

- Your Environment, Your Vote
- Your Comedy, Our Cash

FoEE European Election Hustings

Wednesday 21st April sees Friends of the Earth Edinburgh's European Election Hustings - with representatives from the six major parties. A recent opinion poll commissioned by the UK Office of the European Parliament found that 95% of Scots consider the environment personally important to them, but only 22% intend to vote! Up to 90% of all environmental law in Scotland begins in Europe so who we elect as our seven Scottish MEPs will have a direct impact on Scotland's environment.

The FoEE hustings event is being organised as part of the **everyone** campaign. After its successful Holyrood campaign in 2003, **everyone** is back for the upcoming European elections. **everyone** is the combined effort of 26 Scottish environmental NGOs encouraging voters to engage in the upcoming elections. You can get involved in several ways. First, check out the **everyone** website (www.everyonecan.org). On this website



12 issues, ranging from Transport to Biodiversity, are outlined. These show how important the European Parliament is for Scotland's environment and what future decisions will be required of the MEPs elected on 10th June. Next, write to or email your MEP candidates from each party. The website makes this very easy and gives you the opportunity to challenge your MEP candidates on what they are going to do for the environment if elected. Finally, you can attend a hustings and challenge your MEP candidates in person. On Monday, May 24th from 7 - 9 pm, **everyone** will be hosting another hustings at the Trades Hall, Glasgow. With this

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Book Early for Our Sell-Out Comedy Night!

Our highly successful comedy night is back for the fourth year running. This event always sells out, so book your tickets early. Last year we raised over £1000 for the group's campaigns and we hope to do even better this time. See back page for full details.

Co-ordinators' Comments

Welcome to the April edition of INFOE, the bi-monthly newsletter of Friends of the Earth Edinburgh (FoEE). For those who are not familiar with us, we are a local environmental organisation, campaigning on issues that affect Edinburgh. While we are affiliated to our parent organisation, Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES), we have our own dedicated committee and campaign teams who work on an entirely voluntary basis.

2003 was a productive year for our enthusiastic and committed group. Over the year we held regular public meetings on a wide variety of topical issues, including a successful hustings event before the Scottish Parliament elections. Our annual comedy night was a sell-out success raising over £1000 for the group. Several new members (activists, committee members and campaigners) were recruited. We launched this fabulous new-look newsletter and successfully lobbied the council to use recycled paper for its own widely distributed newsletter.

2004 is shaping up to be another good year. As the City of Edinburgh Council is in the process of making some significant decisions regarding Edinburgh's transport strategy, FoEE have set up a campaign group specifically for transport issues. We will be developing our waste campaign in several new directions including a project investigating and encouraging recycling in Edinburgh's pubs, clubs and restaurants. On the 21st of April we will be holding another hustings event, this time for the European elections. We will be continuing our monthly public meetings and have another Comedy Night arranged for Tuesday 20th July.

Finally, we are on the lookout for enthusiastic people to help us in our work and to have a laugh at the same time! Whether you are interested in getting involved with our transport or waste campaigns, would like to help us distribute our newsletter or just want to come along to our meetings, we would like your support! See the back page to find out how to get in touch with us - and how you can help.

*Jolin Warren and Katriona Harding
 Joint Co-ordinators, FoE Edinburgh*

Colin Hattersley



Election Hustings

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hustings being a month after the FoEE hustings, it will be a great opportunity to revisit key issues or pose new questions. Finally, get out and vote! If you are not registered to do so, the everyone site has links to the sites where you can do this. The European Elections are on the 10th of June. Make sure you support your environment with your vote!

Susan Warren, FoE Edinburgh

Transport Campaign Update

The Transport Campaign Group have been busy on a number of fronts. We have submitted an objection to the Parliamentary Bills for **Tram Lines 1 & 2**. While we are very enthusiastic for high-quality modern trams, we continue to have concerns at the failure of Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE) to take on board any of the criticisms we have raised. We are now looking into the proposals for **Tram Line 3** (consultation deadline 18th May). We have also written a supporting submission to the Public Local Inquiry into **congestion charging** due to begin on 27th April. We are now looking for more help (see page 8) in ensuring that the Council's commendable proposals for congestion charging are delivered.

