



Staff training is needed to keep batteries out of landfill sites

Spotlight on Efficiency, page 29

OPINION

Is the EU now past its sell-by date?

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Director of Monksleigh on the case for voting to leave the EU



As the vote looms ever closer on whether the UK should exit the EU, it seems as though the arguments have been more negative than positive, with scare stories from both sides and little being offered in the way of a clear vision of what the future of staying in or leaving will have.

I am very pro-Europe and, in the interest of openness, you should know that my father was an immigrant in the late 1960s from Holland and I have a large extended family there. So it won't surprise you to know that I am not totally against immigration, the euro, trade or the single market.

And from a waste and resources perspective, the EU has driven change within the UK that arguably would not have otherwise happened. It has certainly led to rafts of legislation for implementation in the UK to drive the wider environmental sectors and agenda, alongside the economic growth that the EU has experienced during the period.

But while people keep looking backwards at their successes, few seem to be looking at the harsh reality of where the EU is as an entity at the present time. I would argue that if you considered it like a product or service lifecycle, then it is not only mature as an 'experiment' but is very much showing the early stages of decline.

Now I am sure that, if you were extremely pro-EU, you would look at the lifecycle and say that it is still in growth, with more and more countries 'falling over' themselves to join. But is this really the case?

This positive view of the EU presupposes that we are in a vibrant and fully functioning union that delivers what it has in the past. But what we seem to have is the opposite: fiscal imbalances

across member states that threaten the union and the euro to the core (don't forget how close it came to failure with Spain, Greece and Italy only relatively recently); uncontrolled borders with no real solutions to the problem; negative growth rates across most member states; and legislation that is becoming increasingly burdensome for businesses to the point that they will struggle to compete in the global market.

The stresses are there to be seen. And the UK renegotiating the terms of its membership and having a referendum has caused instability, so it is therefore obvious that leaving would have massively negative consequences for a period of time.

I suppose some people feel that, as with a bad marriage, sometimes it is easier to stay in it than deal with the consequences of a divorce. But that does not make it the right decision if the marriage isn't working. My feeling is that if the UK does not leave at this point, we will be delaying the inevitable as the indebtedness of the southern members eventually catches up with the rest.

Will those countries really care about some of the EU legislation that they cannot comply with? How important, for example, do we think Greece hitting 50% recycling in 2020 or implementing the circular economy will be to them, and will they really care what penalties are enforced when compared with the country's wider social and domestic issues?

If you look at a map of EU recycling

HOW IMPORTANT DO WE THINK GREECE HITTING 50% RECYCLING IN 2020 OR IMPLEMENTING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY WILL BE TO THEM, AND WILL THEY REALLY CARE WHAT PENALTIES ARE ENFORCED WHEN COMPARED WITH THE COUNTRY'S WIDER SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC ISSUES?"

rates, more than half of member states are currently below 35% and they are nearly all new members or those around the 'periphery' of the EU with other more pressing problems.

So, on a straight in or out vote, the difficult choice is whether to 'bite the bullet' now and take control. That would lead to the waste and resource sector having to survive based on economic and 'bottom line' thinking rather than compliance and red tape. But that, after all, may be the next stage in the lifecycle regardless of which way the referendum goes.

The circular economy is only going to work for businesses and member states if they can compete on a global basis, and that means without having miles of red tape to legislate for it to happen, whether that comes out of Brussels or the UK.

I for one do not see China or any other countries that member states import from worrying about circularity and legislation. 🌐

PRODUCT LIFECYCLE STAGES: HAS THE EU NOW GONE BEYOND MATURITY INTO DECLINE?

