

Speaking Notes for The Earl of Selborne
ESA/FEAD Conference Resource Efficiency in the World's Largest Economy

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The Royal Society, 6 Carlton Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG

The Commission is now seeking to ensure that waste policy enters a new phase, it is to be placed explicitly within the context of resource use. The waste hierarchy has been the basis of EU waste policy from the beginning, prevent, reduce, re-use and recycle, but legislative initiatives have tended to be piecemeal, tackling specific waste streams but without a real sense of how they interact. Providing a wider context for waste policy could be positive as it focuses on the prevention of waste more clearly, rather than just finding more efficient ways of clearing it up. In order to achieve this however, a huge effort will have to be made to introduce drivers for change, and to set clear, quantifiable objectives. Work is already starting with initiatives such as the Integrated Product Policy Communication, which is seeking to develop the tools for assessing and progressing analysis of the impact of products, and the recently published Resources strategy. At the same time the Commission is seeking to review the approach to waste through the waste and recycling strategy.

The waste and recycling strategy is welcome because it asks questions about the effectiveness of current waste policy, in particular the relevance of EU wide targets. It also identifies the difficulties caused by a lack data, and the impact that might have on setting effective objectives.

The strategy is slightly ambivalent about its role, stating that a complete review of waste policy would be beyond the role and resources of the Commission. This may be the case, but to really understand the way forward, a real attempt must be made to understand what has been lacking in the past.

The slowing down of legislative activity anticipated over the European Parliament elections, means that the Commission should take time to properly consult on the strategies and use this as an opportunity for review.

The recent inquiry by Sub-Committee D identifies problems both with the legislative process, in developing rigorous policies to deal with such a complex area, and the subsequent content of proposals.

- Lack of data:
Baseline, impact assessment and review of implementation
- Timing of transposition and implementation:
The use of technical advisory committees to fill in the detail of framework proposals after co-decision has led to difficulties in finalising essential detail in time for those affected by the legislation to take action within the timetable set out in framework legislation. (eg landfill)

EU waste policy must become more focused on the objectives it is trying to achieve; setting targets for their own sake is not enough – will they actually provide a driver for achieving objectives?

Warnings over the management of waste policy in the EU have come from a number of quarters over the past year: The House of Commons recently produced reports which were highly critical of the approach to waste management by Government in England and the Better Regulation Task Force has warned that improvements still need to be made on transposing EU legislation.

It is not enough for the Commission to drive forward change; Member States must play an active role in assessing their own needs. This will become more important if targets are no longer set for Member States, but for the EU as a whole, with flexible mechanisms introduced to achieve them. It is extremely important for the UK to develop a clear position and to move from a reactive stance, responding to EU legislation, to providing strategic direction for the EU.