Waste Campaign Update

Waste is one of Friends of the Earth Edinburgh's two main campaigns at the moment. Here's a quick round up of current campaign activities -

- Eight places are available to visit the Smith Anderson **Tetrapak** recycling plant in Leslie, Fife, in the week beginning the 3rd May, during the day (exact time tbc). Please contact Katriona Harding <KHarding@foe-edinburgh.org.uk> to reserve a place if you are interested.

- A questionnaire has been drafted for use in the '**Recycling in Edinburgh Pubs and Clubs**' project, to establish the extent of recycling done by local pubs and the problems which inhibit them. The finalised questionnaire will shortly be published on the Friends of the Earth Edinburgh website and you can help us by carrying it out in your local pubs.

- We've been working to identify effective ways to campaign on **over-packaging** and have approached WRAP Scotland to explore how we might work together on these issues.

Charlotte Mackinnon, FoE Edinburgh

Genetic Engineering in the cold light of dawn

Is the Earth waking up to an environmental nightmare, or a brave new world? In my presentation to the Friends of the Earth Edinburgh Public Meeting on Thursday 27th May, we will take a close look at the new science of genetic engineering and whether current developments fulfil the initial promises of benefit for society at large. Are all opponents of genetic engineering irrational, or with a hidden agenda - as the protagonists assert? Is the Government willing to take account of the public's concerns or will it try to win its arguments using spin alone? This talk will consider the issues under six broad headings.

There will first be a simple introduction to the principles of genetic engineering - what the genome of a living organism represents and how it is being altered using methods that transcend normal selective breeding. The emphasis will be on GM crops. Medical applications of genetic engineering and "pharming" will be mentioned only briefly, as separate developments.

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Genetic Engineering

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This will be followed by a look at the present state of the art: the nature of 'synthetic gene cassettes' and the 'gene fragments' left in present-day GM crops. The behaviour of transgenes will be considered from a safety perspective, with a look at what experiments have and have not shown.

The ecology of modern agriculture and its impact on the environment will be considered next, particularly those factors most relevant to GM crops: chemical usage, gene escape ('vertical' and 'horizontal' gene transfer), biodiversity and organic farming. The potential benefits claimed for GM will be examined: the promise of cheaper and healthier production methods, and agricultural improvements of benefit to poor countries.

The direct effects of GM food and other products on humans and animals will then be addressed, and whether developments to date are sufficient to ensure consumer safety. GM food has potential problems for the consumer that could include allergies, nutritional shortcomings and toxic effects, and secondary problems that might arise from transgene uptake and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Then we will take a look at what controls exist to minimise the negative aspects of genetic engineering. Mention will be made of the recently updated European regulations, including questions of labelling and liability for harm caused. Recent political exercises include the Science and Economic Reviews, the 'GM Nation' public consultation and the Farm Scale Trials, and some of the prominent critiques relating to these will be mentioned.

Finally, there is the question of consumer choice. Are there sound reasons why consumers would wish to avoid GM products? And do the present regulations help them to exercise that choice? Consumers in Europe have already had a dramatic influence on the incursion of GM products, but the pervasive influence of the GM industry continues to be impressive.

Although these topics will be outlined only briefly, there will be plenty of time for questions from the floor. One possible topic for discussion would be current activities by other pressure groups (on both sides of the argument) and the effectiveness of their tactics.

*Colin Holden,
Lothian and Borders Bio-check
LABB is organisation which opposes the
irresponsible use of genetic engineering,
particularly with regard to GM foods and
crops. For further information:
www.smcholden.charitydays.co.uk/gm*

Environmental Justice for All

The right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being is fundamental to environmental justice. And yet often those most powerless and marginalized lack the resources that enable them to enforce this right.

Central to those resources is the ability of people to go to court to protect and improve their environment. This includes the ability to challenge the decisions of public bodies (including the regulators) where their acts or omissions are the cause of the environmental harm.

At the Environmental Law Foundation, we are acutely aware of the importance of

obtaining access to justice through the civil courts to address environmental concerns. Every day our Advice and Referral Service assists people throughout the UK by referring environmental problems to our members, who are expert environmental lawyers and technical consultants, for initial free advice.

However, there are significant barriers to environmental justice. Most importantly, over 30% of community groups with a reasonable case decline to pursue the matter because of cost or, more often, the risk of losing and paying the other side's costs. People often face the risk of losing their homes and all they have in order to cover the other side's (and third party) costs if they lose.

