

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL BUREAU
2017 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Changing Landscapes

Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

6 November 2017

CONFERENCE REPORT



EEB
European
Environmental
Bureau



Scottish
Environment
LINK

The conference was organised by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and its member organisation Scottish Environment LINK

EUROPE'S LARGEST NETWORK
OF ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENS
ORGANISATIONS



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An International non-profit Association

Association Internationale sans but lucratif

The EEB is a member of Accountable Now

EC register for interest representatives: Identification
number 06798511314-27



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Established in 1987, LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. LINK is a member of the EEB and IUCN. LINK is a Scottish charity (SC000296) and Scottish company (SC250899).

The organisers gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the LIFE Programme of the European Union, the Scottish Government Environment and Forestry Directorate, the Scottish Government Energy and Climate Change Directorate, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Historic Environment Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.
Published March 2018, Brussels, Belgium.



With the support of
the LIFE Programme
of the European Union



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WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

A crucial moment, a powerful future

Opening the conference, Joyce McMillan, Honorary President of Scottish Environment Link told delegates it was a “special privilege” to welcome them to Scotland and to do so at what she said everyone knew was: “a crucial moment for the environment”.

The level of CO2 emissions, chronic species loss and the challenges that Brexit poses for sustaining and improving environmental standards, were all highlighted by McMillan, who said: “These are traumatic times for people on this island, for people who care about the environment”.

Like many present at the event, McMillan was delighted that Scotland, like all EU countries, is committed to delivering on the global Sustainable Development Goals. She also told the audience how proud she was of Scottish involvement in Agenda 2030.

McMillan brought her brief remarks to a close by highlighting the dramatic energy of Scotland’s history. She said Scotland has been changed by an economy built on oil and it was now ready to face an exceptional future powered by renewable energy.



Joyce McMillan

DR MIKAEL KARLSSON

Co-President of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Solidarity is a scarce resource but if we can nurture it, it can show us how to build relations and a green society, says Dr Mikael Karlsson

"Solidarity doesn't tell us what to do about Brexit or Trump, but it guides us in bearing consequences and building sustainable relations," EEB President Dr Mikael Karlsson told delegates as he opened the Annual Conference in Edinburgh.

In a wide-ranging speech that quoted some of the greats of Scottish literature and philosophy, but that remained grounded in references to the changing colour of the trees lining the city's streets, Karlsson provided an oversight of what he hoped the day's discussions could achieve.

The conference, Karlsson said, would dig into what it might take to achieve green transformations in various areas, not least in the present period of changing political and social landscapes within Europe and across the Atlantic.

Karlsson reminded delegates that such transformations rely on a relationship between science and policy. Early warnings from scientists are commonly neglected, and knowledge migrates slowly from natural scientists to social scientists, sometimes to economists, and then finally to politicians and the broader public.

A major challenge is translating rhetoric and objectives into strategies and measures. Something that Karlsson says is never easy: *"not even when problem drivers are known and mitigating measures are both feasible and profitable"*.

The President pointed out that there are two explanations for why it is so hard to make progress. The first, is that policies are too weak to achieve their aims, the second, that simply making *"amendments to business as usual"* can never lead to true transformation.

On this second point Karlsson explained the argument that: *"If we change prices but not social values, if we develop laws but keep institutions, if we label and substitute but consume as before, if we focus on efficiency and not on sufficiency, if we push for green growth instead of sustainable development, if we commodify nature, if we accept present power relations and continued gender inequality – then we might fool ourselves to the extent that problems may even worsen."*

While some may see the two explanations and the approaches required as a result of them as incompatible, Karlsson argued that both new policies and genuine transformation were necessary: *"If we on the other hand focus on values but keep present prices, much will go wrong before an enlightened mankind understands that change is needed."*

Karlsson warned that the science-denying president Trump is just the tip of the iceberg: *"Climate denial exists also in Europe, from outright flat earth-type of arguments, to policy opposition, nurtured by underestimated costs of carbon, and overestimated costs of regulation."*

The speech turned to recent and current challenges with European policy makers, criticising the approaches of successive Commission presidents. The harshest criticism reserved for current European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker: *"instead of defending the planet in line with facts and rational reasoning, he downplayed, delayed and dismantled environmental policy even more"*.

