

How To Influence People (And Make Friends)



CIWM President, **Professor David Wilson**, explains how the Institution's expertise is helping shape the UK's response to the issue of marine plastics pollution

As I write this, I am half way through my term as CIWM President. It has been a busy time, with visits to all 10 CIWM Centres, and numerous follow-up visits already booked (I do still have some availability in my diary, however, so do please invite me!).

It's not just the visits that take the time. Each presentation or speech needs preparation or tailoring, even if there are some common themes. These include the global waste crisis (3bn people worldwide without access to a solid waste management service); and my perspective on the evolution of resource and waste management in China in the context of our current "recycling crisis" following China's National Sword programme (see April's *CIWM Journal*, pages 12-15).

Of particular note was my keynote presentation to CIWM Scotland's Spring Seminar on marine plastics. I was thrilled to have to edit my presentation the day before to celebrate a good example of one of CIWM's critical roles as the professional body for resources and waste, that of informing and influencing government policy.

I wrote an earlier column about mismanaged municipal solid waste as the major source of plastics entering the world's oceans (see February's *CIWM Journal*, page 14), an issue that matters to CIWM both in its own right and because of our role internationally. I also reported that, when Theresa May announced on 12 December a UK initiative to take the lead on tackling marine plastics, CIWM joined forces with Tearfund, the Institute of Development Studies and WasteAid UK to write first to the *Daily Telegraph* and then to No 10. We urged that any package should include international aid funding to help developing countries improve

their municipal solid waste management. This resulted in a meeting at Downing Street the following week with the Prime Minister's Senior Environment Advisor, Sir John Randall.



The obvious target for the Government to launch its promised initiative was the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), held in London this April. So CIWM and its partners kept up their work, pressing both for the Government to deliver on its promises, and to include a focus on improving municipal solid waste management in developing countries. We had various meetings with the Department for International Development and Defra, and CIWM chief executive Dr Colin Church helped orchestrate the process, using his knowledge of how the decision-making process works.

CIWM and WasteAid UK also published a briefing paper, "From the Land to the Sea", on World Water Day (March 22), which made the case that extending solid waste collection to all, and eliminating open dumping and burning of waste, would not only improve the lives of the world's poorest, but also potentially halve the quantity of plastic entering the oceans; the primary aim was to provide the evidence for officials to make the case. The paper also called on the Government to take immediate action by:

- committing to a step change in the proportion of its aid spent on waste management, which internationally has been running at an average of 0.3 percent but needs to increase to around three percent up to 2030;
- championing the need for increases in aid to waste management at the CHOGM and at the G7 this year, for example, as part of the blue economy priority
- spearheading the negotiation of a binding international treaty to tackle marine plastic pollution that should have, at its core, prevention through proper solid waste management, as well as efforts to clean up existing pollution.

In parallel, Tearfund organised 5,000 of its supporters to e-mail the Secretary of State for International Development asking for three percent of the UK's international aid budget to be directed to waste management.

On the day before the CHOGM, Theresa May announced that the UK and Vanuatu would lead a new Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance (CCOA) to fight plastic pollution, and that Ghana, New Zealand and Sri Lanka had already joined.

She also announced a £61.4m package

of funding to help tackle marine plastics, of which more than £20m would help developing country members of the CCOA improve waste management at a national and city level.

I was thrilled by this announcement, if a little dismayed that it received relatively little press coverage due to the events then unfolding in Syria. When Defra Secretary of State, Michael Gove, made a further announcement on the day before the actual Heads of Government summit, his focus and that of the press coverage was more on local UK politics with a ban on plastics straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

CIWM's press release hailing the first announcement stated that: "We are delighted that the Government has listened and taken action on a number of fronts, including research and practical support and aid to improve waste management systems." The overall package of measures is very much a step in the right direction, and raises the profile of proper management of municipal solid wastes in developing countries at the centre of the international agenda. The funding package is a good start, even if it leaves some way to go before the UK brings the proportion of its aid towards three percent.

As I said in the press release, CIWM will continue to press home this message to the Government. A pro-poor, inclusive approach to improve solid waste management would provide a vital service to some of the world's poorest communities, helping them to have a healthier place in which to live, grow and do business, whilst also creating jobs. It could also be a major step in tackling the marine plastics crisis, potentially halving the amount of plastic waste entering the oceans and reducing the wider environmental impact of waste on the environment. ■