Of course, this is a common complaint of the whole legal system: 'The Courts, like the Ritz Hotel, are open to all.' But environmental cases are a special category: first, their success will benefit the environment for the whole community, not just the claimant. Of the 250 cases we handled last year, we estimate that at least 350,000 people were being adversely affected by the environmental harm cited, and that harm may also affect future generations. Second, many who contact us have low incomes. This implies that it is the poorest and least powerful in society who suffer disproportionately from environmental problems, and are then further excluded by being unable to gain access to justice to remedy the harm.

What can be done? First, use our services. Contact our Advice and Referral Service on 020 7404 1030 weekdays 9.30am-5pm (we will gladly return your call), or come along to our Environmental Law Question Time on 22 April, 5pm-7pm at the Friends Meeting House in Edinburgh, where an expert panel will answer questions on how you can use the law to improve your

environment.

Second, lobby local political representatives regionally, nationally and at European level to recognize more fully the link between social inequalities and environmental harm. At present there is a proposed Directive on Access to Justice in environmental matters being considered by the European Parliament, and it successfully concluded its first reading on 31 March. In line with the Aarhus Convention [1], which the Government has signed but not yet ratified, this Directive seeks - among other things - to ensure that environmental legal proceedings should not be prohibitively expensive. We should take the opportunity of the forthcoming EU elections on 10 June to lobby MEP candidates to support this important Directive in the next Parliament. Friends of the Earth Edinburgh is holding a hustings for the EU elections which will be a perfect chance to let the prospective MEPs know your views (7:30pm on 21 April at the Friends Meeting House).

[1] Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters agreed at Aarhus, Denmark, on 25 June 1998.

*David Whiting, Outreach Co-ordinator,
Environmental Law Foundation*



courtesy of Digital Vision

Colin Hattersley



Appealing Planning

Planning has an enormous impact on our daily lives even if it may not sound the most exciting of subjects. Decisions made by planners affect aspects as diverse and contentious as Edinburgh's new tram system, wind farm developments, out of town shopping centres, and new housing on the green belt – not to mention your neighbour's application to build that extra bedroom which will overlook your vegetable patch and block out the sunshine.

The Scottish Executive is currently consulting on a new Planning Bill (www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/planning/roap-00.asp) and so we invited Siobhan Samson (Planning and Development Officer at Friends of the Earth Scotland) along to our March public meeting to outline some of the main areas which are up for change. The underlying thrust of the reforms is to improve public participation and involvement in planning, and make the system more accountable and transparent. The meeting covered a range of issues, and while areas such as improved neighbour notification and removal of Crown immunity are important, the key topic of interest for communities around Scotland is the consultation on a third party right of appeal (TPRA).

So what is TPRA exactly? The person who makes a planning application is the "first party", the planning authority is the "second party" and anyone who is affected by the proposal is a "third party". Currently, if the application is refused the first party is able to appeal that decision. However, many communities have been surprised to find out that when the application is approved they have no similar right of appeal, even if the decision is a departure from the democratically-adopted local plan. TPRA already exists in many other countries, most notably the Republic of Ireland. The need to level the playing field and include the community in local decision-making is essential for environmental justice, and Friends of the Earth has long campaigned for the introduction of TPRA.

In a wide-ranging discussion after Siobhan's talk, other issues were also touched upon, such as introducing penalties for developers or operators who do not stick to the conditions imposed when their application was approved – this is the case when landfill sites are not being operated correctly, or low-cost housing "disappears" from a new estate of town houses. The need to rebuild confidence in the planning system was emphasised and it was suggested that a stronger role for Community Councils may be one route to make sure residents' views are reflected in consultations.

Readers are urged to respond to the current consultation on rights of appeal, or write to their MSP expressing their support for TPRA. Information can be found on the Friends of the Earth Scotland website (www.foe-scotland.org.uk/nation/tpra.html). Planning may not sound sexy, but it affects every one of us and this is our chance to make sure it works for us, not against us.

Helen Todd, FoE Edinburgh

Bringing Up Baby

Ponder this thought: disposable nappies have been around for about 30 years and are used by the vast majority of babies. Every day, around 7.5 million are dumped in a landfill site, and since part of each nappy is not biodegradable, that means we are sharing our planet with every used disposable nappy ever put into a landfill. Not a pleasant idea. However, there are alternatives and indeed, most people reading this article probably spent their formative years tucked into reusable terry-towelling nappies with far better environmental consequences. There's progress for you.

