



**BRITISH-IRISH  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH  
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

**REPORT**

from

**COMMITTEE D (The Environmental and Social Committee)**

on

**WASTE MANAGEMENT**

## **Introduction**

1. Committee D of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body has been engaged in an enquiry into waste management since March 2003.
2. The Committee aimed to investigate the current policies on waste management which are in place across the membership of the Body, to determine how the European Union sets targets within their directives on waste management and to consider good practice.
3. During the enquiry the Committee received evidence and met many witnesses. In July 2003 the Committee visited Guernsey, the following month Committee D visited the Isle of Man and in March 2004 the Committee traveled to Brussels. In Guernsey the Committee met the Board of Administration and their staff. The Committee discussed the waste management issues facing small island communities, the development and implementation of the Guernsey Waste Strategy and held a round table discussion on waste management issues of mutual concern. The Committee also had the opportunity to visit the Mont Cuet landfill site to view current putrescible waste disposal practices and St Germain (former landfill site) to view restoration works.
4. On the Isle of Man the Committee had an in-depth briefing on their Energy from Waste (EfW) project. The Committee discussed the project and the principles of Energy from Waste with the Minister for Local Government and the Project Director.
5. In Brussels the Committee held meetings with the Head of Unit on Production, Consumption & Waste from Directorate-General Environment. The Committee discussed the process of introducing waste management directives and the Commission's role in assisting Member States to meet the targets. The Committee held a meeting with the European Federation of Waste Management and Environmental Services (FEAD); the Federation's role is to provide a response from industry to the waste management policies which are being discussed within the Union. The Committee also met with Mr Pat Fenton from the Irish Permanent Representation to discuss waste management from the Presidency's viewpoint and to consider future legislation.
6. The Committee's report is set out thematically, with individual sections devoted to Options for waste including: landfill; recycling/composting; incineration; and export, reducing waste, current strategies, and issues for the future. A summary of conclusions and recommendations is printed in the concluding chapter.

## **Background**

### **Waste Management Targets**

7. Although the Commission initiates waste management targets the 'co-decision procedure' means that the Commission is only active in the process of target setting

until the Second Reading in the European Parliament, and then they are available in an advisory capacity only. Final targets are set by the European Parliament and Council. The Commission helps to set the framework within which Member States operate under the subsidiarity principle; they will not say how each Member State should operate within this framework. Member States are responsible for the enforcement of directive targets under the Treaties. The Commission will not tell Member States how to implement the targets. The Commission is, however, aware of the need to be more open in their initial proposals. They now consult industry and carry out a cost-benefit analysis before making directive recommendations.

8. This was confirmed when the Committee held a meeting with the European Federation of Waste Management and Environmental Services (FEAD). The Commission do not consider current directives on waste management to be either too impossible to achieve or too lenient - some Member States have already achieved the waste management targets set, but others, for example the UK and Ireland have not yet met the targets and will struggle to do so for some time. EU waste policy appears to be heavily influenced by the Scandinavian and German approaches, which focus on recycling and see landfill without energy recovery as a last resort. The strict guidelines to reduce the proportion of waste sent to landfill were set in 1999; the UK and Ireland are yet to fully implement these targets.

9. In December 2003 the House of Lords EU Committee published a report 'European Union Waste Management Policy'[\[1\]](#). The report focuses on the process of deciding EU policy on waste, it asks 'how does the European Commission make decisions with regard to waste?' The conclusion is rather grim; too many important decisions are taken behind closed doors and without the involvement of Member States.

10. The Report also acknowledges the notable lack of data on waste; the European Commission have said to the Lords Committee that "it is not possible at this stage to propose any operational, quantified waste prevention targets based on comprehensive environmental and economic analysis".[\[2\]](#) The Lords EU Committee suggests that there is a lack of co-ordination between UK Government departments, and that a waste policy unit should be created to provide strategic leadership on policy development and a single voice to provide information for stakeholders.

11. The Commission told us that they are considering a change of emphasis for future directives; one possibility is to focus on the management of waste materials rather than products. For example there are currently directives on packaging, end of life products and electronic waste. The Commission might consider having a directive on plastic, rather than the products which contain plastic.

12. The Commission encourages all Member States to take waste management seriously. They suggest that Member States:

- Find out what sort of waste is produced and where?

- Estimate waste volumes for the future; and
- Consider waste management from an EU perspective.

