary agreements do not have a history of effective performance at European level. Retailers have argued that a non-binding approach will work because sustainability is a central issue in their competitive positioning, but EEB views environmental performance as more than just a marketing exercise.

“Visible change is needed on supermarket and shop shelves and in advertising messages,” Doreen Fedrigo continued. “We need the Forum to go beyond a talking shop and produce a list of necessary activities with clear measurable targets that can be monitored. We expect to see real changes that will increase the proportion of sustainable products [4] available to the public, eliminate poor performing products from the market and improve the ecological performance of retailers’ own brands.”

Beyond products, retailers need to more actively assist customers in using public or self-powered transportation for shopping, improve the sustainability of their shop operations and office activities and mainstream sustainability messages.

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Editor’s notes:-

[1] EEB member organisations are located in EU Member states and neighbouring countries, ranging from local and national to European and international. EEB is the environmental voice of European citizens, standing for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. We want the EU to ensure all people a healthy environment and rich biodiversity.

[2] The Retail Forum was launched today by the European Commission in collaboration with EuroCommerce and the European Retail Round Table (ERRT). EuroCommerce represents the retail, wholesale and international trade sectors in Europe. The ERRT is a network of business leaders established to express the views of large retailers on a range of issues of common interest.

[3] The SCP/SIP Action Plan calls for the establishment of a Retail Forum to help “individual retailers commit to a series of ambitious and concrete actions with clear objectives, timelines, deliverables, and monitoring indicators,” referring to the actions necessary to reduce ecological footprints within the retail sector.

[4] A “sustainable product” is one that is not only environmentally sound but also considers social issues such

as fair trade and local production. Sustainability means satisfying human needs and bringing about quality of life while ensuring social equity and respecting the earth’s carrying capacity

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