



# The Greek NCESD's Experience in Producing Strategic Environmental Information and Supporting the Policy-Making Process

*by Alexander Deliyannis, Project Manager, NCESD  
deliyannis@ekpaa.gr*

## 1: Introduction

The Greek **National Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development** was established by Presidential Decree in December 2000. It was officially inaugurated in June 2001.

It operates as a private body supervised by the Minister of the Environment. Its Board of Trustees has been appointed by decision of the Ministerial Council.

The NCESD's **mission** is to become the state's strategic advisor on issues of the environment and sustainable development. By providing continuous, reliable and objective information, knowledge and well-justified proposals and opinions, it supports effective policy-making and implementation within the above sectors. It contributes, as a knowledge mechanism, to the integration of the environmental dimension to sectoral developmental policies and, therefore, to the cross-coordination of public policies influencing territorial and environmental management.

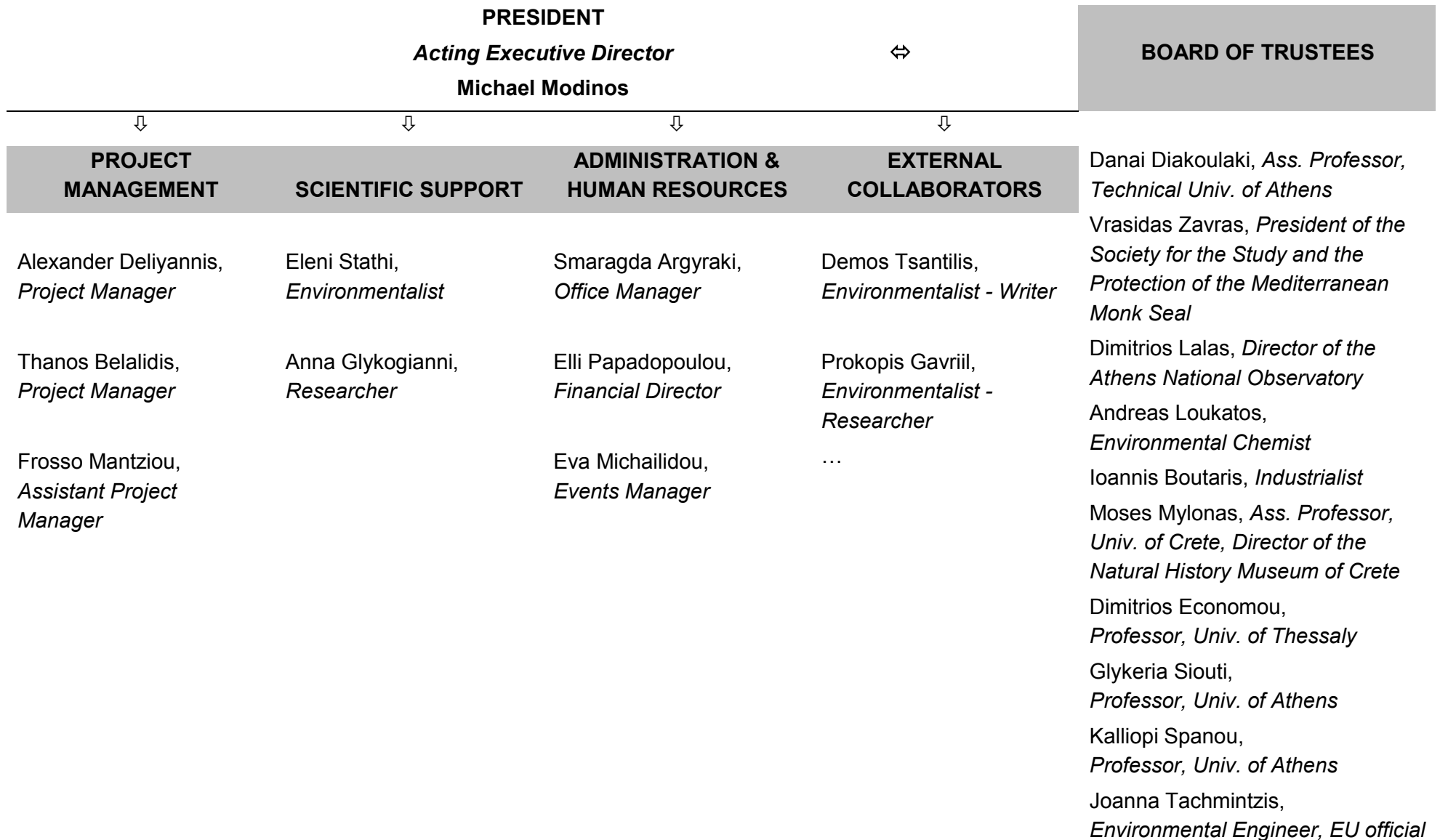
## 2: Aims

The National Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development **aims** to:

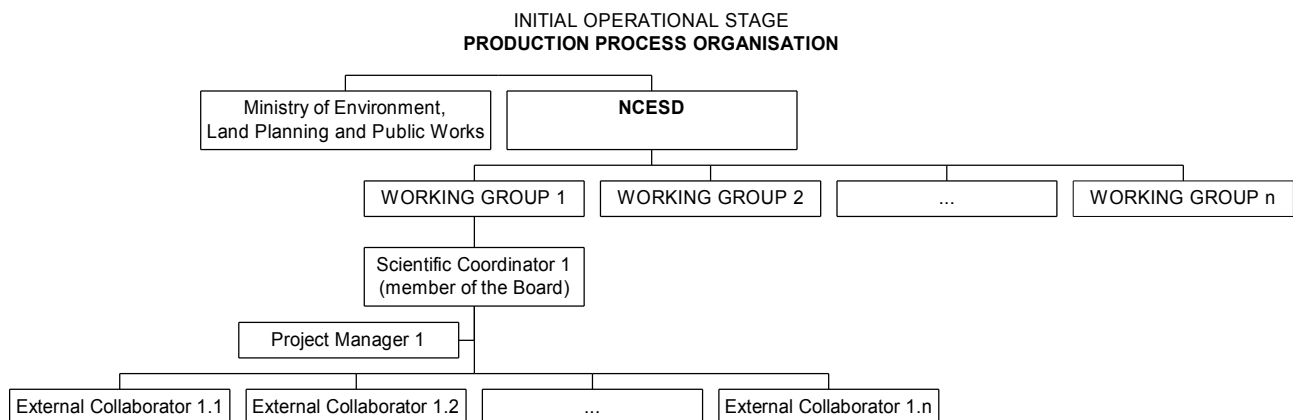
- **Collect, organise** and further **process** information and data on the environment, and **provide** objective, reliable and comparable information to both public and private users.
- **disseminate** environmental information widely and raise the level of knowledge and consciousness of the public in relation to the environment and sustainable development.
- make a scientific contribution to the **establishment, implementation** and **evaluation** of policies, programmes and measures concerning the environment and sustainable development undertaken by the administration.
- provide **technical** and **scientific support** to programmes and measures undertaken at national, EU and international level in relation to the environment and sustainable development
- offer **education** and **training** to national and local administrations, as well as to citizens, on issues related to the environment and sustainable development.

### 3: Organisation

#### 3.1 Temporary Administrative Structure



### 3.2: Production Model



The NCESD is currently operating on a project-by-project basis, pending the establishment of a permanent workforce through regular public service personnel hiring processes.

During this period, the Center's production processes are handled by working groups of external collaborators, under the scientific guidance of its board members, and the facilitation from project managers based at the NCESD's office.

This approach will continue after the Center has fully developed its infrastructure and workforce, expanding its area of activities. However, an increasing percentage of processes will be handled in-house.

## 4: Facility

The NCESD's facilities are located at the majestic Villa Kazouli, a building of the 1900s renovated in 1998 by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works. The building is currently housing three more structures active in environmental issues:

- The **National Network of Environmental Information** established by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works to support environmental data exchange and management, as well as collaboration with the EIONET. All EIONET national focal points are connected to this Network. The NCESD is scheduled to undertake responsibility for the Network when its infrastructure and workforce have been completed.
- The Coordinating Group of the **MedWet Initiative** promoting protection of Ramsar Convention wetlands in the Mediterranean countries.
- The recently established **Natura 2000 National Committee**.

## 5: SWOT

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced Leadership &amp; Fresh blood</li> <li>NGO / Private Sector -like results-oriented attitude</li> <li>Bird's eye view of issues</li> <li>Open attitude to information handling</li> <li>Access to external expertise from a broad range of disciplines</li> <li>Office building a major asset, housing a number of environmental activities &amp; bodies</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underdeveloped infrastructure</li> <li>Hiring of permanent personnel not yet underway</li> <li>De facto multiple priorities</li> <li>As yet not broadly known</li> <li>Project-based approach does not always ensure the best long-term results</li> <li>Distance from the central administration</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requirement for a National Environmental Agency broadly acknowledged</li> <li>Willingness from the scientific community and other stakeholders to collaborate</li> <li>Availability of data in specific areas, i.e. energy, air pollution, waste</li> <li>Funds available for infrastructure</li> <li>Increased demand for expert participation in international meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental issues split between multiple authorities</li> <li>Transitional period for the Public Sector</li> <li>Multiple standards in environmental reporting</li> <li>Major investments already scheduled</li> <li>Occasional defensive attitude from other ministries</li> </ul>

## 6: Strategy

Based on the previous analysis, we can conclude that the NCESD's main competitive advantage is its **multidisciplinary approach** to environmental issues and its **extensive collaborator base** which enable it to provide unique services to the public sector and the civil society, such as **comprehensive environmental information, strategic assessment of environmental issues, multistakeholder dialogue processes** and **policy proposals** based on the best available expertise.

The NCESD has chosen to focus its resources to producing integrated and specifically aimed outputs from the above range. Each NCESD project is a step towards a model of integrated environmental and sectoral policies, leading to sustainability.

## **7: Projects**

### **7.1: 2001 - State of the Environment**

The concise report of the State of the Environment in Greece was the first attempt of the freshly established National Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development to produce a reliable basis on the issue. The task proved harder than initially expected as time and space limitations put a number of constraints.

