

19th October #BuildingLife Policy Dialogue

MEPs and industry leaders are aligned on the need for EU Directives to drive decarbonisation of buildings

A window of opportunity for policy change

The European Commission has just released a much-anticipated set of proposals for the revision of the EU's flagship buildings policy: the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive or EPBD.

The Commission deserves some credit for this overhaul. But in at least one area - whole life carbon - the proposal fails to follow through with the level of ambition and urgency demanded by the climate emergency.

The proposals now enter the so-called triad: negotiations between Parliament, Council and Commission. As several Members of the European Parliament have been calling for much greater ambition on whole life carbon, there is still hope for more ambitious legislation.

Consensus on the need for action

Whole life carbon covers not just the operation of the building: it includes as well as the embodied carbon emissions associated with materials production, construction and end of life stages. For new buildings, embodied carbon emissions often account for more than half of their total environmental impact. World Green Building Council's (WorldGBC) #BuildingLife campaign aims to accelerate industry and policy action to tackle these often overlooked emissions.

We should celebrate that the EPBD proposal mentions embodied emissions at all. But the bar is set far too low. The proposals only require disclosure of these emissions for most buildings from 2030. This is simply too little, too late.

As the Commission was drafting the update, WorldGBC and GLOBE EU jointly hosted a #BuildingLife event. The online dialogue between MEPs and industry leaders explored what a roadmap for the decarbonisation of the sector should look like. The event was chaired by Sirpa Pietikäinen (President of GLOBE EU), one of five MEPs supporting the #BuildingLife campaign.

Sirpa described the impact of the construction sector, highlighting its huge environmental footprint and resource consumption. Her vision is of a complete rebuild of the EPBD as a *Sustainable Performance of Buildings Directive*: a directive that fully recognises the critical role of buildings in meeting global climate goals.

Speaking at the event was MEP and GLOBE EU member Niels Fuglsang. Niels is rapporteur for the update of another important piece of EU legislation: the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED). He too acknowledged that more must be done to address whole life carbon. He emphasised that both the EED and the EPBD can be strengthened to increase renovation rates, which can help avoid the high embodied carbon footprint of new construction.

The policy makers were joined by speakers from Tarkett and Stora Enso, both leaders in the building sector. Tarkett is a flooring manufacturer and Myriam Tryjefaczka, Sustainability and Public affairs Director for the EMEA Division, shared insights from their work to close material loops and make their products more circular. Johanna Pirinen, Senior Vice President of Sustainability for Stora Enso's Wood Products division, explained how sustainably sourced timber can be a solution to reduce the embodied carbon in buildings. Stora Enso is a renewable materials company whose products include structural mass timber solutions for buildings.

Roadmaps signpost readiness for change

WorldGBC's Europe Director, Stephen Richardson, explained to an audience of professionals, policy makers, and academics how under #BuildingLife ten national Green Building Councils (GBCs) are developing national roadmaps for the total decarbonisation of the built environment. The roadmaps have been developed with input from all stakeholder groups. Stephen showcased the Polish roadmap - the first to be launched. Two further roadmaps - from Finland and the UK - were launched during the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow.

These roadmaps, which have broad industry backing, support the perspective of Johanna Pirinen and Myriam Tryjefaczka that industry is ready to tackle whole life carbon but needs ambitious policies to be able to do so.

Hopes now on #BuildingLife ambassador coalition

If the Commission has not recognised this, the sector must now rely on MEPs to make sure these calls are heard. Five have already lent their support to the #BuildingLife campaign:

Ciaran Cuffe, European Green Party

Frances Fitzgerald, European People's Party

Valter Flego, Renew Europe

Sirpa Pietikäinen, European People's Party

Maria Spyraiki, European People's Party

Standing alongside them are 140 other #BuildingLife ambassadors - leading figures from across the industry and civil society. We invite you to join them!

Contact your local Green Building Council or WorldGBC to find out how you and your organisation can help ensure buildings have their rightful place in Europe's fight against climate change.