Describing Juncker's approach to the environment as *"anachronistic"*, although not as disastrous as President Trump, Karlsson said: *"Fortunately, Juncker has repeatedly failed in his most severe attacks on the environmental domain, but he is stealing valuable time from issues and from the future, by delaying and weakening policies."*

Yet Karlsson concluded his speech by touching on some more positive elements of European environmental policy. He said the essential precautionary principle was beginning to be applied in chemicals regulation, that the Emissions Trading Scheme left space for carbon pricing, and that it was becoming less and less unusual for high-level politicians to talk about the need to go beyond GDP as a measure of success. It was changing attitudes and values that were crucial he said.

Karlsson said that while the world is dark now, there *"is ground for optimism for the future" and that solidarity was the greatest resource we have: "solidarity, after all, is what makes us humans, or in the words of 'Rabbie' Burns, 'to see ourselves as others see us'; so that 'man to man the world over... should brothers be'."*



ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM MSP

Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

No 'race to the bottom' for Scotland, or UK, says Roseanna Cunningham

Scotland will not allow a 'race to the bottom' in environmental standards after Brexit, Scottish Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham told the EEB Annual Conference.

In her key note address to attendees she outlined the Scottish Government's commitment to preserving Scotland's *"distinctive and ambitious"* approach to environmental standards.

"Just after the EU referendum last year, I gave my commitment that I would do everything in my power to maintain, protect and enhance our environment," she told the Dynamic Earth venue in Edinburgh.

"That is a commitment I share with Scotland's First Minister – Nicola Sturgeon – who stated to our Parliament that any threat to Scotland's distinctive and ambitious approaches to environmental standards and to climate change – along with many other areas – is 'completely unacceptable'. We will not let our goals be undermined by any race to the bottom in pursuit of future trading agreements."

The Scottish Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change, and Land Reform welcomed those attending the conference.

"Looking up from this conference centre towards Arthur's Seat in the park behind us, you can get a glimpse of why Scotland has just been voted the most beautiful country in the world by Rough Guide readers – an accolade that we are deeply proud about," she said.

In addition to acknowledging her commitment to maintaining environmental standards she also strongly emphasised her government's commitment

to the values of the European Union which underpins those values.

"The European Union was founded on a recognition of shared values and common interests which transcend national boundaries. A robust and effective approach to protecting our environment has proved, for many of us, to be one of those key shared values," she said.

"So my ambition is to carry through not just the letter of EU environmental law but also, its spirit. That spirit is captured in the underlying principles of precaution, prevention and rectifying pollution at source, as well as the 'polluter pays' principle."

"And I want to assert my intention and determination to ensure that these principles sit at the heart of Scotland's approach to environmental policy in the future, wherever that future lies. Without them, we risk lagging behind and diverging from the ambitions of our European allies as well as missing key tools that can help us to meet international ambitions such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals," she added.

Ms Cunningham, member of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), emphasised the value of European environmental policy to Scotland through the Natura 2000 network, the EU LIFE programme and the Water Framework Directive.

She also pointed to ways in which Scotland was leading the way with its strong commitment to renewable energy, their focus on marine litter and their new Climate Change Bill.

Her final remarks also acknowledged the incredible work that Scottish communities were doing in response to environmental challenges.

"In Scotland, we are lucky to have a long tradition of strong civic organisations and non-governmental bodies. I believe that active citizens and local groups will be key to our success. In 2015, Scottish Environment LINK reported that 565,000 people in Scotland volunteered to help with environmental projects," she said.

