

The Green Party UK Natural Resource and Waste Management policy

Background

NR100 The natural resources that are considered in this section include fossil fuels, metalliferous and bulk minerals, water and reusable or recyclable waste materials. Policies affecting the use of natural resources are also contained in the Sections on Agriculture, Forestry, Food, Countryside, Pollution, Energy, Population, Transport, International Policy and Economy.

NR101 Raw materials for industrial use are obtained from three sources:

- i) non non-renewable primary natural resources, such as fossil fuel and metal ores;
- ii) biologically renewable primary natural resources, such as wood and cotton;
- iii) waste or used products which have not irreversibly lost their useful characteristics in use and can be recycled as secondary raw materials.

Principles

NR200 Supplies of natural resources on Earth are finite or require suitable land, which is in limited supply, for their production. Increasing productivity of biologically renewable raw materials is generally coupled with a decrease in genetic diversity and an increased dependence on high high-energy inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides.

NR201 Manufacturing processes using recycled materials require less energy than those exploiting primary natural resources because of the reduced processing required. This energy saving will increase as progressively lower grades of non non-renewable resources need to be exploited as richer deposits are exhausted.

NR202 The energy saved by recycling secondary raw materials is normally greater than that which could be obtained by instead recovering energy from combustible waste.

NR203 To achieve sustainable resource use with minimal environmental impact requires:

- i) social and economic policies which will encourage and maintain a reduction in the physical burden human societies place upon our planet;
- ii) further regulatory controls for some resources to ensure that the social and environmental impact of their use is acceptable;
- iii) research to identify sustainable patterns of resource use for the future.

NR204 In order to achieve increased waste avoidance and higher recycling rates, the government needs to:

- i) establish a structure for industry which secures end end-use markets for secondary raw materials;
- ii) ensure that the cost of using natural resources takes account of the environmental costs of their extraction or harvesting, processing and disposal.

Long-Term Objectives

NR300 To determine the global availability of resources and identify sustainable patterns of resource resource-use.

NR301 To minimise the consumption of all natural resources and, in particular, non-renewable resources for which supplies are reaching the limits of availability, whether for environmental, technical, physical or political reasons.

NR302 To phase out the routine use of non-renewable materials for product-uses in which they cannot be easily be recycled for the same purpose.

NR303 To minimise damage, including the reduction of genetic and ecological diversity, caused to the natural environment by extracting or growing natural resources for industrial use.

Short-Term Objectives

NR310 To slow down the consumption of non-renewable raw materials before the onset of scarcity and at the same time give incentives to society as a whole to investigate alternatives.

NR311 To induce industry to invest in resource saving technology by:

- minimising waste during manufacturing processes;
- the manufacture of long life products which can be repaired or reused;
- greater conservation of energy in industry;
- the development of anti-pollution devices.

NR312 To introduce new priorities for waste management:

- so that unnecessary waste is avoided;
- so that the efficient reuse, recycling and composting or digestion of waste is maximised;
- to work towards a target of zero waste. The zero waste concept encompasses producer responsibility, eco-design, waste reduction, reuse and recycling, all within a single framework with the aim of eliminating altogether waste sent to landfill or incinerators.

NR313 Intensify research into the recycling of secondary raw materials.

NR314 To provide safe drinking water to all people and to encourage the adoption of levels of domestic and industrial water consumption which minimise damage to the environment through entrapment and treatment works.

NR315 Promote research into ecologically sound cultivation techniques for renewable raw materials and develop less energy intensive methods of cropping and processing.

NR316 To ensure that the transition towards sustainable resource-use occurs in such a way as to achieve and guarantee social justice, equity and economic stability.

NR317 Taking account of the genuine benefits available from trade, to encourage self-reliance, whereby people collectively within communities can determine their own needs and meet these as far as possible from the resources available to them.

NR318 To work towards achieving international agreements on the use of natural resources, which take full account of the need to guarantee sustainability and to minimise damage to the natural environment.

