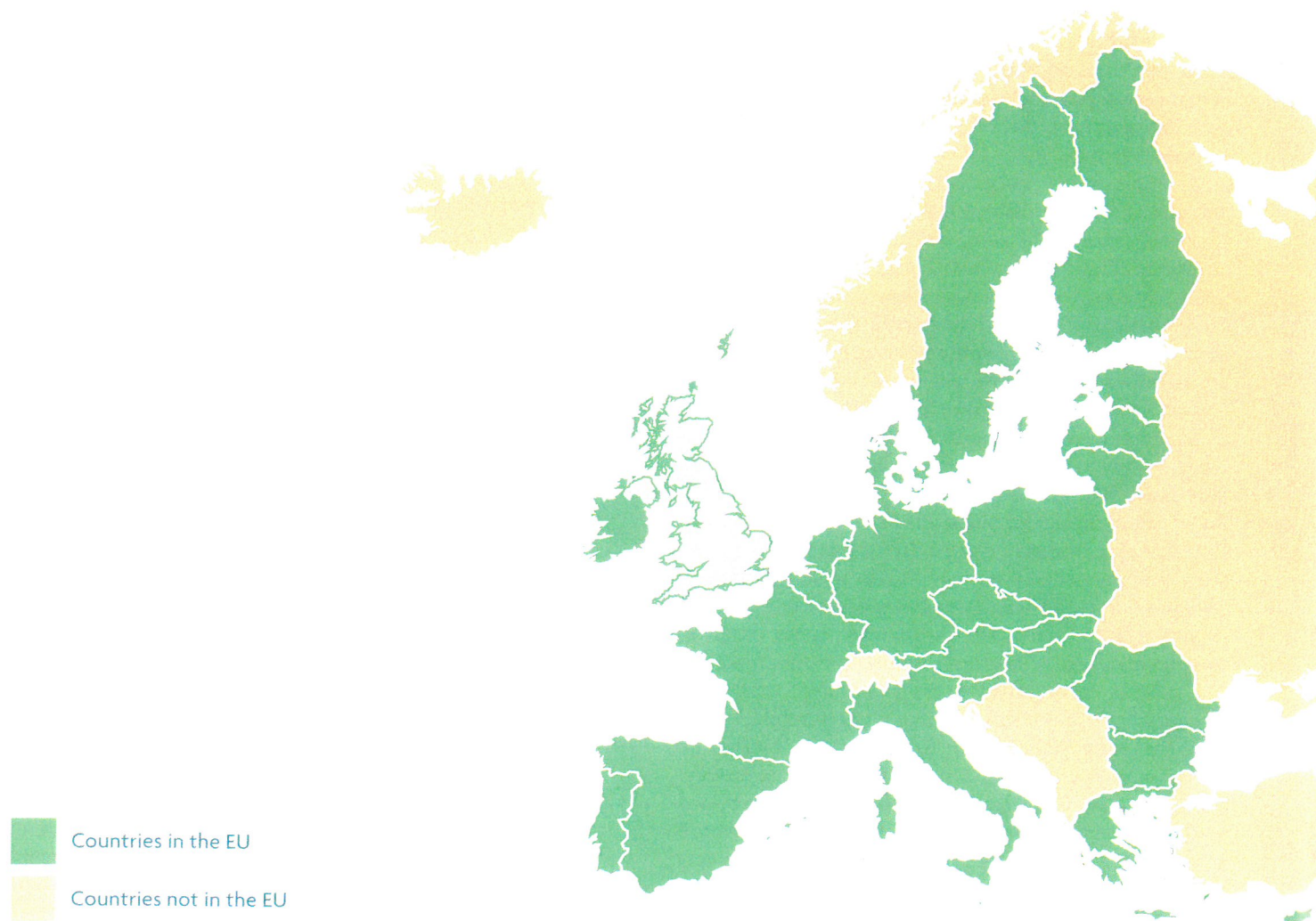


In or out?

The environmental impact of leaving the EU

The IES contacted the major political parties in the UK and asked them: “What would be the environmental impact of leaving the EU?”

Editor's note: environmental SCIENTIST contacted the Labour and Conservative parties and offered them the opportunity to contribute but they declined the invitation.



The debate over the UK's place in Europe is set to rage until the next general election at least. As part of any discussion over the UK's future in Europe it is worth looking closely at the ways in which European legislation has affected the environment in which we all live and work.

In many ways the EU is the perfect body for creating environmental legislation as the protection of our environment simply can not be done by countries acting alone. All EU member states share seas and breathe the same air, our rare birds do not need a passport to travel, the sewage spilt on beaches in Germany does not disappear when currents carry it into Poland, and climate change simply cannot be tackled by any one country by itself. And it is not only in theory that the EU is the right body to create environmental law – it has been doing well in practice too.