"There are many inspiring stories to be told of communities taking action to improve their local environment. For example my own awareness of marine pollution issues was heightened when pupils from a primary school near Edinburgh constructed a massive jellyfish from plastic bottles collected on their local beach and brought it to the Scottish Parliament. We have groups making the links between the environment and health, between environment and developing new skills and employment. We have farmers helping the recovery of threatened birds like the corn bunting and we have farmers developing new enterprises enabling the public to see wildlife such as the reintroduced sea eagles and red kites."



HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION: PURSUING SUSTAINABILITY IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

**Lesley Riddoch, Anne McCall, Jeremy Wates,
Mary Creagh and Ian Jardine**

As moderator, **Lesley Riddoch**, an award-winning journalist who writes regularly for the Guardian, The Sunday Post and the Scotsman, praised everyone that fights to protect the environment for following generations, especially against the challenges that Brexit and Trump pose to the environment.

Anne McCall, Director of RSPB Scotland, asked how civil society can pursue sustainability at a time of uncertainty. Regardless of climate change denial and Brexit, environmental challenges are the main priority, she said. Issues like climate change, biodiversity loss and air pollution are affecting everyone as we witness the consequences of frequent extreme weather events and wildfires across Europe. McCall described these as global challenges that require cross-border cooperation.

She welcomed remarks made by the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment that Holyrood intends to preserve EU environmental standards, adding that Scotland, just like the rest of the UK, has benefited enormously from EU ambition on conservation and land management, access to clean water, research and innovation, among others.

McCall reminded those present that Scotland has already signed up to the Paris Agreement and is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, despite ongoing political uncertainty.

Jeremy Wates, Secretary General of the EEB, highlighted that the Brexit vote should in fact be seen as an opportunity for increasing cooperation on issues such as environmental protection, democracy and accountability.

"Many of us feared that the decision by the UK to leave the EU was going to have a domino effect on other countries. But we have instead witnessed the growth of a movement calling for collective action to address common issues", Wates said.

He argued that the impact of Brexit cannot weaken EU environmental legislation, which is put in place to protect all forms of life and serve the interests of all people. Wates warned that we cannot afford a race to the bottom.

On the contrary, he stressed the need for the implementation of common laws that are based on scientific evidence, justice and accountability, rather than ideology.

Mary Creagh, Chair of the British Environmental Audit Select Committee, argued that environmental legislation in the UK has benefited massively from EU membership. Many policy analysts now fear

that important principles, such as the polluter pays principle, as well as ambitious targets may be left behind or made non-binding.

Transposition of EU environmental laws into the British framework will be the biggest challenge for the current and future UK governments. Such laws cannot simply be copied into national legislation if the common, overarching ground provided by the EU is taken away from policy makers. *"Environmental protection must not fall through the legislative cracks,"* she said.

Creagh said that an area of great concern is the REACH legislation, which concerns the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals put on the EU market. The EU has provided countries with harmonised standards to regulate chemicals that pose a threat to people and the environment. Once the UK leaves the EU, it is unclear which regulatory body UK authorities will have to report to when it comes to toxic substances.

The panellists discussed the importance of maintaining EU environmental standards in the UK as well as the role of Scotland in the negotiations amid concerns from the audience that the worst is yet to come.

Ian Jardine, National Adviser on Environmental Policy for the Scottish Government, who joined the discussion at the end, concluded that there is a duty for people to see the benefits of the EU membership, and to build on those important values during the negotiations.

Brexit, all panellists agreed, should not serve as a Trojan horse to take social and legal rights away from citizens.





BREAKOUT SESSION: AGRICULTURE

Faustine Bas-Defossez, Nikolai Pushkarev, Helen Browning, Konstantin Kreiser, Olga Kikou and Martin Scheele

EEB Policy Manager for Agriculture and Bioenergy **Faustine Bas-Defossez** opened the session by outlining how farming and the environment are intrinsically linked.

Many speakers drew the link between biodiversity loss and intensive agriculture, stating that farming is a direct cause of species loss. A common theme among many of the speakers was the need for transition to an EU farm policy that better allocates payments, has performance and outcome-based incentives, ends the funding of harmful activities, respects the polluter pays principle and has a strictly ring-fenced biodiversity fund.