**13. The highly successful tax on plastic bags in Ireland should be used as an example of how communities and government can reduce the quantities of plastic waste, however, more must be done to develop markets for recycled products. The Commission must continue to ensure that waste management targets are fixed and achievable. The Committee suggests that Member States would benefit from having assistance on how to meet waste management targets from the Commission or other more successful Member States.**

### **Options for waste**

14. The Committee asked 'What can be done with the vast quantities of waste being generated by households, businesses and municipalities?'

15. There are four options (landfill, recycle/ composting, incineration or exportation)

#### **-Landfill**

16. Landfilling is the most common method of waste disposal. Waste is buried in licensed sites. These sites require regular monitoring to ensure that waste decomposition does not produce dangerous gases or pollute nearby water supplies. Landfilling is the least environmentally friendly and slowest method of waste disposal and it was for that reason the Commission drafted the Landfill Directive.

**17. The Committee recommends that where possible waste should not be sent to landfill sites. The Governments and devolved administrations should work to ensure that the number of landfill sites accepting waste is reduced and that few new sites are permitted.**

#### **-Recycle/ Composting**

18. Recycling is the ideal solution for those items which can be reused. Paper, steel or aluminium cans and glass can be easily recycled and markets for recycled products (for example paper and plastic) are growing. Barriers to recycling are the lack of facilities for both waste collection and recycling, the cost of recycling and the 'not in my back yard' attitude by communities towards recycling facilities. **The Committee was pleased to learn that facilities for recycling across Ireland and the United Kingdom are improving.**

**19. The Committee was encouraged to see that governments and local authorities are taking recycling seriously.<sup>[3]</sup> The Committee recommend that access to recycling facilities is improved. We welcome the growth of curb-side recycling collection. The Committee recommend that further investment be made in the search for new products made from recycled materials.**

## **-Incineration (Energy from Waste)**

20. The burning of waste in order to produce energy is a difficult subject. There are controversies over the levels of hazardous dioxins produced by energy from waste plants and there is often a strong desire within a local community to ensure that these factories are not built close to inhabited areas. Within the UK and Ireland EfW remains controversial. There is widespread scepticism about its safety, and this has been reflected in local opposition in a number of areas in Britain and Ireland.

21. This is not the case in the Isle of Man. There a large publicity campaign resulted in the building of a plant close to Douglas (to reduce pollution caused by transporting waste away from its source). Both Guernsey and the Isle of Man are confident that there will be no adverse environmental impact from emissions. It is worth noting that EfW plants generate carbon-free energy, and thus could play a role for the UK and Ireland in reaching the Kyoto targets. There is a legitimate concern that sending waste to EfW plants diverts attention from recycling or reusing, which are, in environmental terms, the most beneficial ways to deal with waste. It is for this reason that, within the UK at least, EfW does not benefit from "renewable" status. Although "mass burn" technology could burn almost anything, the recycling of metals, glass, paper and green materials should always be encouraged before incineration. EfW produces 'bottom ash' as a residue. In the past it was hoped that this ash would be used in building roads or concrete although it would appear the disposal of bottom ash is becoming a significant hurdle.

**22. Energy from Waste is an emotive issue; often this is fuelled by the extreme lack of information the environmental impact of such facilities. It is understandable that without a public information campaign communities will fear the development of local EfW facilities. The Committee recommends that there is a public information campaign to explain the possible benefits of Energy from Waste facilities and to counter rumours on potential health hazards.**

23. The Commission are content that the current incineration directive ensures that new incinerators control dioxin levels. There has been no suggestion that the directive on incinerators requires tightening. The Commission encourage incineration, as part of a waste management plan, but they will not force Member States to adopt this policy. The Commission were keen to identify with the incineration plant in Vienna which was designed by an Austrian artist as a visibly attractive building.

24. The Committee discussed energy from waste facilities with an industry representative from the European Federation of Waste Management and Environmental Services. They were of the opinion that industry is content that incineration is a good method of waste management. Experts do not consider dioxins to be a problem any more. They consider it to be a matter of public misunderstanding which exists outside of industry. The newest plants have minimal dioxin emissions which are within the guidelines set by the incineration directive.

They argued that individuals are more polluted by standing beside a garden bonfire than from a waste to energy plant.

