



# GreenEcoNet

## Innovation Lab

### *'Identifying and utilising green business opportunities for SMEs'*

Brussels, 29 November 2013

#### Topic one: Background and objectives of the GreenEcoNet project

##### *Summary of discussion held*

Following the introduction by the chair (Arno Behrens, Head of Energy and Research Fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies), Mr Corrado Topi (Senior Research Fellow, University of York - SEI) presented the background, aims and objectives of the GreenEcoNet project. Thereafter, Ms Silvia Donato (Research Programme Officer, DG Research - European Commission) illustrated the EU Commission's expectations about the project as well as its relevance to EU-policy making. Finally, Ms Emily Benson (Project Manager, Green Economy Coalition) provided a first visual presentation of the platform and illustrated how it will support the needs of all relevant actors.

##### *Key messages*

- SME multipliers and networks will be utilised during the 3-year course of the project to reach the widest possible audience.
- Depending on the national and local circumstances, in some cases the availability of information only in English might be a significant limiting factor for the engagement of local SMEs. Thus in the long-term, the project team will need to find ways to integrate more languages in the platform.

## Topic two: Assumptions for building the platform - A barriers and opportunities oriented approach

### *Summary of discussion held*

The chair (Wytze van der Gaast, Senior Expert, Joint Implementation Network) launched the discussions on the second topic focusing on the barriers and opportunities arising for SMEs wishing to implement the green economy. Mr Sotiris Papadelis (Senior Expert, University of Piraeus Research Center) listed the key barriers and enabling factors that have been already incorporated in the initial design of the platform. Mr Henning Sittel (Project Manager, Efficiency Agency of the German State of North-Rhine Westphalia) followed up this presentation by providing his view on the design of the platform. He was skeptical about the development of another new European platform for SMEs. He stressed that the new GreenEcoNet platform would need to become an efficient and user-friendly source of information in terms of best practice examples, technology potentials, financial benefits and funding options, which SMEs can tailor to their own contexts. The platform should also incorporate the experiences of national and regional structures as well provide direct links for contacts. Mr Sittel furthermore underlined the role of consumers as key driver for greening of business.

### *Key messages*

- SME networking is important to overcome barriers and benefit from green business opportunities, and it should tap into national and/or regional collaboration agencies/multipliers.
- The platform would need to be user-friendly and use the limited time of SMEs effectively.
- Regional and/or national consultancies or multipliers should be the starting point for promoting the platform and reaching local SMEs.
- The platform will need to be 'dynamic' rather than 'static' and offer to the users 'easy-to-understand' information and funding options. These options, as well as other solutions, need to connect well with the local context of the SMEs and the platform should enable SMEs to find context-relevant information.
- The platform can address the 'regulation' barrier by channeling to policy makers the key issues and concerns of SMEs as identified in the context of the project.
- A degree of collaboration is needed between the GreenEcoNet platform and the various available platforms that aim at greening SME business.
- There might be cases where some local SMEs would not be interested in sharing their best-practice examples since they might want to expand; however, on the other hand, through the platform SMEs could identify local partners which could help them expand their services.

## Topic three: Introduction of the GreenEcoNet platform

### *Summary of discussion held*

The introduction by the chair (Oliver Greenfield, Convenor, Green Economy Coalition) was followed by a presentation by Mr Sotiris Papadelis of the main categories of the platform as well as of the basic structure of case study data collection. Thereafter, Mr Martin Kloet (Project Leader, MKB Nederland) mentioned that small companies are often interested in the green economy but they have difficulties in

understanding how to apply green business concepts due to lack of knowledge and/or time constraints. He emphasized that an important audience group for GreenEcoNet will be actors which advise entrepreneurs on how to green their businesses. He recommended that the focus of GreenEcoNet be related to entrepreneurship, which implies that platform users should be able to 'contextualize' information supplied on the platform to their regional or national situation. Ms Luisa Nenci, (Environmental Economist & Sustainability Advisor, Global Eco Forum) emphasised the need of identifying "champions" who will promote the platform at national and local level and also stressed that the case studies should offer practical information with academic knowledge, such as criteria, parameters and indicators to build the bases for benchmarking green SMEs. She also suggested that GreenEcoNet services both support SMEs in becoming green and staying green. Mr Franz Brudl (Advisor, Austrian Economic Chambers) presented the main issues to be taken into account from the Austrian Economic Chambers' point of view and suggested the integration in the platform of an online forum (or FAQ catalogue) that would help SMEs identify the information they are looking for. The platform could also show what potential exists for greening business in different contexts (e.g. help a Swedish SME to decide whether a good green SME practice from Australia is also applicable in Sweden).

### ***Key messages***

- SMEs should be directly involved in the discussions regarding the platform as they will be the principal users of the platform.
- The platform should be promoted at national and local level through Chambers of Commerce, EU delegations, SME multipliers and local organisations.
- The internet is an important source of information but the platform should be also adapted to the national and local needs through support by regional groups or associations.
- The case studies should be practical and answer core questions for the SMEs such as how much would a new practice or technology cost.
- The platform should include, if possible, the option for SMEs to answer a number of questions related to e.g. size of SME and location and then receive a list of suggestions for case studies.
- An online interactive forum or FAQ catalogue would facilitate SMEs to easily acquire the information they need.

### **Topic four: Added value of the platform**

#### ***Summary of discussion held***

The chair (Corrado Topi) summarised the discussions held. He stressed that the project team faces the challenge of developing a platform that will support the SMEs wishing to implement the green economy in an effective way. While developing a platform that will address the SMEs needs at the EU and even global level, the team should also take into account the importance of local conditions and local context. Two key points that emerged from the discussions were the knowledge gap for some companies wishing to become 'green' as well as the lack of information about financing; the platform will try to address both of them. The team will also map similar initiatives at the EU and global level and develop communication linkages. Participating stakeholders also offered their support to the next steps of the platform development, e.g. through webinar discussions.