But the session highlighted that food policy also impacts our health, and, as pointed out by **Nikolai Pushkarev** from the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), the EU has a treaty obligation to promote citizens' health. Speakers said the CAP should be reformed so that food, wellbeing, and health are at its core.

Helen Browning, farmer and Chief Executive of the Soil Association outlined that the current CAP is particularly problematic when it comes to making the positive case for the EU as it is glacially slow to reform, has a one size fits all approach, and huge amounts of money go to big landowners.

Pushkarev highlighted the need to give farmers a fair price and to support them to farm in a nature-friendly way. He said: *"It's difficult to imagine a situation where all of the goods a farmer is producing would be supported by the market. If I was a young farmer starting out I would want a policy framework that is future proof, aligned to the SDGs, and that is supported by society."*

Konstantin Kreiser, Head of International and EU Conservation at NABU called for a CAP that is fair, sustainable, healthy, and globally responsible. He said: *"Farmers don't want to be dependent on subsidies."*

There was discussion too on the role of agri-environment measures with consensus on the need for better targeting, but disagreement on how to do this.

When it comes to consumers, **Olga Kikou** from Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) said that many people remain unaware that two thirds of animal products come from intensive systems. Better labelling of products was mooted as essential to tackle this information gap.



A question from the audience on the importance of better vocational training for farmers on how to manage land in a nature-friendly way moved the discussion beyond policy solutions.

The session ended with a discussion on what farm policy should not be focused on and 'feeding the world' – the trope often used by representatives of the most powerful farmers – was top of the list, followed by producing cheap food for Europe. Equally, several speakers said that it was important to highlight that the transition to sustainable farming is not about making all farms small – the important thing is how land is farmed, not the size of the farm.

Martin Scheele from the European Commission's DG AGRI said that the Commission remained on track for publishing its new communication on the future of the CAP on 29 November.

BREAKOUT SESSION: CLIMATE AND ENERGY

Ewan Hyslop, Chris Morris, Claire Roumet, Stefan Scheuer, Paul Vertegaal and Katherine White

The Climate change and Energy session was moderated by **Ewan Hyslop**, Head of Technical Research and Science, Historic Environment Scotland.

Chris Morris manages Local Energy Scotland and is responsible for the delivery of the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme. He spoke about the need for government, agency and community collaboration and the work his organization does to help communities realise renewable energy schemes. Morris described the changing energy landscape and explained the role of community energy schemes. He set out the ambitious targets of delivering 1GW of community power in Scotland by 2020, creating more local energy plans, and boosting shared energy ownership even further. Morris concluded by saying that there's ambition in communities for big projects, and that shared ownership helps to manage associated risks.

Claire Roumet, Director of Energy Cities, the European association of local authorities in energy transition argued that the EU had been quite ambitious but much more action was needed. She dismissed the Commission's claim that the EU has no power over 'national energy mixes', as she pointed out that there is nowhere in Europe where electricity or energy markets respect national borders. Roumet argued that creating future energy markets will require completely new partnerships, which must involve cities that can help deliver local energy solutions for communities. She said that the EU and national governments have a role to play in coordinating the transition.

Stefan Scheuer, Secretary General of the Coalition for Energy Savings argued there was a greater need than ever to deliver different types of energy efficiency, both in terms of quality and quantity. He pointed out that EU energy demand has peaked

yet the economy continues to grow. He described a future of better living while using less energy. Scheuer highlighted research that shows it is five times cheaper to save energy than to produce it and argued that improving energy efficiency is essential to meeting the Paris Agreement. He concluded by underlining how improving energy efficiency is already delivering benefits like cutting bills, creating local jobs and improving health by cutting air pollution.

Paul Vertegaal, Head of Programme at the Climate Buffers Coalition in the Netherlands argued that nature doesn't just have to be a victim of climate change, but can be a way to repair and adapt to its impact. Natural climate buffers are nature-based solutions resulting from integrated planning projects. In the Netherlands, the Onlanden project involved the water board, local authorities and farmers. Vertegaal compared the cost of raising dykes (€155m) to using natural climate buffers (€33-42m) and said that despite the project's first aim of restoring biodiversity, it had become a successful climate mitigation project.