Take, for example, the huge environmental and health issue of air pollution. In the UK alone 27,000 people die every year as a result of the noxious gases in our air, and without EU legislation that number would be even higher. The Air Quality Directive has been incredibly successful in forcing EU member states to act in order to bring down pollution levels of sulphur dioxide and, in some places, nitrogen dioxide. For those of us who continue to breathe bad air we now have the ability to put pressure on local authorities and the UK government to clean up air pollution hotspots. The UK Government, which has been trying its very best to avoid acting on air pollution, is being forced to protect the health of its own citizens because of EU law.

As well as ensuring the protection of our air the EU has also brought in forward-thinking policy that protects our precious seas and beaches. The EU Bathing Water Directive, which obliged member states to change the way they treated sewage, has paved the way for a big improvement in the state of our beaches. These clean beaches are more likely to attract tourists, provide a haven for birds and boost local economies.

On top of legislation protecting our physical environment the EU has also produced legislation that, though not as strong as some of us might have liked, gives us a continent-wide approach to tackling the most pressing issue of modern times: climate change. With at least 11 per cent of global greenhouse gases coming from the EU, it is vital that we work together to lower our emissions to have a fighting chance of avoid catastrophic climate change.

The legislation I have outlined above is just a snapshot of some of the environmental protection that the EU has afforded to us all. Over the years environmental legislation has often been opposed by the British government, and Conservative MEPs continue to try to undermine climate change proposals, but the EU has forced us to clean up our act.

The EU is far from perfect, but a UK exit would risk environmental disasters. In the run up to any referendum Greens will be campaigning for a more democratic, less corporate-driven EU that puts the protection of our environment at its core.

Keith Taylor is the Green Party Member of the European Parliament for the South East region. Prior to becoming an MEP Keith spent 11 years as a city councillor in Brighton, striving for improvements in the everyday quality of life for local people.



‘Shallow’ and ‘ignorant’ are words that describe the British debate about the country's role in Europe. Generalities prevail, along with grumbles about rules and regulations, but environmental issues are a happy hunting ground for those of us determined to ensure that the UK continues to play a lead role in EU decision-making. Most people appreciate that pollution has no respect for national boundaries. Most people welcome EU initiatives to raise air quality, improve the management of waste, and ensure the safety of chemicals. Few people attack the EU's environmental role, except perhaps environmentalists who would like it to be more ambitious.

Environmental improvements may in time have been introduced by a British government without reference to the EU, but the EU law-making machinery has often strengthened the hand of an environment minister dealing with arch enemies in the Treasury. It is harder to resist the call for money to be spent on improvements when there is a legally enforceable EU agreement requiring them. But in many instances measures agreed in Brussels could never have been adopted by one member state alone.



Take as an example the improvements in fuel efficiency and reductions in CO₂ emissions being achieved by new cars. Details of the EU law, proposed initially by the European Commission, were thrashed out and agreed by MEPs and ministers from across Europe. The standards it imposes apply to every car manufactured within the EU and to every car manufactured abroad and imported here. How could the UK, with its car plants sometimes shipping the majority of vehicles to the continent, apply different standards of its own without cutting its competitive throat?

Here is the rub. If Britain were to pull out of the EU the environmental impact would be minimal. That is not because the EU makes no difference, but because we would continue to sign up to virtually every piece of environmental law that comes out of Brussels. The only alternative would be not only to leave the EU but also to leave the EU single market, and all but a handful of Europhobic loonies recognise that this would be economic madness.

True, we could leave the EU and join the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), sitting alongside Norway, a country so 'independent' that it has incorporated 250 EU environmental laws into its own statute book. In fact Norway has adopted the entire EU library except for our laws on nature protection which are not regarded as having an economic influence. Norwegian experts get consulted when the Commission is drafting a new environmental law but the country's ministers have no vote and no place around the tables where the decisions are made. Failure to apply the law would result in the country being taken to the EFTA court. That is the price to be paid for belonging to the single market.

This, then, is the brave new world offered by those who want a proud, independent Britain to pull out of the EU. We sign up to laws made by others. Some pride! Some independence!

Chris Davies MEP is the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman in the European Parliament.

In the area of environmental policy, the EU has had a revolutionary impact on the UK. The EU's first Environmental Action Programme was agreed in 1973 and stipulated that "The protection of the environment belongs to the essential tasks of the Community". At that time, with the highest sulphur dioxide emissions in the EU, the UK was the 'dirty man of Europe'. Despite this, in 1983, the Thatcher government refused to sign up to a protocol to reduce 1980 levels of sulphur dioxide by 30 per cent. The UK's environmental policies were reactionary rather than preventative. The UK government had a voluntary approach. If the already low targets were breached, it was rare that action was taken against the offenders. Despite this, between 1990 and 2009 sulphur dioxide levels in the EU decreased by 76 per cent thanks to EU legislation. The UK has had to conform to set targets and standards and the results are clear.