If you try to live a green life, recycling your bottles and buying organic food, you may hope to continue in the same way when you have a child. For others, the new responsibility of having a baby is a wake-up call to consider the environmental impacts of our lifestyles and the kind of world that their child will grow up in. Indeed, for many people becoming a parent or grandparent is the catalyst which spurs them to take out membership with organisations like Friends of the Earth. Yet without access to information about things like chemical-free shampoo and fair trade baby clothes, it can be hard to make the right choices. This is where BabyGROE comes in.

The difficulties of bringing up baby these days in an environmentally-friendly yet convenient way were outlined in February's public meeting by Linoa Cochrane and Susan Oak of BabyGROE. They told of the surprise and frustration they felt, after having their own babies, at the lack of information about alternative baby products and how to be an environmentally-friendly mother. They rejected the conventional route of

processed baby foods, disposable nappies and baby toiletries peddled by multinational corporations and instead set about gathering information on a green, ethical life for mothers and babies, sourcing small-scale, ethical businesses. With Linoa's background in organic agriculture and Sue's experience in retailing and marketing, they were ideally placed to join their skills together for this new enterprise. They now have a website and an informative leaflet that contains a directory of useful companies and contacts. Leaflets are handed out to almost every new mother throughout the UK, more of a reach across all social spectrums than most established environmental organisations can hope to achieve.

The response so far from mothers has been positive, and midwives too are keen to have copies of the BabyGROE leaflet to answer the growing number of questions they face from new mothers about environmental issues. After their launch in April 2003, Linoa and Susan are positive about the future but are dependent on funding and publicity if they're going to take on giants like Proctor & Gamble and win. Their passion and commitment to this social enterprise was clear and they have plenty of ideas for future development. However, there are still many challenges ahead, so check out their website (www.babygroec.co.uk) and see how they're getting on.

Helen Todd, FoE Edinburgh



www.babygroec.co.uk

Make Contact

If you'd like to get involved in the work of Friends of the Earth Edinburgh then please email us - info@foe-edinburgh.org.uk or see www.foe-edinburgh.org.uk. For those without access to the internet you can call Jolin Warren on 0131 466 8329.

We'd also be keen to hear any ideas or comments you have about the events and campaigns organised by the group.

Help Us Out!

FoEE is looking to recruit volunteers to assist with:
Membership & activist recruitment - Fundraising - Transport campaigning

We are an entirely voluntary organisation so we require volunteers with initiative and the ability to work independently. Members of the FoE Edinburgh Committee will however be available to give support and advice. Contact us for more details.

Dates for Diaries

Wednesday 21 April, 7.30pm
Friends of the Earth Edinburgh
Election Hustings
(See front page article).
Friends Meeting House, Victoria Terrace

Thursday 22 April, 5pm
Environmental Question Time
(See page 4 for details).
Registration from 4.30pm
Friends Meeting House

Saturday 24 April & Sunday 25, 9.30am
Scottish Global Awareness Conference
For information and tickets email -
<SGAC2004@yahoo.co.uk>

Saturday 1 May, 6.30pm
Coan-Coan
Fundraising event for Amazonian Communities
To reserve tickets email -
<coancoan@galeon.com>
or phone FoE Scotland on 0131 554 9977

w/c 3 May
FoEE Visit to Tetrapak Plant
For information contact -
<KHarding@foe-edinburgh.org.uk>

Thursday 27 May, 7.30pm
FoEE Public Talk
'Genetic Engineering in the Cold Light of Dawn' - Colin Holden, LABB
(See page 3 for details).
Friends Meeting House

Saturday 12 June, 12.30pm
FoE Scotland AGM
For information contact -
<MGraham@foe-scotland.org.uk>

Thursday 24 June, 7.30pm
FoEE Public Talk
Topic and speaker TBC
Friends Meeting House

Tuesday 20th July, 7.30pm (doors open)
FoEE Comedy Night
The Stand Comedy Club, York Place
This event always sells out, so book your tickets early.

To reserve tickets, and for other enquiries, contact The Stand Comedy Club on 0131 558 7272 or Friends of the Earth Edinburgh on -
<comedy@foe-edinburgh.org.uk>
- or see www.thestand.co.uk