Katherine White, Head of Strategy and Projects at the Energy and Climate Change Directorate of the Scottish Government spoke of the value and need of collaboration. She argued that Scotland was at the forefront of the change to a low carbon future. She described the Scottish approach as taking a whole system view, looking at energy, heat and transport and said Scotland was a world-leader in renewable technology with well-developed offshore wind and renewable industries including a wave and tidal test centre and the world's first floating wind farm. White also spoke of Scotland's commitment to climate justice worldwide, including its project to provide sustainable energy in Malawi, its organization of a conference about the Arctic and its presence at the COP23 conference in Bonn.



BREAKOUT SESSION: MARINE AND FISHERIES

Carole Cowan, Helen McLachlan, Thord Monsen, Mark Ruskell and Bjorn Stockhausen

This session was moderated by Carole Cowan, Post-EU Referendum Coordinator at Marine Scotland.

Helen McLachlan, Fisheries Governance Programme Manager at WWF UK/Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group said it was clear that fish didn't respect borders and that shared management was required. She drew the link between fisheries and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, to which all EU countries were committed. McLachlan argued that the EU's Common Fisheries Policy had some positive features, including maximum sustainable yields and impacts on the broader marine environment. She spoke of the changes that will be required following Brexit and the potential for new technology to assist with monitoring and enforcement.

Thord Monsen, Head of Section, Directorate of Fisheries, Norway told the audience that his country had struggled in the past with over fishing and discarding but that through a dynamic management regime progress had been made. He explained that principles underlined the Norwegian approach and that they always take account of geography and coastline, maintaining a diversified fleet, and settlement patterns. Monsen pointed out that external requirements often dictate what happens in Norway, where 90 % of stocks are shared with other countries. He said that the Norwegian fleet is becoming more efficient and that overcapacity is tackled through managing participation, closing new entries and reducing the size of the fleet. Monsen said that while compliance was essential, there are no universal solutions. He argued that Brexit presents a window of opportunity for the UK but that, as for Norway, there would be both costs and benefits to being outside the EU and that some level of cooperation was inevitable.

Mark Ruskell, Member of the Scottish Parliament, said that whatever happens, fish will keep swimming across boundaries and there is a need for national and international frameworks with science-led approach and system for enforcement and management. He argued that Maximum Sustainable Yields need to be set by science, not politicians. Ruskell said it was essential that nature's voice was heard and called for "relentless scrutiny" as governments change. He said key principles like the precautionary and polluter pays principles need to be bolted in law, not placed as add-ons. Ruskell reminded the audience that huge improvements had been achieved and that using the ocean as a dumping ground is no longer acceptable.

Bjorn Stockhausen, Fisheries Policy Officer, Seas at Risk stressed the need for science to continue to be the basis for political decisions. Independent international science remains the basis for political decisions. He said there was a need for clarity about the arrangements that would be reached after Brexit. Stockhausen said that marine spatial planning that takes account of stakeholders should be continued, as should the Maximum Sustainable Yield approach, which is international and not EU anyway. Stakeholder involvement, he said, is absolutely crucial. Stockhausen argues that fishing measures need to be tailored to regions and be complete and holistic, rather than list of quotas for certain species. Current European Commission proposals are not up to the job, he argued. While EU legislation is not perfect, Stockhausen said that a positive narrative was required and that it was clearly better than what exists in other parts of the world.





HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION: LOOKING BACK FROM 2030, HOW DID WE SUCCEED?

Lesley Riddoch, Anne Glover, Shaun Spiers and James Curran

In the final panel of the day, the uncertainty that had dominated previous discussions left the room to make way for hope and optimism.

Anne Glover, former EU Chief Scientist, began by discussing the hypothetical achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). First, she said that we need to restore people's faith in democracy. The rise of populism across the world tells us that citizens no longer believe in the institutions. It comes as no surprise that politicians are amongst the least trusted categories.

