



# Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

No. 347 November 2012

## Cutting Ourselves Off from Mother Earth

Our resources come from the earth. Water to drink, food, fuel for heating and cooking, fibre to wear, the oxygen we breathe: everything comes to us from the rocks, water, and ecosystems around us. Our entire economy is founded on the products of nature. And not only direct products: the profits of a company selling wood or beef clearly come from nature but so do those of a company selling bicycles, computers, or shoes. Where do the raw materials come from, if not from the earth? Metal is mined, smelted using energy from the earth, and cooled with water; glass is, at its most basic, fused sand; plastics are made from oil or other raw materials. Our entire society, and specifically our well-being, is rooted in the resources of the earth.

Despite our economy being founded on services of nature, many economic models consider natural resources to be free. A tree planted and looked after to produce fuel or paper, is valued with the inputs of labour and fertilizer, but a tree harvested from a wild thicket is considered to be without price: not priceless, but free. In order to correct this, there have been efforts to incorporate the many services of ecosystems into financial modelling. However, the sheer variety and fundamental nature of these services makes it difficult to isolate their contributions in order to calculate an individual price. How much is it worth to have your fruit crops pollinated? Or to have diseases regulated by natural predators? To enjoy the mitigation of climate?

### *Many economic models consider natural resources to be free.*

We need functioning ecosystems for food production, to help mitigate climate, to provide us with clean rain and yet protect us from floods, and to grow the

materials for clothes, houses, and other goods upon which we rely. And we should not discount the social and psychological importance of an artist's inspiration from the landscape, the smell of a strawberry field on a hot June day, the respite of listening to the rush of a stream while fishing, or a family day out cycling through the woods.

However, we Europeans are blithely damaging our natural resources. Streams in nine European countries have been confirmed as suffering from nutrient pollution – from fertilizer run-off – slowing the functioning of the stream, inhibiting the shrimp, stoneflies, and caddis flies from breaking down leaf litter. We know pollution is interfering with the functioning of our waterways. And not only pollution: 40 per cent of European waterways are affected by drainage for agriculture, and modification of waterways for hydroelectric power and dams. Over-extraction is another problem. What will we drink when we have overused our water sources? And what will we eat when irrigation becomes an impossible luxury?



Water and soils provide essential services to human society.

Photo: A. Bosbeer

European population has been growing - by about a third since the mid-1950s - but the area taken by cities is growing faster - almost doubling in the same time period. Today, Europe contains 7% of the world's land, 7% of the people, 7% of the cropland, and 17% of the urban area. Not only is the amount of urban area out of proportion with our land area and population, but it is increasing at a rate of 1000 km<sup>2</sup> per year. About five hectares are lost to concrete in the time it takes you to eat breakfast. Enjoy that breakfast – about four-fifths of urbanization is on agricultural land, with the result that we will have to reach further to get basic

### CHANGES IN AROUND EUROPE

Around Europe will be bigger in 2013! You will receive the usual December-January issue to round off 2012. From February 2013, Around Europe will be twice as thick but come only every two months to your door or e-mail inbox. Subscription prices will remain the same.

We will be delighted to receive your feedback on this experiment. Write to [office@qcea.org](mailto:office@qcea.org), send us a letter, or comment on our Facebook page!



foods that were once grown locally. This means our food will cost more in terms of carbon. We are replacing crops with car parks, going in the opposite direction from the more sustainable choice of local food production. In addition, when we seal soils and destroy their functioning, they are no longer able to absorb carbon.

## *With functioning soils, we have food, fuel, fibre and other essential elements for our lives.*

Sealing of soils - covering the earth with roads, car parks, and other impermeable surfaces - is one of the major threats to European soils. All those new industrial terrains and shopping centres, roads to carry the increasing numbers of private cars and trucks bringing strawberries from Spain to Sweden in October, as well as the 'no maintenance' gardens for the busy commuter, these are all covering the soil. These covers block rain from its traditional route into the sponge of the soil, nourishing plants, and slowly trickling through into streams and rivers. The blocked water instead runs along the surface of the barrier over the soil, flooding onto streets and down drains, rushing into rivers faster than before, flooding in a flash in flatlands, running far too rapidly for plants to gently collect molecules of water from the tiny clumps called peds of soil. The nourishing moisture is lost into a flood of too much water in the wrong place.

