

**NIEL & NIEA Networking Meeting**  
**Right vs Right:**  
**When There Are Two Environmentally Sound, But Opposing, Solutions**  
**March 30<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**BACKGROUND**

In our increasingly complex and interconnected world we have to deal with complicated decisions about environmental matters, and the debates and discussions on these matters often becoming divisive, or can lead to conflict or protracted stalemate. The reason for division in decision making is more often than not related to the difficulty in achieving consensus in matters intersecting economic, environmental and social domains. To balance a divergence of interest we must learn respectful, participatory and democratic ways of communicating, engaging, negotiating and resolving environmental conflicts. The key is communication and consensus building. While we normally think of these conflicts being between economic and environmental interests, it is becoming more apparent that such dichotomies are no longer true; there can be two opposing arguments which each have strong environmental benefits. Reaching consensus is not always easy, but it is essential if we are to move forward in an increasingly challenging world.



**John McMillen (NIEA) opening the event**

**KEY POINTS**

*Sue Christie*

Representing a wide array of environmental organisations, NIEL often has a difficult task in reaching a consensus view amongst its members. There are often strong environmental arguments on opposing sides of potential developments or actions, and devising a compromise view is not always easy.

*Noel Bell – The Roe Valley Hydro Restoration Scheme*

- Roe valley could be the benchmark for future river renewable ventures
- The extent of legislation and modification of project design to enable implementation is complex and ongoing (from 2006)
- Implementing renewable projects must integrate conservational interests
- We need to think about cumulative impacts on ecosystems of several projects

*Paul Davison – Water Treatment Standards versus Climate Change Targets*

- Water is the new oil and carbon is the new currency
- Increasing Water Quality = Increasing Carbon Footprint = Atmospheric Degradation; pure water comes at a high carbon cost; increasing standards have doubled the carbon cost of water

- As a society we are wholly addicted to carbon, 'so kicking the habit is a big issue for us', as people and as an industry for water treatment
- To beat the carbon addiction the water industry must become increasingly sustainable
- A much higher cost of carbon under CRC – about £50 per tonne rather than current £12 – is required to really drive carbon reduction
- As a company Northern Ireland Water (NIW) must turn their waste into raw materials for other uses, i.e. oil greases, energy, nutrients, fats, etc must be reused
- NIW has the potential to become carbon positive



**Paul Davison (NI Water)**  
***Water Treatment Standards vs***  
***Climate Change Targets***

*Angus McRobert – The Marine Current Turbine*

- Strangford encapsulates almost every conservation designation known in Northern Ireland
- The potential implementation of SeaGen involved a stakeholder consultation of government departments, eNGOs and the public
- An Environmental Impact Assessment was conducted to gauge all physical, biological and ambient effects of implementation
- As a novel project adaptive management allowed implementation to proceed on an iterative level

*Malachy Conway – To excavate or Not to Excavate*

- Excavations are at the same time destructive and informative
- At a site due to be destroyed excavation is vindicated, but at a site not under threat?
- People like to see and touch things from the past, so necessary education tool
- Excavating can provide the last chance to glean from the past
- Presumption is *in situ*, but if loss likely then excavate
- Not recording or publishing results is vandalism

## DEBATE – THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT ELECTRIC VEHICLES SHOULD BE AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF A SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEM FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**Against** the motion – Peter Lipman (Sustrans)

**For** the motion – Terry Waugh (Action Renewables)

◆ *Peter Lipman*

The current transport systems are deeply environmentally damaging to our personal and mental health: for years we have been pursuing ever increasing levels of mobility rather than accessing the things we need for our daily lives. Huge behavioural changes are required as we (the UK) do not have the money or fossil energy to install new infrastructure for electric vehicles.



◆ *Terry Waugh*

A sustainable transport system consists of strengthening and replacing the current system with a more fuel efficient, space saving and healthier alternative. According to the DRD – from the period 1992-2008 – the licensed vehicle stock in Northern Ireland has increased 42%. Northern Ireland does not have a sustainable transport system, with the majority of the population relying on private transport to live and work. Consequently, in Northern Ireland electric vehicles must play a part in our future.

*Peter's rebuttal:*

Terry mentioned that sustainable transport is any form of transport with a low impact on the environment, however, with electric vehicles over 40% of their lifetime carbon footprint derives from their production. Therefore establishing a fleet of electric vehicles to replace the current combustible engine fleet is not feasible.

*Terry's rebuttal:*

Electric cars per mile use half the resources of a combustible vehicle, and electric vehicles can be powered by green energy and can have a lifetime of over 1 million miles.

*Peter's final response:*

Electric vehicles support more road building, and enable people to travel further and faster, I personally believe it is the wrong direction; we will have to move to living more local lives, with electric public transport providing a more sustainable mode of transport.

*Terry's final response:*

I am a realist, and if you think people will change behaviour in NI - and this debate is about NI - over next 20 years, it just won't happen - we have to deal with what we've got now, car manufacturers are climbing on board, mechanism of converting internal engine to electrical, infinitely better for environment and if that's what we have to deal with, then we have to go with it.

Vote: 30 votes 'for the motion' and 13 votes 'against the motion'; the motion was carried.

## SUMMARISING THE ISSUES

The topics explored throughout this conference epitomise the divergence of opinion that exist and influence decision making, it is how we balance this divergence and reach a consensus where one party does not feel ignored. The key is striking a balance that is beneficial to the economy, the environment and to society. We have a long way to go, and do not always have the necessary mechanisms to effectively resolve conflicts and produce a balanced outcome. The idea of adaptive management being used throughout the MCT project is one potential route to explore in resolving some environmental conflicts, primarily as it is a 'learn as we go' integrative and iterative process.

That we are aware of the limits of natural resources, of our increasing ability to negatively affect the environment, and that we often find ourselves at a deadlock in environmental decision making indicates a higher profile for environmental interests than has often been the case in the past, but work must continue to ensure that a balance is maintained in decision making at all levels.

Informing and transparent decision making are key; people need to understand the science and logic on all sides to help them to decide and to have the required degree of trust in the decisions and institutions which administer them. It was agreed that the topic requires more work, and that further conferences exploring the mechanisms of conflict resolution would be of use. Issues around environmental limits, true carbon costing of all options, and short/long term decisions deserve further discussion.



**Malachy Conway (National Trust)**  
*To Excavate or Not To Excavate*