

AEGPL Response to the European Parliament's Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas Intergroup's Consultation on Energy & Climate Change in Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas

AEGPL, the European LPG Association, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the debate on energy and climate change in rural areas and is therefore delighted to submit its answer to the public consultation issued by the Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas European Parliament's Intergroup. AEGPL strongly believes that rural areas represent an extremely important part of the EU society and that they currently do not have the attention they deserve. In fact, they account for 90% of all the territory in the EU and for 56% of its population. They generate 43% of all economic value and support 55% of all the employment.

For these reasons, AEGPL believes that the EU should better tailor its policies in order to take into account rural areas' specificities, which, more often than not, make ad-hoc solutions necessary to solve their problems. Hence, AEGPL welcomes this consultation as an important step to effectively tackle rural areas' issues, among which energy security, indoor air pollution and its contribution to climate change are for sure some of the most pressing ones. AEGPL believes that LPG, which is a low-carbon, near-zero black carbon and low polluting fuel, can play a strategic role in the EU rural energy mix because of the capillarity and flexibility of its distribution system, which make it available even in the remotest parts of Europe. Therefore, LPG is able to provide households a high degree of energy security, by also tackling climate change and fighting indoor air pollution.

Below you can read AEGPL's response to the European Parliament's RUMRA Intergroup's Consultation on Energy & Climate Change in Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas.

Samuel Maubanc

AEGPL General Manager

What are the main energy challenges in rural areas? *

Rural areas households have a limited fuel choice, since most are not served by the natural gas grid. In addition, although almost all EU rural areas are covered by the electricity network, statistics by the Council of European Energy Regulators suggests that blackouts in rural areas are 2 to 4 times more frequent than in urban areas and last, on average, 75% to 300% longer. Therefore, security of energy supply is also an issue in rural areas. For that reason, moving to an “all-electric” scenario as advocated by some stakeholders, to cover all household needs including space heating, water heating, and cooking, can possibly prove problematic in rural areas. Heating appliances running on an autonomous source of energy, i.e. without a need to be connected to a grid, represent a clear added value in the rural areas.

AEGPL, the sole representative of the LPG industry at European level, believes that the promotion of cleaner fuels, like LPG, which already has a capillary distribution throughout all EU rural areas, can cost-efficiently help European households to achieve a high degree of security of supply, while helping to tackle the issues of air pollution and climate change. It should be noted for example that the use of LPG with a gas heat pump, a hybrid boiler (combination of a gas boiler with a heat pump), or a thermo-solar installation (combination of solar panels with a gas boiler) bring together the environmental benefits of renewables without the risk of a shortage of power due to grid disruption or intermittency of solar or wind power.

Is fuel poverty an issue in rural areas? *

Studies have shown that average living standard, as expressed as GDP per head, is generally lower in rural than in urban areas. Rural poverty in Europe seems to become an increasingly serious issue and fuel poverty is its direct consequence. For this reason, it can be argued that rural households may suffer more often than their urban counterparts from insufficient heating and, evidently, they may also have more difficulties in making investments to switch to cleaner fuels or improve the energy performance of their buildings

AEGPL believes that, for the EU to reach its climate targets, it is fundamental that more tailor-made financial support for increased energy efficiency or for switching to cleaner fuels is given to rural households. It considers that stimulus to switch to cleaner fuels given by the EAFRD to economic actors is not effective enough. While the Cohesion Policy has been effective in helping urban communities to make their heating systems more environmentally sustainable, a tailor-made approach is necessary in order to achieve the same success in rural areas.

Do you think current policy covers rural energy in a sufficient way? Why? *

The Energy 2020 strategy included measures to achieve energy savings. In addition, EU Regional Policy provides financial support to increase the security of energy supply and to promote innovation in rural areas. However, EU policy does currently not cover the issue of indoor air pollution, which is extremely significant in rural areas.

Do you think that current policy addresses the impact of CO₂ and other air pollution on rural areas in a sufficient way? Why? *

The EU adopts the same approach for policies on urban and rural air pollution, while the issues affecting the areas are very much different. In particular, EU policies ignore the problem of indoor air pollution, which, according to the WHO, caused 117 000 premature deaths in the European Region in 2012. These deaths are caused by inefficient burning of solid fuels, which are predominantly used in rural areas,

mainly for heating and cooking purposes. AEGPL believes that policies efficiently promoting cleaner fuels could have a significant impact in reducing that number.

Regarding outdoor air pollution, the Ambient Air Quality Directive prescribes that air pollution sampling points in rural backgrounds must be installed every 100.000 km² (the EU has a 4.3 million km² total area and 14 EU countries' surface is smaller than 100.000 km²). This raises serious doubts about the significance of the available data and therefore makes a valid assessment of the adequacy of outdoor air pollution policies extremely difficult.

As per the impact of CO₂, given their specificities, rural areas would need a tailor-made approach to cut GHG emissions, based on realistic and cost-efficient measures. The promotion of cleaner fuels, such as LPG, which produces 49% less CO₂ than coal and 17% less than heating oil, could provide the EU a significant help in achieving its climate targets. In fact, studies show that a rural energy mix with an increased role for LPG (from 8.8 million ToE to 14.1 million ToE) could bring the CO₂ emissions down by 184 million tonnes per year.

For further information, please contact Samuel Maubanc at samuel.maubanc@aegpl.be