

IRRI NEWS

October 2008

Dear IRRI Member

This is the first quarterly newsletter for all Members of IRRI to bring you our news. We have news of several events that have happened recently, which might interest you, and announcements of events to come, which you may want to know more about.

You are all members of IRRI. You **are** IRRI – IRRI is owned by its members – and IRRI exists to serve its members' wishes and views. You will see news of the forthcoming AGM in the Announcements below, which is your chance to propose policy and resolutions for the coming year. But we would like this newsletter to be a more regular, less formal means of reaching out to you and asking for your views. Please take the time to reply. Let us know what you think of what we are doing, what you think we should be doing, what you think of this newsletter, or just give us your opinions of the state of the debate and what you think of it.

Now is the time to be speaking out. Remember our mission:

International Resources and Recycling Institute is dedicated to work against wasting the world's resources. It is fighting against the chronic shortages the world now faces as a consequence of the mistakes we have made. IRRI exists because we can accelerate progress to put our problems right if we work together.

If you believe we have a part to play, now more than ever is time to speak out. This is the week that the US Government has determined to raise \$700 billion to buy the toxic debts of its banking community to save them from collapse, and the financial system with it. You might wonder how this relates to IRRI and its work. But consider what these toxic debts represent. They are debts for which there is little or no collateral. They are difficult to claim, because there is insufficient security to cover them.

Whatever word you use – 'security', 'collateral' – it amounts to the same thing. Those who owe the money do not have the **resources** to pay it. We mean money, of course. But money is a token, and it only works if it is a token of something real. The reality is that we have insufficient real resources to cover these debts, and this is why they are toxic. They are based on thin air, using money as a token with nothing to back it up.

Is it possible that we are staring at an awful reality? Could this financial crisis be part of a distressing trend driven by our habit of living beyond the planet's capacity to support us? We are, quite literally, using up the World's resources faster than the planet has time to replace them. The money we pay to buy them is becoming worthless, because the time is approaching when it cannot buy any more, because there are no more to buy.

We think the current economic crisis has got a lot to do with IRRI's mission. But what do you think? You are IRRI. Tell us what your perspective is, and what you would like us to do about it in your name.

Introductions

First, many of you will hardly know who 'we' are. This newsletter comes from the first port of call for everything to do with IRRI. My name is Nick Lyth, and I have been running IRRI for all the three years that have passed since its first Charitable Board Meeting in September 2005. I am writing to you from the office I share with a one-eyed rat, who keeps me company when I am stuck for inspiration. I report to Ewan Ramsay, who is Managing Director of IRRI. He is

responsible for keeping the organisation running, and making sure we do everything we need to do to keep it growing, and keep it solvent. Steve Taylor is our man in Europe. He has made all the introductions that have built up our network of partners around Europe, and is responsible for expanding the flow of our friends and contacts. Duncan MacKinnon is the brains behind the technology. He is building the electronic presence, improving its quality and range, with his unique brand of technology expertise. Ian Thomson is our academic head, a pioneer in Environmental Accounting, who is currently on secondment as a policy advisor to the Scottish Parliament's Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. Finally, our Chairman is Stewart Ball, whose work for IRRRI over the years has kept us all on an even keel. Stewart is also Chairman of the Board of Directors, of whom there are six, representing the Membership of IRRRI.

This is IRRRI's management team. We are based in Edinburgh, although our registered office is in Dundee, where Board Meetings are held. We are the people to whom you can talk, and we will undertake to listen and reply. Address us collectively or individually by replying to this newsletter, or by e-mailing info@recycling-institute.org, and we will get back to you as quickly as possible in return.

Dumfries Office

We are shortly to open an IRRRI office in Dumfries, from which several planned work programmes will be run. The work relates to remote rural areas, especially in relation to the development of small-scale renewable energy solutions for commercial and residential premises. IRRRI has chosen the Dumfries & Galloway region as the best for its test projects, mainly because it has many friends in the region. Not least of these is John Moorhouse, one of IRRRI's most influential Directors. John has been part of the development of IRRRI since its inception. As a resident of Dumfriesshire, he has introduced IRRRI to Dr Philip Leigh, whose expertise in renewable energy, energy efficiency, climate change and carbon footprinting are especially relevant to IRRRI's work. Phil is setting up the IRRRI office on the beautiful Crichton Campus in Dumfries.

Conference Speeches

In recent months, IRRRI has spoken at a couple of interesting conferences. In June, we were asked to address the Sustainable Consumption and Production conference at the Barbican in London, run by Public Service Events. It was necessarily dominated by the Public sector, and opened by Joan Ruddock MP, who takes responsibility for Defra (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) in the present administration.

IRRRI was asked to speak in the Masterclass on Sustainable Design and the Use of Materials in a Creative Green Economy. We gave a speech whose theme was that design is not the way forward, and that, however clever we get in using less while consuming more, the real answer lies in using less and consuming less.

Our conclusion, which drew a chorus of approval, was that our Governments let us down in its obsession with growth. We have lived through times when we have had to tighten our belts, times like World War II, when we accept the need for rationing to serve the greater good. Now is the time for an economy of thrift, rather than growth. We cannot continue to live beyond our resources.