Outside EU legislation, the coalition government is doing little to combat climate change. "Vote blue, go green" was the Conservatives' bold slogan during the 2006 election campaign, in an attempt to detoxify the Tory brand. In 2010, David Cameron pledged that the Conservatives would lead the "greenest government ever". However, they have since turned their back on green policies. "We're not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business" said George Osbourne at the Tory party conference in 2011.

In early June, MPs voted against an amendment to the Energy Bill for a 2030 decarbonisation target. The coalition has cut the number of people working on the UK's response to climate change from 38 to six. Meanwhile, the UK is facing a multi-billion pound bill for the costs of dealing with the effects of climate change including flooding, heat waves, droughts and extreme weather. If Labour placed more importance on the need to build a low-carbon economy, the coalition government would find it more difficult to disregard the environment. However, their silence has been deafening.

In Wales we have the potential to boost our economy by billions of pounds by investing in renewable energy. A recent report by Regeneris Consulting and Cardiff Business School shows that 2,000 jobs a year could be created until 2050 and £2.3 billion injected into in Wales through investing in wind energy alone. However, we are hampered by the fact that many environmental powers are not devolved to Wales. Outside the EU, we would be in an even worse situation.

In Wales we are committed to the sustainable development of our country. We are helped in our efforts by EU laws on requirements for bathing water quality and protection of natural habitats, for example, as well as funding for our poorest communities and rural areas. If the UK left the EU, it is unlikely that the UK government would look to develop and enforce such environmental laws. As a result, the UK would be at risk of being rebranded the 'dirty man of Europe'.

Jill Evans MEP is president of the Green/European Free Alliance Group. She is a member of the committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. She is former president of Plaid Cymru and party spokesperson for European and International Issues.

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As well as the challenges, climate change provides a wealth of opportunity for Scotland, given our expertise and enterprise that can bring new jobs and greater prosperity. Scotland is an energy-rich nation with centuries of experience in coal and decades in hydro, oil and gas, industries that will increasingly be augmented by our future technologies in renewables: wind and biomass as well as wave and tidal. Indeed, Scotland has hit the energy jackpot with approximately 25 per cent of Europe's tidal power and 10 per cent of its wave power, in addition to 25 per cent of European offshore wind resource potential.

The SNP Scottish Government has invested heavily in Scotland's renewables sector and we showed our commitment to developing new renewable technologies by launching the £10 million Saltire prize for innovation in marine technology. We have taken big steps forward with our zero-waste strategy and have begun major investment in low-carbon transport which will be a crucial part of our carbon-reduction efforts. And, with tens of thousands of new jobs expected to be created in the renewable sector within the next decade, we are working to build the right skills, attract new investment and ensure Scotland is recognised as the most attractive location in Europe for marine renewables and carbon capture and storage.

As EU Energy Commissioner Oettinger said recently, Scotland could be on the verge of becoming "an energy

powerhouse of Europe". And Europe can help Scotland harness that potential through its policies to promote renewables, to build the required North Sea networks, and develop an integrated internal energy market that provides a level playing field to market those resources. No single member state can deal with today's energy challenges on its own, and as Scotland increases its renewable energy output we will need networks to further help us develop our export capacity and bring in revenues. In the EU, we have the political means, the economic muscle and the technology.

The UK government is doing considerable damage to our relationship with the rest of Europe: Westminster does not engage constructively with the EU and fails to promote Scottish interests, which are being damaged in the process. The UK's place in the EU is now in jeopardy. The vision of the Scottish National Party is for an independent Scotland in Europe; leaving the EU would have a detrimental environmental impact.

The Scottish Government's Climate Change Act is the most ambitious in the industrialised world and Scotland is working hard with our partners across Europe to develop green economic opportunities for Scotland and a sustainable future for our planet – we would like this to continue, and with Scotland's own voice.

Mike Weir was elected Scottish National Party MP for Angus in 2001. He is the SNP Westminster spokesperson on Energy and Climate Change.



Let me say from the outset that I believe the EU to be thoroughly bad for the environment. The examples are legion. Not least the entirely indefensible second home for the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The ridiculous monthly trek there is hugely expensive and involves a great fleet of trucks carrying the contents of MEP offices backwards and forwards, belching fumes all the way and for no good reason. Sadly, it can never be changed because of the French veto.

