

Catherine Stihler MEP says It's Time to throw out the plastic bag

✘ by Catherine Stihler MEP

Plastic bags are the ultimate symbol of our 'throw away' culture and such attitudes are costing us the Earth, literally.

The campaign to encourage Edinburgh shoppers to ditch their plastic bags in favour of re-usable canvas bags is one which could have a strong momentum across Auld Reekie. Edinburgh will hopefully be joining the likes of Italy and cities across California, South Africa and Australia, which have either imposed full bans on plastic bags or levied surcharges on their purchase. Through supporting this scheme, Edinburgh has the ability to trigger a new wave of other communities willing to join in.

Tackling climate change remains at the heart of EU policy, and Labour MEPs have a proud record of supporting ambitious and ground breaking environmental policies. We are the strong voice calling for immediate action, unlike many of Cameron's Conservatives in Europe – some of whom continue to deny the existence of global warming. We can no longer stand by and ignore the damage from climate change. Labour have recently backed new targets, calling on EU member states to stop discarding electrical items which end up in landfills. Toxic chemicals, such as mercury, end up seeping into the environment.

Similar to the grass root level campaigns we see in Edinburgh every day, the EU is also leading by action. Too often international agreements end up being watered down or face

lengthy negotiation stages. However, the EU has been a real driving force behind international negotiations: encouraging an agreement on UN climate treaties, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and a leading role in the preparations for a legally binding framework beyond 2012. These examples are to name just a few. Fortunately the vast majority of our European members are equally as environmentally conscious as we are in Scotland, thus proactive about securing concrete measures. We will not tackle climate change on our own, but by working together Europe we can become a world leader and produce a highly efficient, low carbon economy.

Progress in recent years has been significant. New estimates have revealed that the EU-27's 2009 greenhouse gas emissions were approximately 17.3% below 1990 levels. The strongest impact on these levels came from the sharp drop in coal use – 12.7% lower in 2009 than 2008.

In 2008 the European Parliament backed the most ambitious and demanding of climate and energy targets throughout the world. These included:

Reduction in EU greenhouse gas emissions of at least 20% below 1990 levels

20% of EU energy consumption to come from renewable resources

A 20% reduction in primary energy use compared with projected levels, to be achieved by improving energy efficiency.

These EU targets are in line with European policy on job creation and boosting our fragile economy. We must invest in low-carbon technologies, train and re-train workers to secure new 'green growth' jobs and reverse attitudes such as "grow first, clean up later".

The 'I Love Edinburgh' scheme, plus the introduction of Capital-based green businesses, underlines the fact that Edinburgh has taken its place in the vanguard of the fight against climate change. Petroc Technologies, an Edinburgh

technology firm, have recently been awarded £40,000 under the Shell Springboard programme, for developing safeguards against leakages from underground reservoirs' used in Carbon Capture Storage (CCS) processes.

We have seen the damage caused by unchecked climate change – floods in Pakistan, mudslides in China and now a cyclone which has ravaged its way through Queensland, Australia. The public tide and attitudes across the UK are changing – this is our opportunity to do our bit and work towards a global climate change deal.