**25. The Committee recommends that further research is carried out into the long-term effects of dioxins. The Committee suggests that industry and governments should communicate more clearly the benefits of new technologies to the public.**

#### **-Export**

26. The exportation of waste is considered to be more wasteful than most other waste management policies as it requires the use of further energy for transportation. It is acceptable only where there are no waste facilities or where such facilities would not be economical, for example hazardous waste exported from the Channel Islands. The Irish Presidency worked on a directive on the shipping of waste and this has now been passed to the Dutch Presidency for completion during Autumn 2004.

**27. The Committee concludes that waste should only be exported if there is no alternative.**

#### **Reducing waste**

28. Reducing the quantity of waste is an obvious method of improving the quantity of waste sent to landfill or incinerated. It reduces the need to recycle. Ireland has been leading the way in these Islands with the introduction of a tax on plastic bags. **This has been a remarkably successful scheme and the Committee recommends that it is replicated elsewhere.**

#### **Other good practice**

29. In Ireland many local authorities are attempting to reduce waste at source and encourage recycling by charging per collection at curb-side; a tag must be purchased and attached to a bin before it is collected. This has led to a 40 percent reduction in the quantity of waste collected. Charging appears to be an effective method of encouraging reuse or recycling but might not necessarily be suitable where local authorities finance their waste collection by council tax or rates. Alternatives to financial incentives include the provision of recycling banks and the collection of segregated recyclables (as is the practice in some parts of the UK).

**30. The Committee is keen that good waste management and waste reduction practices should be shared more widely.**

#### **Current waste management strategies across the Islands**

31. The Committee wrote to the National Governments and Devolved Administrations requesting information on their waste management policies<sup>[4]</sup> in order to determine the range of waste management policies across the membership of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. It appears that all areas and regions are

working to reduce the quantity of waste being landfilled and to improve waste management.

32. Responsibility for waste collection and disposal tended to be delegated to local authorities in all but the smallest islands.

33. The Isle of Man was the first member of the Body to set a waste management strategy (in 1990). The strategy has been reviewed three times since then. The estimated recycling rate is 16% with around 50% of waste going to landfill. There is approved landfill reserve to last for 10-15 years but it is expected that this reserve will last longer than that with the introduction of a Waste to Energy plant on the outskirts of Douglas in 2004.

34. Jersey have had a waste to energy plant since 1979, which incinerates 80% of waste. The process of incineration produces 'bottom ash' which is landfilled. Some hazardous waste is treated locally (for example clinical waste and fridge/freezer gasses) while other hazardous waste is exported.

35. Ireland saw a reduction in the quantity of waste generated by 7.4% in the first three years of their waste management policy (which began in 1998). Landfilling has decreased. In the future Ireland is planning to develop producer responsibility initiatives for packaging (with a target of 50% packaging waste recovery by the end of 2005); Farm plastics; Construction and demolition waste; Biodegradable waste; Electrical and electronic equipment; and tyres. Ireland aims to move towards greater self-sufficiency in waste management and reduce the need to export waste. At present more than half of all hazardous waste is exported. There are plans to work with Northern Ireland to develop an all-Island solution for the treatment of fridges and fridge/ freezers.

36. At present the UK landfills 80% of municipal waste. As part of the landfill directive England plans to develop a system of tradable allowances to encourage local authorities to take a long-term, shared approach to meeting the directives targets. The UK has changed its policy on hazardous waste since 1998; this moves away from landfilling waste towards incineration for energy recovery, waste recycling or reuse.

37. Northern Ireland published a waste management strategy in 2000 which outlines targets until 2020. It plans a review of this policy in 2005. In 2002 Northern Ireland recycled just under 10% of household waste; its aim is to increase this to 40% by 2010. Landfill reserve in Northern Ireland is expected to be exhausted in 2005 but they do not plan to join England's system of tradable allowances for landfill.[\[5\]](#)

38. The National Assembly for Wales published its *Wise about Waste* strategy in 2002. Wales faces two significant issues in the near future; a) at present there is much opposition to the use of Energy from Waste plants in Wales; and b) It is expected that there will be no registered landfill for hazardous waste in Wales from mid-2004.

39. The Scottish Assembly outlined their waste plan in 2003. It plans to recycle and compost 55% of municipal waste by 2020. The Scottish Executive is consulting on a landfill allowance scheme, however, low population density means that there are few restrictions on landfill capacity. Hazardous waste is landfilled.

40. Guernsey is in the process of drafting its waste strategy which should run for 25 years. No targets are being set as 'targets.. provide a rather arbitrary measure of the success or otherwise of waste management' instead 'it is more meaningful to concentrate resources on reducing waste generation in the first instance'. Hazardous waste is placed in secure storage and shipped to the UK for disposal.