Then there is Galileo, the EU's vanity project principally being done to outdo the Americans and their satellite navigation system. Galileo involves multiple rocket launches to put satellites in space at vast cost, to duplicate a system that already exists and is freely available. The environmental impact of all the chemical rocket launches required must be incalculable.

What about the EU's catastrophic failure to manage Europe's fishing waters? In a recent speech to Parliament, I demanded that the control of fisheries be returned to the nation states, such is the failure of the European Commission in this sector. Fishing stocks have been destroyed and many fishermen driven out of the business. The discard problem is still with us as the EU continues to move at a ponderous pace to end it. Countless tonnes of dead fish have been thrown back into the sea over many years.

European fishing fleets have also been hoovering up the fish in North African waters. The EU's *modus operandi* is to bully a North African state, such as Morocco, into signing up to a trade deal, which includes giving EU fishing fleets full access to their waters. Local fishermen end up with either no fish or having to venture much further out to find any.

Despite the contradictory examples above, the EU is obsessed with the unproven man-made global warming theory. This has led to an explosion in the production of biofuel crops, which are supposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but do exactly the opposite. Most biofuels produce more greenhouse gases than ordinary petrol or diesel. This happens because of the application of

nitrogen fertilisers to these crops, which emit nitrous oxide and because of the worldwide destruction of huge amounts of grassland, wetland and forests, stimulated by this market.

The EU has also been a major impediment to the development of GM crops, refusing to do anything to encourage research and blocking many efforts to trial these crops in the member states. The irony being that genetically modified crops designed to resist insects and weeds can increase yields while dramatically reducing the need for fuel and all pesticides.

The EU is a major threat to the environment through misguided policies that are forced on the member states. The EU's recent ban on neonicotinoids, based more on green paranoia than scientific research, will have the effect of lowering crop yields in a hungry world and increasing the use of alternative but more environmentally hazardous products to protect crops.

If the UK were to leave the EU, a large part of the funding for this dangerous nonsense would be removed. The UK would also be free to pursue agricultural and environmental policies better suited to our own needs and infinitely better for the environment. **ES**

Stuart Agnew is the UKIP MEP for the Eastern Counties and serves on the European Parliament's Agriculture, Constitutional Affairs and Fisheries Committees. He farms in Norfolk, where he has 35,000 free-range laying hens, 500 ewes and 400 acres of arable land.

Should harmonisation or subsidiarity prevail for the regulation of shale gas in the EU?

Frederick van Mierlo considers whether the examples of the UK and the Netherlands' regulatory attitudes to shale gas exploration should be extended throughout Europe.

The US shale gas revolution has certainly not gone unnoticed in a Europe that is increasingly dependent on energy imports. In the US, shale gas has proved to be a game-changer of epic proportions, revitalising heavy industry and providing a cheap and secure domestic source of energy. In Europe, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK have all expressed an interest in pursuing shale gas¹. Following the lifting of a temporary moratorium in the UK, the gas exploration company Cuadrilla looks set to make the UK one of the first to get shale gas flowing. The Dutch may well follow suit and are likely to vote on whether to lift their own moratorium in September or October.

FRACKING RISKS

A catalogue of environmental concerns over water pollution, climate change and seismicity has accompanied the interest in shale gas. If we put aside the debates and hyperbole over resource potential and economic viability, environmental risk can be seen to be at the epicentre of fracking². Fortunately, extensive environmental legislation of EU origin is already in place that is applicable to shale gas³. These include, amongst others, the Water Framework Directive, the Mining Waste Directive, the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and the Regulation on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH).

In 2012 the European Commission undertook a series of research investigations to examine the impact of shale gas on climate change, energy markets and the

environment. The Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission (DG Environment) published a report that found the existence of what it considers to be significant gaps in the legislative framework. Discussions between DG Environment, DG Energy and DG-CLIMA (for climate action) on whether to initiate a proposal and what legislative instruments to use will shape the nature of regulation in Europe.

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS

Having completed the research phase, the European Commission is now at the mandatory impact assessment phase, which includes a series of steps that examine the economic, social and environmental consequences of a potential initiative⁴. The outcome of this is not yet certain, but three courses of action are being considered.

The first is that the Commission decides the environmental risks can be adequately managed using soft instruments such as guidelines on how to use existing legislation. The second is that aspects of existing legislation, such as Annex I of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, are amended. Annex I includes a threshold of 500,000 m³ per day of natural gas production, below which an environmental impact assessment is not required. DG Environment believes that flow rates from shale gas in Europe may not be high enough to trigger a mandatory assessment⁵. However, opening up existing legislation to co-decision means that the Council of Ministers and European Parliament may attempt to amend other Articles and Annexes in a way that is not favourable for the environment. Both the UK and the Netherlands have previously expressed their desire to review the existing powers of the EU and

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