Continuing the theme of an economic about-turn, we also attended and spoke at the 20th International Congress for the Centre of Social and Environmental Accounting Research (CSEAR) held at St Andrews University at the beginning of September. We delivered a more playful argument for economic revolution in a paper linking the use of waste in the literary canon to a new system for economic analysis, which could provide the Environmental Accountants with their Holy Grail – a robust system for environmental accounting. As far as we know, this is the first time any serious commentators on the issues surrounding waste in the modern world has connected them to the most famous and influential poem of the 20th Century, *The Waste Land*. But they are connected, and it is worth trying to understand what we might learn from those connections.

Anyone wishing to find out more about these contributions to the debate is welcome to the paper delivered at St Andrews, as well as the more cryptic Powerpoint slides from the earlier presentation in London. Either reply to this e-mail, or send a request to info@recycling-institute.org.

Finally, we also attended an interesting seminar in Copenhagen to hear how the Northern Periphery Programme run by the European Union is seeking to advance its plans to improve the environment of the remote rural regions in Northern Europe. The challenges are intense. A sparse population, hostile weather conditions, extremes of temperature and light, limited connections to urban centres, and long distances to travel, all make these regions inimical to economic and environmental self-protection. They are a pure challenge for all of us, and IRRI is becoming involved in the pioneering work required to help find solutions.

We have also attended events in Amsterdam, to discuss Sustainable Islands; in London, to discuss the new LIFE+ Environment programme; Newcastle, to hear about the work being undertaken on Environmental Technology Verification; Dumfries, for the Future Homes Exhibition; Edinburgh, for the Sustainable Scotland conference; and Nottingham, where we attended the Second Annual Conference of the Resource Efficiency Knowledge Transfer Network, on the vexed theme of Decoupling Growth from Environmental Impact.

International Network

IRRI's International Network of the partners it is working with, and which have expressed an interest in future ties with IRRI, is growing. This is, in some ways, the benchmark of IRRI's success. A list of current partners is attached, for your interest. If any of you know people or organisations from any walk of life who might be interested in what we are doing, please tell us about them, and either ask them to get in touch with us, or provide us with the means of getting in touch with them. We want to expand the membership and reach out as widely as we can.

Subscriptions

The subscription for membership of IRRI is £10/month, or £120/year. Thanks to those of you who are paying, or have paid to become Members. For those of you who have yet to make the necessary arrangements, the attached Bank Details are provided.

Forthcoming Events

The following events and activities are for your interest and diaries. If you would like to participate, you will be more than welcome.

- **Inaugural IRRI Conference:** IRRI is planning its first open conference next April (22nd/23rd) in Dundee. We are running it in partnership with the Resource Efficiency KTN, and Resource Recovery Forum. It is planned to be principally a European conference on the subject of "Zero Waste – Rhetoric or reality? A Global Perspective", and will put together presentations of what Zero Waste means in different European venues, with contributions from further afield. We are inviting a guest speaker from Kamikatsu in Japan, which has claims to being the first true Zero Waste community. NISP has agreed to run workshops to challenge the delegates to push forward on certain selected issues by working together. **This is free to all Members, although you will have to pay for your own travel and accommodation.**
- **Scottish Environmental Personality of the Year Award:** We are considering launching an additional award, Scottish Environment Personality of the Year Award, at the conference.
- **AGM:** The Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 8th, at 15:00, in Dundee (venue to be confirmed). All Members welcome.

- Leading Partnerships: After some startling results in recent months, these have encouraged us to push on with IRRI's role in European partnerships, and take a lead. We have offered or been invited to lead no less than four European partnership bids applying for funding from the EU in the coming months. These include one for LIFE+ Environment on improved systems for packaging waste; one for the 7th Framework Programme on enhancing connectivity between research and policy making in sustainable development; one for Regions of Knowledge, for triple helix clusters in Waste Management; and one for the Northern Periphery Programme for a pioneering service which offers small scale practical Renewable Energy Source (RES) options to communities for whom RES solutions are thought to be uneconomic, too difficult technologically, or too difficult in practice. These are all large bids. The smallest will be for €1 million over three years, and the largest will be closer to €2 million. We need as much help as we can get, on all aspects of these, especially the financial aspect. We need to raise money for the match funding requirement that most of them need. If you have any interest and can help with any of these, please let us know.
- Website: We are developing the website (www.recycling-institute.org) so that it is a live, interactive vehicle for all our Members and Partners. Please visit the site regularly, and start to channel responses through there. It is still work in progress at the moment, but we hope that the bulk of the news contained here will, in future, be accessed from there.
- Facebook: We have also introduced an IRRI group in Facebook, for younger audiences. At present, we have done little to develop or exploit this. But all ideas and interventions are welcome. Do go onto Facebook, and post a comment or start a debate.

Fund Raising

Finally, fund raising. IRRI is a charity, and at present, it depends on the goodwill of the team that manage its day-to-day existence. Without their contribution, IRRI would have collapsed long ago. We need to raise funds for the core management activities. Do you know of philanthropical individuals or organisations who or which care about the environment, and might be interested in the adventurous agenda that we have set for IRRI? They exist, but we need help in finding out who they are and getting to talk to them. All ideas, suggestions and introductions are welcome.

Meanwhile, thanks for your help and commitment. IRRI needs you!

Nick Lyth
 Director
 International Resources and Recycling Institute
 24 East Claremont Street
 Edinburgh
 EH7 4JP
 United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0) 131 556 2006
 Mobile: +44 (0) 7802 150053
 E-mail: nick.lyth@recycling-institute.org
 Website: www.recycling-institute.org

International Resources and Recycling Institute is an international applied research institute that is dedicated to work against wasting the world's resources