### **Summary of recommendations and conclusions**

41. The highly successful tax on plastic bags in Ireland should be used as an example of how communities and government can reduce the quantities of plastic waste, however, more must be done to develop markets for recycled products. The Commission must continue to ensure that waste management targets are fixed and achievable. The Committee suggests that Member States would benefit from having assistance on how to meet waste management targets from the Commission or other more successful Member States. (Paragraph 13)

42. The Committee recommends that where possible waste should not be sent to landfill sites. The Governments and devolved administrations should work to ensure that the number of landfill sites accepting waste is reduced and that few new sites are permitted. (Paragraph 17)

43. The Committee was pleased to learn that facilities for recycling across Ireland and the United Kingdom are improving. (Paragraph 18)

44. The Committee was encouraged to see that governments and local authorities are taking recycling seriously. The Committee recommends that access to recycling facilities is improved. We welcome the growth of curb-side recycling collection. The Committee recommends that further investment be made in the search for new products made from recycled materials. (Paragraph 19)

45. The Committee recommends that there is a public information campaign to explain the possible benefits of Energy from Waste facilities and to counter rumours on potential health hazards. (Paragraph 22)

46. The Committee recommends that further research is carried out into the long-term effects of dioxins. The Committee suggests that industry and governments should communicate more clearly the benefits of new technologies to the public. (Paragraph 25)

47. The Committee concludes that waste should only be exported if there is no alternative. (Paragraph 27)

48. The tax on plastic bags in Ireland has been a remarkably successful scheme and the Committee recommends that it is replicated elsewhere. (Paragraph 28)

49. The Committee is keen that good waste management and waste reduction practices should be shared more widely. (Paragraph 30)

## **DRAFT RESOLUTION**

**50. That the Body welcomes the report of the Committee on Environmental and Social issues on waste management and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the report which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.**

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1 47th Report, 2002-03, HL 194

2 Ibid para 56

3 See paragraph 30

4 A copy of the questions can be found at Appendix 3.

5 See para 35 above.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **LIST OF MEMBERS**

John Battle MP [former member]

Johnny Brady TD

Alistair Carmichael MP

Jeff Ennis MP

Donald Gelling MLC

Jim Glennon TD

The Lord Glentoran

Dr Dai Lloyd AM

Arthur Morgan TD

Senator Joe McHugh

Kevin McNamara MP (Chair)

Senator Mary O'Rourke {Shadow}

Joe Sherlock TD

Iain Smith MSP

The Lord Temple-Morris

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **MEMORANDA RECEIVED BY COMMITTEE D**

These memoranda have been deposited in the libraries of Westminster and Dáil Éireann as well as those of the devolved administrations.

Ireland  
Isle of Man Government  
Northern Ireland Office  
Scottish Executive  
States of Guernsey  
States of Jersey  
United Kingdom  
Welsh Assembly

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **QUESTIONS FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS/ DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS**

1. Is there a national waste management policy, with targets for recycling, landfill etc.? If so, when was the policy last updated?
2. Is there a national policy for reducing waste generation?
3. What specifically are your national targets for waste re-use; recycling; recovery (i.e. EfW); other incineration; or landfill?
4. What proportion of waste nationally is currently re-used, recycled, recovered, incinerated or goes to landfill?
5. How do you propose to meet the current EU targets for recycling, waste disposal and landfill? What progress have you made towards meeting Landfill Directive targets over the past 3 years?
6. Did you hold discussions with the EU institutions before the relevant directives were agreed? Have you had discussions with them since then concerning implementation?
7. When did you last update your waste policy?
8. Who is primarily responsible for waste disposal: local authorities/councils or the national government? What is the balance between central Government and local authority/ the devolved administrations responsibilities in meeting waste targets?
9. How is your waste management programme financed?
10. By what mechanism are national targets translated into local waste plans?
11. How do you deal with hazardous waste disposal?
12. Is any waste created by your country exported abroad? Do you import waste? If

so how much, and to or from which countries?

13. What is your attitude to transportation/export of waste?
14. Do you work with other Member States or with countries outside the EU to attempt to achieve waste management targets? Where might further partnerships be beneficial?
15. What quantity of landfill reserve remains within your land mass? Are reserves finite, or to all intents and purposes limitless?
16. What contribution, if any, will Energy from Waste plants make towards meeting the targets in the Landfill Directive?