

Joint communique by the UK's Environmental Services Association (ESA) and
the Dutch Waste Management Association (DWMA)

MAINTAINING EUROPEAN TRADE IN WASTE MATERIALS WILL REMAIN ESSENTIAL WHEN THE UK LEAVES THE EUROPEAN UNION

There is a thriving market within the European Union for trade in waste materials for recycling and recovery, and the UK is an active participant in that market.

Each year around 3 million tonnes of recyclable material are exported from the UK to other EU countries, worth over £900 million, and in addition the UK exports around 3.5million tonnes of refuse derived fuel (RDF) to EU countries for energy recovery, at a cost of some £320 million.

This trade has significant economic and environmental advantages for the UK and for the other European countries involved:

- The UK does not have enough domestic capacity to reprocess all of the recyclable materials it collects into new products and materials. Rather than consign the surplus to landfill, it makes good economic and environmental sense to export these materials to be recycled elsewhere. The additional cost and environmental impact of transporting the materials is far outweighed by the economic and environmental benefits of recycling.
- In addition, the UK currently does not have enough facilities in place for recovering energy from its non-recyclable waste and recycling residues, while UK landfill capacity is rapidly falling and landfill tax rightly makes this a costly option. The UK industry is seeking to develop additional EfW facilities to close this capacity gap, and has called on Defra to put in place the measures necessary to help achieve this. In the meantime, paying other EU countries to import non-recyclable waste (RDF) from the UK to convert into energy in their countries makes economic and environmental sense, as a temporary measure until UK capacity is built.

For these economic and environmental reasons, ESA and DWMA call on the UK and the EU authorities to maintain as far as possible frictionless trade in waste for recycling and recovery after the UK leaves the European Union.

ESA and DWMA believe that unnecessary trade barriers and tariffs on trade in waste materials between the UK and the EU must be avoided. Instead, the UK and the EU should capitalise on the potential for neighbouring countries to continue to work closely together towards a low carbon circular economy. This means continuing to move away from landfill, except where it is the best or only option, and making optimum use and reuse of resources, so contributing to climate change and renewable energy objectives, while boosting economic growth and job creation.

If the UK's exit from the EU were to result in the loss of free trade in waste materials this would have significant adverse economic and environmental consequences for the UK and other European countries. In particular, the UK would face significant problems in maintaining its existing recycling rates, let alone increasing them further.

The UK would also see a worsening of the capacity shortfall it already faces in dealing with its non-recyclable waste. Landfill sites might have to be reopened again, and it would be very difficult for the UK to find an additional 3.5 million tonnes of capacity quickly – the equivalent of about 10 additional energy from waste plants.

From the perspective of Dutch and other West European operators, Brexit could lead to a reduction in waste streams in their installations and therefore a decrease in the production of sustainable raw materials and renewable energy. The overall environmental performance of the UK and the EU combined would go down.

The resources and waste management sectors which ESA and DWMA represent want to be able to continue to innovate and invest in new capacities and technologies which contribute towards the UK's and the EU's climate change targets, clean growth and resource productivity, and strongly believe that stable and resilient markets for recyclable and recoverable waste materials are essential to meeting that objective. Therefore, unnecessary trade barriers and tariffs on trade in waste materials between the UK and the EU must be avoided. On top of that, ESA and DWMA would like to see the continuation post-Brexit of existing initiatives such as the North Sea Resource Roundabout, as an important element in ensuring the future of well-functioning regional markets in waste materials.



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