

the scottish
co-operative party

Europe

Agenda 2011

Consultation Paper

More than 80% of UK legislation now originates in the EU. In terms of Co-operative businesses, it affects anything to do with the environment, such as farming, fisheries, renewables, water, pollution, or energy. In retail, it affects labeling, costs of food produce, worker entitlements, waste disposal and transport. And in the Financial Sector, its already considerable impact is set to increase dramatically.

In Europe, the Co-operative model of both business and service provision is better understood, better integrated into the mainstream, and considerably more widespread than in the UK. Whereas our UK Co-operative tradition – with all due respect to the Fenwick Weavers and other craft based co-operatives – is largely rooted in the 19th century Industrial Revolution, much of the Co-operative tradition in mainland Europe stems from the economic and social devastation of the 1930's recession and of WW2.

In mainland Europe, there are Co-operatives manufacturing everything from computers to cars, sell everything from bread to houses, and market everything from ballet companies to fine wine.

That European experience is now being brought to bear on the current global economic crisis, for example the development of Labour Co-operatives in Finland, which now keep more than 5,000 people in paid employment, and are supported by government as a matter of Public Policy; the detailed research into the reasons why Co-operative Banks across Europe have not needed government bail outs, while others have; the work around banking and renewable energy co-operatives in the run up to the UN's Year of co-operatives in 2011.

We need to be aware of legislative developments in the EU which may impact on Co-operatives. Co-operative Banks should not suffer because non-co-operative banks have been given an unfair commercial advantage by governments seeking to protect ordinary customers. Tax regimes should not view Co-operatives which redistribute their profits among a wide member base and on the achievement of social goals in the same light as large Corporations whose sole aim is to maximize financial profit to large shareholders. Legislation governing procurement should not impose barriers on Fair Trade, and should permit social goods to be taken into account.

The Co-operative Party and MEPs who are co-operators should work together to ensure that Co-operatives are supported at EU level, and that Co-operative businesses and services are not disadvantaged by any aspect of European legislation.

We should work with the ICA to develop links with co-operative political campaigns in the European context, and that European Co-operative experience is available to UK business, and to any social or service providing organisation interested in becoming or developing a co-operative.

We should look to building co-operative networks in sustainable energy generation, supply and education, and encourage the sharing of best practice and experience throughout Europe.

A few questions for consideration

How can we know in advance about EU legislation which will impact upon Co-operatives?

Are we aware of any European Co-operative models which would transfer easily to the UK?

What role would we see for CMS, and what role for the SCDA, would we envisage for co-operation between co-operatives on an EU scale?

How can we inform and galvanise communities, opinion formers, and politicians to ensure that co-operatives are formed in time to play a key part in the third industrial revolution?

Should Co-operatives, local authorities, and the Scottish government – irrespective of political composition - work in clearly defined partnerships to deliver European objectives?

If so, how should we make this possible?

If not, how can we help to ensure that European objectives – particularly on renewables and sustainability – are met?

Making Submissions

The Scottish Policy Committee is extremely keen to ensure that all views expressed at branches should be included in written submissions to the Scottish Policy Forum. We would ask branches to invite the Scottish Policy Committee to the meeting which considers this paper so that views can be recorded.

Submissions should be made by **19 February 2010** at the latest to Mary Lockhart, Secretary, Scottish Policy Committee, at m.lockhart@party.coop.