

David Stewart

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Speech in the Scottish Parliament

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Excess packaging

I thank Jim Hume for this excellent debate.

The state-of-the-art Ecodeco waste treatment plant near Dumfries is an exemplar of best practice and puts in context the key mantra "reduce, reuse and recycle".

Tackling waste and excess packaging is not some obscure policy backwater; it is very much at the heart of the debate about climate change and emissions reduction strategy.

As members will be aware, during the previous session, the Environment and Rural Development Committee carried out a detailed study of our national waste strategy.

As the committee said at the time, the challenge is to compete with other EU member states in terms of best practice.

For example, Austria recycles three quarters of the municipal solid waste that it produces.

In Scotland, although the figures vary, the average home produces around a tonne of rubbish each year, which historically has ended up as landfill.

However, as Jim Hume pointed out, EU legislation has rightly moved member states away from that poor environmental practice.

The EU landfill directive targets are set at reducing annual biodegradable municipal waste to 75 per cent of what was produced in 1995.

As we have heard, the aim is to reduce that even further, to 35 per cent of that amount by 2020.

The Ecodeco plant has contributed to Dumfries and Galloway Council trebling the amount of waste that is being diverted from landfill.

In my region, the third sector has operated services for Highland Council in areas as diverse as community composting schemes and furniture reuse projects.

As Friends of the Earth has said, the big picture is that we have, worldwide, a relentless cycle of three killer problems—problems that exist not just in industrial nations but in developing nations.

First, we have a major problem with overproduction, which uses up valuable natural resources and leads to deforestation, especially of our rainforests, which is a major contributor to climate change.

Secondly, we have bad practice in the excessive use of fossil fuels in the production process, which leads to climate change, and in the terrible industrial practice of planned obsolescence

I am sure that we have all appreciated that when we have prematurely had to replace products that should have had a much longer life cycle.

The third problem is excessive disposal

Believe it or not, the average person in the UK throws away their body weight in waste in three months.

Much of that could be reprocessed instead of being sent to incineration or landfill.

As I am sure we will hear when the minister sums up the debate, the Scottish Government has proposed a move towards zero waste and is consulting on a series of new targets, such as reducing landfill from municipal solid waste to 5 per cent by 2025.

One of the key issues is how we incentivise householders and businesses to recycle more.

Members will be aware that my colleague Sarah Boyack has suggested cuts in council tax for householders who recycle more.

There is also a strong argument for greater enforcement by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish Government on the basis of the polluter-pays principle.

Perhaps the minister could confirm in his closing speech whether local authorities that exceed their landfill limits will be fined or allowed to trade allowances, as currently happens in England.

It is ironic and disturbing that, while countries such as Ethiopia are reporting widespread starvation, one third of Scottish food purchases are thrown out.

We need to change consumers' and supermarkets' behaviour.

We need to cut excessive packaging and have tougher producer responsibilities

We need to stop talking the talk and start walking the walk.

**Ends**

website links :

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