A significant number of experts contributed to the project, each working on a specific area, constituting the first network of partners to the NCESD. The Center's staff undertook the responsibility for editing a single comprehensive document. The report can be downloaded from [http://www.ekpaa.gr/documents/NCESD-EN-State\\_of\\_the\\_Environment.pdf](http://www.ekpaa.gr/documents/NCESD-EN-State_of_the_Environment.pdf)

The State of the Environment report was widely accepted as an objective assessment of where the environmental policy issues stood at the moment in Greece. It was published with the financial support of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP/UNEP), which in fact acted as a catalyst to push a 3-month old organisation to accomplish its initial task of strategic reporting.

### **7.2: 2002 - Strategy for Sustainable Development**

In anticipation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the NCESD organised a series of expert working sessions, focusing on (a) global environmental issues, (b) international and european environmental agreements and policies and (c) a sustainability approach to national sectoral policies.

Expert inputs to the sessions formed the basis of a comprehensive proposal for a National Strategy Towards Sustainable Development.

Under the responsibility of NCESD Board Member professor Danae Diakoulaki, the document was completed in record time and disseminated to the competent authorities for comments. Following feedback, the document was revised by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works; its final version was approved in May 2002 by the Council of Ministers and submitted to the UN CSD. An english summary of the final document is available upon request.

In addition to the strategy proposal, the NCESD played an active role in the ministerial committee set up to prepare the country's participation in the WSSD; among others, it contributed most of the material for the Status chapters in the Country Profile submitted to the CSD.

### **7.3: 2003 - Sustainability Indicators**

This project commenced shortly after the delivery of the proposal for a National Strategy for Sustainable Development, and was concluded in the first quarter of 2003. Contrary to initial plans, it proved difficult to base the Indicators report on primary sources of information. In numerous cases, the researchers used data provided through channels well-established within the public sector, namely the National Statistics Agency. In addition, the contribution of the National Observatory of Athens, national focal point for the Kyoto protocol, was outstanding in issues of climate, energy and air pollution.

The completed document was circulated to a wide range of peers and received very positive comments. In addition, the NCESD is now in the process of producing a full english translation of the report.

The first national Sustainability Indicator report is currently being disseminated to the broader public sector and attracting significant attention. In effect, the report is being used to establish permanent links with competent authorities and agencies which follow specific environmental issues, to ensure that the next report will be based on the best primary sources of information available.

#### **7.4: Other Projects (Indicative List)**

The NCESD, considering multistakeholder dialogue involving competent public authorities, special interest organisations and relevant groups of society, as a prerequisite in the process of drafting environmental policy, has organised a number of work sessions on a wide range of issues of strategic importance for the environment. The meetings participants included experts and representatives of public administration, civil society and the corporate sector, depending on the specific issue. More specifically, the following issues were addressed:

1. Spatial Planning Policy
2. Civil society, environmental NGOs and the NCESD's role
3. The 6th Environmental Action Program and the European Strategy for Sustainable Development
4. Solid Waste Management Issues
5. Environmental Sensitization and Education
6. Renewable Sources of Energy and Environmental Protection
7. Legal Protection of the Environment
8. Biodiversity and management of natural resources

Among others, the NCESD organised the multistakeholder dialogue for a Strategic Action Plan for the conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean (SAP-BIO project) with the support of the MAP/UNEP Regional Action Center on Specially Protected Areas. It also organised and hosted the first Greek-Turkish environmental NGO Conference with the participation of a total of twenty-five NGOs from the neighbouring sides of the Aegean.

In addition, the NCESD has been called to address specific sectoral policies in depth. In the case of management of water resources, the Center has produced:

- A draft format for a Water Reporting System
- A plan for the development of a River Basin Management Scheme in Greece
- A proposal for the alignment of the national legislation to the EU framework Water directive.

## 8: Conclusions

Within its two years in operation, the Greek NCESD has played a significant role in providing comprehensive environmental information to a broad public, as well as supporting environmental policy making through the majority of available national channels. It has played, among others, the role of facilitator, advisor, leading partner, national representative, catalyst. In addition to the initial SWOT analysis, a few notes on its experience follow below.

On the plus side:

- Networking of established experts from neighbouring sectors has proved an effective way to kick-start work on cross-cutting issues.
- An independent entity can be more flexible and efficient than traditional public sector structures.
- There is significant public demand for reliable environmental information.

On the minus side

- Funding available to an independent organisation can often be limited compared to the scale of certain operations.
- Finding one's way through the labyrinth of the public sector is not always easy.
- Without integration with the existing structures it is difficult to be effective in the long term.

## 9: What's Next

Following its two-year experience of operating through an ad-hoc structure, the Greek National Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development is taking the final steps towards establishing a more permanent workforce and infrastructure.

The structure of the NCESD's new website (*see next page*), currently under construction, provides a view of the things to come. The NCESD's staff will follow specific environmental issues in the long term, liaising with external experts and stakeholders, and collaborating internally to ensure cross-sectoral cohesion.

Effectively, the NCESD will be becoming a one-stop shop for environmental information and policy issues, advancing its role as a partner to stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as civil society.