With global warming, parts of Europe are likely to have increased rainfall and more storm events. The natural infrastructure of soils and plants absorbing and using water will become all the more important. But we are not managing it properly. Not only are we sealing the soil, but we are losing it. Soil erosion affects more than 10% of Europe's land area. Soil is

lost with water and also with wind. Dry soil can be blown away, causing dust clouds such as one which caused a major car pileup in Germany in 2011. Parts of the world - 60% of the US - are currently experiencing drought, which might be part of a new climatic pattern. And dryness makes fine soils vulnerable to wind erosion.

To give an idea of the impact of this in financial terms: soil erosion is estimated to cost €53 million per year in the UK. Despite the enormity of this ongoing damage to the earth that sustains us, the UK is one of the countries in the Council of the European Union blocking the EU's proposed Soils Framework Directive. The other four countries blocking the Directive are Germany, Austria, France, and The Netherlands. While these national governments prevent any agreement on legislation to protect soil, the land we depend on is being irreparably damaged.



Soil sealing increases the risk of flooding.  
Image: Axel Kuhlmann (www.publicdomainpictures.net)

One of the obstacles to conserving soil is that it is out of sight, literally buried under the surface, and misunderstood as being 'just dirt'. However, the reality is that soil is extremely complex. Soil functions on a scale of metres, a scale of millimetres, and a scale that is molecular. The myriad algae, diatoms, invertebrates, and fungi that live in soils are always

creating it, from rocks and from their own metabolisms. Fungi and invertebrates break up organic matter, making nutrients available to fertilize other plants. Without them, our soils would be covered with layers of undecomposed dead things.

With functioning soils, we have food, fuel, fibre, and other essential elements for our lives, all right here in Europe. Without our basic ecosystem services, humans won't be able to survive at all. Let us step in now to protect our soils and water for all people in Europe.

**Alexandra Bosbeer**

## What can you do to help protect soils?

- If you live in one of the five countries obstructing agreement on the Soils Framework Directive, write to your head of government (and send a copy to your Member of European Parliament) explaining the importance of legislation to protect the soil from which we gain our food and many other essential products, and asking them to give priority to making progress on the Soils Framework Directive.

- Once soil is sealed by buildings or car parks, it is almost impossible to reverse. Communicate with your local planners, or politicians who belong to the local planning authority, to explain why they should focus any urbanization on brownfield sites - sites previously built on- and keep greenfield sites green. The European Commission has published guidelines on preventing soil sealing which may be of use to your local planners. [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/sealing\\_guidelines.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/sealing_guidelines.htm)



## QCEA, Social Media and how we Communicate

It was not so long that the Religious Society of Friends and Facebook friends may have seemed worlds apart. But here at QCEA, we have recently been exploring the links between the two. QCEA's online presence has developed significantly in recent years: some readers will be enjoying this edition of *Around Europe* via the World Wide Web, and others may already follow our blog. We hope that by expanding the ways in which people can engage with QCEA, we will encourage more people, from a variety of generations, nations, faiths and professions, to interact with our work and with important European issues. Below, you can read about what sort of information you can find in each medium, and how to subscribe to each.

**The QCEA website:** Our website is your portal to a wide range of information about QCEA and its activities. At [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org), you can find out more about the aims and structure of QCEA, details about Quaker House Brussels and hiring meeting rooms, and details on our advocacy work. The website also provides access to past publications and to our blog. Our website address is [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org).

**The QCEA blog:** Posts on the QCEA blog are short, informal discussions of advocacy issues. Blog posts are published approximately once a week on our various work themes. They are tagged with keywords, enabling readers to search for posts on certain topics. You can sign up to receive each blog post by e-mail as it is published by clicking the 'follow' tab on the lower right-hand corner of the blog.

You can read new and older blog posts at [qceablog.wordpress.com](http://qceablog.wordpress.com) (this link can also be reached on our website, [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)).

**Around Europe:** Our newsletter *Around Europe* is currently published ten times per year, although 2013 will see an experiment of longer, bimonthly issues (and your feedback on this is welcome!). *Around Europe* contains articles on different issues pertaining to ongoing QCEA advocacy. Through it, we aim to raise awareness of important European issues and to encourage readers to engage with the European institutions.