Policies

NR400 The Green Party believes that the policies in this section should be enacted in a coordinated manner throughout Europe. However, in the absence of pan-European or European Union agreement on these measures, a Green Party government will be prepared to implement them unilaterally as far as possible at a national level.

Local and Regional Policies

NR410 Local Councils will be given full powers to establish waste recovery and sorting facilities for the collection of all domestic and commercial waste and to sell recovered materials to industry for recycling.

NR411 The duty to dispose of waste collected by District Councils will be transferred to Regional Waste Disposal Authorities, controlled by District Councils and other community representatives, with the costs of disposal charged to all District Councils in direct relation to the quantity of waste collected for disposal by each District. This will give District Councils an incentive to promote waste reduction and to increase waste recycling, as they will save directly on disposal costs.

NR412 District Councils will be required to recover for recycling at least 60% of recyclable domestic waste within 5 years. At the end of this period an increased target will be set, which is based on an assessment by the Standards Commission (see [NR425](#)), of how much further unnecessary waste can be avoided and which incorporates targets for waste reduction and the composting or digestion of organic waste.

NR413 Water companies will be required to enter into joint arrangements with Regional Waste Disposal Authorities to build digestion plants to produce biogas and/or compost from organic waste from agricultural sources, sewage and municipal waste. The discharge into domestic sewers of polluting waste from industry which would detrimentally affect digestion or digestion products will be prohibited.

Transitional policy on municipal waste disposal

NR414 In the medium- to longer-term, we firmly believe that the policies in this chapter designed to prevent waste arising in the first place are the most important ones to adopt. However, local authorities currently have a statutory duty to dispose of domestic waste, and implementation of the Landfill Directive - which quite correctly imposes progressively diminishing targets on the maximum amount of biodegradable waste that can be sent to landfill - means that local authorities are having to revise their waste

strategies. Many authorities have opted for large scale incineration, often in the face of considerable local opposition. Green councillors are necessarily involved in creating new waste strategies, which are only second best and transitional strategies towards the longer-term solutions set out in this chapter.

NR415 In creating any such short-term strategy the following context needs to be taken into account:

- i) while the economy continues to grow in wasteful ways, the domestic waste stream will increase in size, whatever local councils do;
- ii) there is considerable scope to promote greater reuse of perfectly good things that have been thrown away;
- iii) there is growing public willingness to participate in recycling schemes;
- iv) kerbside recycling schemes in some areas currently recover quite high proportions of dry recyclables and compostable waste, and there is scope for replicating this far more widely;
- v) encouraging domestic composting reduces the transport of waste;
- vi) domestic waste is only a part of total waste, which also includes industrial and commercial waste and construction and demolition waste;
- vii) there is very considerable technical development taking place in waste management at the moment, and it is not possible unequivocally to recommend a particular technical route;
- viii) nevertheless large-scale incineration of residual waste (that is after dry-recyclables and compostable waste have been removed so far as they can be) is usually dangerously polluting, and still creates a toxic final product for landfill;
- ix) modern approaches, such as mechanical and biological treatment, anaerobic digestion and possibly even gasification, sometimes used in combination, may offer reduced pollution and a smaller amount of less damaging material going to landfill;

- x) there is scope with anaerobic digestion and gasification to produce biogas and syngas respectively, which can be converted to hydrogen and then used, for example, to power public transport, such as buses, through fuel cells;
- xi) it is recognised that some of these newer technologies are more expensive than incineration and landfill;
- xii) it is important not to enter into long-term contracts or arrangements which require large minimum volumes of waste, and so create an incentive to maintain or increase the size of the overall waste stream.

