



The Association of Geological Surveys of the European Union
(EuroGeoSurveys)

In their position as
custodians to their national natural resources
and
guardians of their terrestrial environment

Present their contribution
to the DG Information Society Working Document

**“eEurope 2002: creating an EU Framework for the Exploitation
of Public Sector Information.”**

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Introduction

This paper sets out the opinion of EuroGeoSurveys (The Association of the Geological Surveys of the European Union) to the DG Information Society Working Document: "Towards a European Union Framework for the Exploitation of Public Sector Information".

About EuroGeoSurveys

EuroGeoSurveys:

EuroGeoSurveys is a European non-profit association, which works solely in the public interest. It is constituted by the Directors of the national Geological Survey Organisations (GSO's) of all fifteen-member states of the European Union plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, and can draw on the expertise of over 7000 professionals. Its main aim is to provide the entire range of European Union institutions with expert, balanced and practical pan-European advice and information as an aid to problem-solving and policy formulation in areas such as the use of natural resources (minerals, water, energy, soils and land), and the sustainable management of environmental issues and natural hazards.

EuroGeoSurveys functions as:

- *A Virtual Geological Survey*, to assist the European Union to obtain joint technical advice from the Geological Surveys of the Member States and the Accession Countries;
- *A Virtual Data Centre*, to provide the policy makers, the industry and the public with easy accessible, uniform quality controlled geoscience data;
- *A Virtual Centre of Excellence*, to combine the best of geo-expertise to further develop technology and know-how in the field of natural resources and terrestrial environment;
- *A Virtual Geoscience Permanent Education Network*, to improve the awareness of the public, industry and authorities of the opportunities offered by geoscience.

Each member Survey reports to its government on the state of the country's landmass and Earth resources and maintains large geosciences information banks. EuroGeoSurveys is thus a network of national topic centres, each of which provides government and industry with comprehensive, objective baseline information to support decision-making on natural resource (minerals, energy, water, soils), environmental issues, such as the holistic monitoring and preservation of the environment and natural and man induced hazards, e.g. earthquakes, volcano eruptions, flooding, sea level changes. EuroGeoSurveys promotes Survey work to the EU institutions as relevant to European problem solving in these issues and has contributed opinions on minerals research, groundwater resource policy, the urban environment and the content of new RTD Framework Programmes.

EuroGeoSurveys formulates forward strategy in eleven main policy sectors (networks) which reflect priorities on the EU agenda: information and knowledge transfer; sustainable land use planning; CO2 disposal; natural resource demands; natural geohazards (including earthquakes); clean water, urbanisation, pollution and waste management; quality of the coastal and marine environment; land instability; impacts of climate change; and effective international cooperation in the Developing World, PHARE and TACIS programmes.

EuroGeoSurveys is part of the Forum of Directors of European Geological Surveys (FOREGS), a platform for discussion of European resource and environmental issues by the Council of Europe countries.

Further information is available from the Web site at <http://www.eurogeosurveys.org/> or the Secretary General: Mr Emile Elewaut, EuroGeoSurveys Bureau, rue Breydel 40, B-1040 Brussels. Tel: +32 2 282 9514 Fax: +32 2 280 1979
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Scope of this response

The focus of EuroGeoSurveys is on technical and research issues. As a network of national, geoscientific government organisations, EuroGeoSurveys is perfectly positioned to react to particular technical and scientific points relating to the acquisition, maintenance and exploitation of public sector information.

EuroGeoSurveys would like to point out that in the past, the European Commission has failed several times to give funding support for projects which seek to initiate European standards in the geological domain. Yet, it is only the EC who can realistically undertake this role; national governments will not. The EC therefore needs to adjust its funding and implementation programmes consistent with its policies.

The present opinion represents the general feeling amongst the members of EuroGeoSurveys. However, some of these members may have separate observations, more relevant to their own specific national situation.

EuroGeoSurveys Opinion

EuroGeoSurveys is positively inclined towards the proposed policy. There is an enormous amount of information within the Geological Survey Organisations (GSOs) that would benefit society better if it were more easily visible and available.

It is also true that the different exploitation/charging policies of national governments make cross-border information initiatives difficult to achieve. Often, there even are conflicting government policies within the same country, on the one hand encouraging public sector bodies to exploit data commercially, on the other proposing release of information at marginal cost. An initiative to clarify and rationalise these policies and to streamline them throughout Europe will have a positive impact on the availability and re-use of the geoscience data.

However, EuroGeoSurveys which represents organisations whose function it is to collect, acquire, maintain, archive, analyse, interpret and make available quality geoscience data, have a number of specific observations to make on the working document:

1. The document should better define the word “producing” (Chapter 2, Section 7, Para 2a). In fact, maintaining a good geoscience data system involves the following activities: to collect, to acquire, to maintain in good quality, to archive, to analyse, to interpret, to make available. The legal basis for safeguarding and archiving data extends over limited periods of time only. The archiving of data for periods longer than the legally imposed periods is an expensive business that is difficult to evaluate in terms of financial aspects, indeed, how to calculate the value of data that have been kept in archive for periods of over hundred years. If fully accounted for, pricing of data will be different all over Europe and will depend on the vintage of the data (year of acquisition, time in archive, way of collection, acquisition, digitisation, etc).
2. The GSO’ are striving towards a one stop shop for geoscience data across Europe, to this end, one of the major issues to be resolved is the lack of standardisation across Europe. This lack of standardisation is related to the following data peculiarities: *historical data* collected in pre-EU times, *project specific data* available in object specific languages, region specific data collected on typical geological events. Standardisation of Geoscience data, or of scientific data in general, is a task to be structured through a EU directive. Chapter 2, Section 5 does not require to maintain data in a standardised format, hence this section could be called upon to justify protectionist actions.
3. Under Chapter 1, Section 2, Para 5, it is stated that this Working Paper shall not apply to the public broadcasters, as far as their archives and creative activities in view of producing new programmes are concerned. To this respect, EuroGeoSurveys would like to point out that the broadcasting sector does not have the monopoly on good ideas and creative thinking. Neither do the private sector and the SME’s. Geological Surveys, because they are regularly confronted with new questions and problems, and as they have a broad overview of all available geoscience data, have in the past regularly developed innovative, value added services with a marginal profitability but having a clear social impact. Therefore, Geological Surveys should have the opportunity to protect those documents that can be considered the bases for a possibly new value added service. (The private sector often regards these innovations as not immediately profitable, so not worth developing, but will gladly take over the business once the method has been developed and provided the data the method depends on is available at no cost).
4. Under Chapter 2, Section 10, Para 1, “public sector bodies cannot be forced to create or to continue to create the production of a certain type of documents....” This section can be wrongly regarded, as justification to stop data collection activities if data are no longer required by commercial or other organisations outside of the geological surveys. This may lead to dangerous situations in case of acute need of data for safety en environmental purposes (e.g. natural hazards such as flooding, land slides, accidental pollution, pollution remediation) or even in case of future planning needs for sustainable development (geo-diversity versus bio-diversity, planning of large infrastructures, urban or marine development).