*Around Europe* is available on paper and by e-mail in pdf form. An annual paper copy subscription costs €22 or £16; an annual email subscription costs €15 or £10. The money that QCEA raises from these subscriptions is vital in supporting the work we do. For information on how to subscribe to *Around Europe*, please visit [www.qcea.org/stay-in-touch](http://www.qcea.org/stay-in-touch), phone us on 0032 22 30 49 35, or write to us.

**LinkedIn:** QCEA has a company page on LinkedIn. You can follow our updates at [www.linkedin.com/company/quaker-council-for-european-affairs](http://www.linkedin.com/company/quaker-council-for-european-affairs)

**Facebook:** Facebook is best known as a method of staying in touch with family and friends, and sharing news and photos. It is also an increasingly popular and valuable online hub for interested individuals to engage with organisations and for organisations to share their work and expand their networks. Our recently-established Facebook page is a very visual and interactive tool, providing those who visit it with an opportunity to discuss QCEA's work and share thoughts by posting or responding to comments. Recent posts of the peace posters found around Quaker House have inspired comments and sharing!

QCEA's Facebook page is available to those with a Facebook account by searching for QCEA or for Quaker Council for European Affairs in Facebook.



You can follow QCEA on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, on our website, and on our blog. Image: QCEA

**Twitter:** Twitter is a rapidly growing social media tool that provides users with an immediate and fast-paced news feed from the organisations and individuals that they choose to 'follow'. QCEA 'tweets' on a regular basis (usually at least once per day). These tweets can be short pieces of news, thoughts or opinions, links to our own blog or website, or questions that we encourage followers to respond to or consider. We hope to use Twitter as an advocacy and activism tool, whereby those who follow our tweets, including other non-governmental organisations, faith groups and individuals, are provided with regular opportunities to engage with and learn about QCEA's work and other related topics.

Twitter users can follow @QCEA. We encourage you to retweet our messages and engage in conversations regarding our tweets. Even without a Twitter account, you can read our tweets and view our profile at [www.twitter.com/qcea](http://www.twitter.com/qcea).

**Bethany Squire**



## Fundamental Legal Rights not Protected in EU

In a new report, the UK-based charity 'Fair Trials International' highlights serious concerns about access to legal representation for citizens whilst being questioned by law enforcement across the European Union (EU). This fundamental legal right is not currently being protected in EU criminal justice legislation, and although work is being done towards strengthening these laws, there is concern that some Member States will not make protecting this right a high enough priority.

The right to access a lawyer at any point during a criminal investigation is guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 6) as well as the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights (Article 47). However, the reality of the situation across much of Europe is that many people face questioning by law enforcement alone, without legal advice. Over 10 per cent of those who contacted Fair Trials International in 2011 reported being denied access to a lawyer during their police interview.

Legislation which will attempt to improve this situation is currently being negotiated by the European Parliament, Commission and Council. It does, however, face some serious hurdles before becoming EU law, and Fair Trials International is concerned about the current state of the legislation within the legislative process. Whereas the Commission and Parliament have both demanded strong provisions for protecting the right to access a lawyer, the Council,

representing the interests of national governments, is pushing for weaker standards and less protection for EU citizens. The countries pushing for weaker standards include the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In the draft legislation issued by the Council, formal safeguards were removed for those who are questioned by police before being formally designated as suspects. This presents the danger that statements are given by those who are "just witnesses" or "helping police" without a lawyer present. These statements may then be used against them when they later become suspects. EU Member States have weakened the proposals in many other ways as well.



Image: George Bellows (Wikimedia Commons)

The report by Fair Trials International also highlights concern for other defence rights across the EU. There is currently no EU legislation which stipulates that Member States must provide free legal assistance if a person accused of a crime cannot pay a lawyer. There is also lack of provision for additional support for vulnerable suspects, and little regulation on the use of pre-trial detention. With more EU citizens working and living in the different member countries, national governments should work with the EU to guarantee these fundamental legal rights.

**Chris Venables**



### Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs aisbl  
Square Ambiorix 50, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Editeur responsable : Alexandra Bosbeer

No. entreprise 0420.346.728

[www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)

[qceablog.wordpress.com](http://qceablog.wordpress.com)