NR416 While there will necessarily be local variation, the most promising approaches seem likely to involve:

- i) having a clear hierarchy of waste treatments, with reuse first, followed by recycling and composting, followed by treating the residual waste in non-polluting ways that produce useful products like biogas and the least possible quantity of inert material for landfill;
- ii) encouraging home composting;
- iii) investing considerable effort in educating and persuading householders to separate their waste into dry recyclables, compostable wastes and residual refuse, and not to place certain hazardous items (for example, paint, pesticides and items containing NiCad batteries) into the municipal waste stream at all;
- iv) aiming to have no more than 20% residual waste, and to recycle and compost more than 80%;
- v) organising kerbside collection of all three streams;
- vi) sorting the dry recyclables either at the kerbside or at a materials recovery facility, and ensuring that the dry recyclables are put to high value uses;

- vii) preferring mechanical and biological treatment and anaerobic digestion, possibly in tandem;
- viii) no incineration of residual waste;
- ix) cautiously exploring the possibility of gasification, but not accepting it if the feedstock contains too many recyclables and if there are pollution risks;
- x) accepting that in the short-term some residual waste after treatment will end up in landfill, but that that waste should be inert and pose no danger to watercourses;
- xi) even without central government specifying it as a responsibility, local authorities looking to reduce, reuse and recycle waste from non-domestic sources within their geographic boundaries.

National Policies

NR420 A Natural Resources Department, a national non-ministerial government body with regional offices, will be established to be responsible for resource exploration and assessment, the maintenance of standards in mining, quarrying and forestry, and the provision of ecological, geological, archaeological and engineering advice. Working with the pollution control bodies and with due regard to relevant pre-existing legislation, the Natural Resources Department will be able to grant and revoke operating licences. Commercial interests will not be permitted to prejudice decisions.

NR421 All mineral rights will be held in trust by the State on behalf of the communities which occupy the land or, in the case of off-shore rights, which border it. Planning consent to exploit minerals will be subject to both local and national agreement. It will be a requirement of such consent that the environmental impact of any work is minimised and for extraction activities to maximise the resources obtained. The affected land should be returned to a similar or improved ecological status.

NR422 Industrial users of raw materials (e.g. smelters and pulp mills) shall keep annual records of the ratio of primary source materials to those recycled. Through the application of Resource Taxation ([NR423](#)) they will be encouraged to reduce raw material consumption in favour of reclaimed materials.

NR423 A system of Resource Taxation will be introduced (see [EC780s](#)) to impose a levy at the earliest possible point in the harvesting or extraction processes for all natural

resources. The Natural Resource Tax will be applied at the forest, quarry, mine or port of entry, with the Natural Resources Department advising the Treasury on the levels at which it should be set. Resource Taxes will be levied at a zero or reduced rate on recycled materials and at a zero rate on reused products. The effect of Resource Taxation will be to encourage not only sustainable production but also waste reduction, recycling and avoidance through reuse and repair. As a transitional step towards the full introduction of Resource Taxation, a zero VAT rating will be introduced for the use of recycled materials and reused packaging.

NR424 A Waste Avoidance and Recycling Act will include measures to:

- i) allow minimum recycled contents to be statutorily imposed upon suitable products;
- ii) ban unnecessary disposable products and packaging, where their non-use would lead to a net reduction in environmental impact;
- iii) introduce specifications for the design of packaging to minimise waste and maximise recyclables;
- iv) impose a variable Recovery Charge on all packaging and short-life disposable products (such as newspapers), including on imported goods, with the revenue distributed to District Councils on a per-capita basis to finance waste recovery schemes (the Charge will be set at separate rates for different materials so as to enable the viability of their recovery to be equalised; for example, the Charge will be much higher on plastic than on glass packaging);
- v) introduce mandatory deposits, refundable by retailers, to encourage the separate collection of toxic waste materials, such as batteries;
- vi) allow for the introduction of mandatory returnable deposits on drinks containers.