But we also need to harness science in pursuit of greater goals, she insisted. Science can provide us with evidence, while also giving us the technology we need to reduce demand for energy and resources.

Shaun Spiers, Executive Director of Green Alliance, also mentioned the Sustainable Development Goals as our priority in the years to come. "We need to embrace technology," he said, while making reference to using the technology already available as a means to help businesses go green and trigger new jobs.

Many progressive US businesses are aware of the power of technology, and that is precisely why they have rejected Trump's anti environment stance.

But, according to Spiers, technology needs to be supported by sound regulation. That includes fair taxes, a firm stance against polluters and incentives for those who pioneer smart solutions.

Good regulation, said **James Curran**, Professor and Honorary Fellow of Scottish Environment LINK, is independent from government. It is a direct result of strong partnerships and collaborations, and for this reason it is at odds with Brexit.

Taking the example of the circular economy, he said that much more needs to be done to achieve any meaningful change, but thanks to cross-border cooperation and knowledge sharing we have the means to shift, one day, from wasteful production to recycling and reuse. These are funding principles of a truly sustainable and localised economy.

And on that note, Curran concluded his speech by stressing the need to empower communities and incentivise localised activities.

The public responded very enthusiastically to the issues highlighted by the panelists, notably people's disengagement with the democratic process and the need to boost local economies.

Anne Glover argued that the problem is not democracy itself, but the distance between people and national institutions. Local governance, she said, could drive citizens closer to the institutions, because we tend to empathise with what is close to us, rather than what is far.

But we also need to hold people accountable for their mistakes. The toxic narrative surrounding the Brexit debate was largely promoted by politicians and media that openly lied to the people. These people, she said, have lied with impunity.

The panellists also unanimously agreed that social equality in the UK, just like in other parts of the world, is a problem that needs addressing. The huge gap between rich and poor goes hand in hand with environmental degradation and lack of trust in the institutions.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, AGENDA 2030 AND THE PARIS ACCORD ARE GUIDING LIGHTS IN TROUBLED TIMES, SAYS JOUNI NISSINEN

Jouni Nissinen

The EEB's Co-President Jouni Nissinen concluded a busy day of engaging debate by reflecting on some of the positive things that speakers had mentioned in the previous sessions.

While Nissinen said that a European Commission reflection paper he had recently read felt "lukewarm and old fashioned", he explained that it was the contributions of many of the conferences' speakers that explained his reaction.

One of the game changers in recent years has been the development of Agenda 2030, Nissinen said. Many of the speakers have described the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as 'beacons in the dark' that have shown us the direction we should be going.

One of the opening speakers, Joyce McMillan, was the first to identify the significance of the SDGs and she explained how proud she was of Scotland's commitment to Agenda 2030. However, she also added that these were 'traumatic' times for people who care for the environment.

Anne McCall from the RSPB pointed out that even in the midst of great difficulties, such as Brexit, the SDGs give us 'direction in the storm'.

Mr Nissinen added that Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreements may also be beacons in the dark but that there are still threats such as bad trade deals that can prevent good intentions.

Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham reassured us that the race to the bottom will not happen as Scotland will work to prevent this as an outcome of Brexit. Nissinen reminded delegates that when she said this it was met with spontaneous applause from the floor of the conference.

Fellow Co-President Mikael Karlson brought attendees through some of the difficulties facing environmental advocacy at the EU level and he cemented the idea that environmental protection is deeply undervalued from an economic perspective.

Mr Nissinen added that he felt no one had questioned the need for a growing economy despite the fact that a growing economy means growing consumption and an increase in natural resource extraction.

Finally, Mr Nissinen told of how EEB Secretary General Jeremy Wates had reminded everyone how the European Commission had turned back to the Circular Economy, because they realised the potential economic benefits.

He concluded the event by thanking all who had taken part and made the event possible and looked ahead to the positive work that everyone present would continue to do in the years to come.





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