NR425 A Standards Commission will be established incorporating the British Standards Institute, the Design Council and the Patents Office, whose duties will be:

- i) to exercise quality control on consumer products, setting minimum standards for safety and design, recyclability, durability, ease of repair and maximum energy efficiency in use;
- ii) to determine rates for Recovery Charges on packaging and short-life disposable products (see [NR424](#) iv);
- iii) to assess the maximum waste recovery levels achievable by District Councils (see [NR412](#));
- iv) to investigate the feasibility of an amortisation tax applied to consumer goods which rises inversely with the length of useful life of the article;
- v) to determine increased guarantees and spares-availability periods required of manufacturers for all long-life products;
- vi) to set statutory targets for minimum recycled contents for suitable products, such as newspapers, glass and metal containers and all paper and plastic packaging which does not come directly into contact with food (the content targets will be set at levels sufficient to ensure that the recovery targets required by [NR412](#) can be achieved);
- vii) to award quality labels to approved products meeting design, energy efficiency and minimum environmental standards;
- viii) to assess the comparative advantages of different packaging systems and, in particular, to determine whether the reuse or recycling of drinks containers should be preferred;
- ix) to determine refundable deposit levels necessary or returnable items (see [NR424](#) v & vi);
- x) to ensure that the ownership of patent rights are not used to restrict the application of socially and environmentally useful inventions.

NR426 Regional offices of the Natural Resources Department will be responsible for issuing consents to abstract water for agricultural, domestic and industrial use.

Consents will only be issued provided that avoidable or unacceptable environmental costs will not result and provided that the Best Available Technology is being used to minimise pollution potential of subsequent discharges. Where granted, consents will be levied at rates which reflect as fully as possible any social and environmental costs which nevertheless may still result.

NR427 Substantial grants will be made available, via the Natural Resources Department, to universities, polytechnics and other research institutions for the investigation of waste recycling technology, renewable energy and other resource resource-saving strategies.

NR428 The Green Party is opposed to the private ownership of water, which will have severe environmental and social consequences, and to the implications for land ownership, particularly in upland areas. We believe that the water service should be run with the direct participation of the communities concerned. In the short-term, this means a decentralised system of industrial democracy where the consumers of the service work with those who produce the service towards the following common ends:

- i) the protection of the environment, e.g. the banning of all discharges to water (from point and diffuse sources) of any toxic or bio-accumulative substances;
- ii) the provision of potable quality water for all individual consumers at a reasonable price;
- iii) meeting standards laid down at national and EU level, the removal of Crown exemption, and public debate about all the scientific evidence of the levels necessary to safeguard the environment;
- iv) freedom of information and the direct participation of people at local and regional levels;
- v) an enforcement agency that is free of vested interests, adequately staffed and given the necessary punitive powers.

The Green Party will bring all water resources stored and routed for public consumption, from reservoir to tap, in England & Wales back into public ownership at national level. However, local water resources will be administered and run by democratically elected local bodies based on water catchment areas.

International Policies

NR430 The import and export of waste would be prohibited, unless it is to be recycled.

NR431 Through the United Nations, or other international agencies, the Green Party calls for and supports programmes with the following aims:

- i) in the short-term, to establish an international code of conduct for trans-national companies to minimise environmental damage and prevent harm to indigenous populations from resource extraction;
- ii) in the longer-term, to return control over resource extraction from trans-national companies to local indigenous populations (the full and fair participation of indigenous and local communities must be of paramount importance in all decisions about natural resource resources production, extraction and profit);
- iii) to establish agreements guaranteeing that tropical hardwoods and products are supplied and used on a sustainable basis;
- iv) to prohibit further monopolisation and standardisation of crop seeds, to encourage greater use of local varieties and to maintain a rich genetic diversity and so prevent the higher risk of large scale crop failure associated with genetic homogeneity;
- v) to manage in a controlled manner the mineral resources of the seas, outside of territorial waters, for the common benefit of all the worlds peoples;
- vi) to enforce a moratorium on the prospecting and extraction of raw materials from international wilderness areas, such as Antarctica;
- vii) to research the global availability of resources and identify sustainable patterns of resource-use. (see also [EC921](#))