

## ESG Radio June 2006 Environmental Charter

Well, today is a new month - is it a new beginning for the local environment?

Everyone who follows the work by the ESG will know that the Environmental Charter officially signed by the Gib Govt this week has been one of the group's core aims since it was set up 5 years ago. It is a small but significant step towards political recognition that our environment deserves a central role in all policy areas. The Environmental Charter and action plan for Gibraltar are well overdue and will provide Govt and other agencies with the necessary framework to embark on reducing environmental damage from the various impacts around Gibraltar.

We therefore welcome the Environmental Charter and all other initiatives by the Ministry and the Department of Environment.

However, as an environmental pressure group all our core aims are priority areas and we would have liked to have seen a charter in place long before now, to begin to tackle the environmental problems and impacts resulting from our day to day activities – from commercial and industrial operations - as well as the rapid expansion and “run” of major development projects.

Now we have a Charter, we hope that the public consultation exercise embarked upon by the Minister for the Environment for the drafting of the Charter extends to the action plan which in the short term should address the following:

For instance, the ESG has made no secret that it considers Government's preference for continuing to use fossil fuels for our energy requirements to be the wrong decision and that informed, public debate should precede the installation of new power plants in Gibraltar. This is a long term, strategic and environmental policy choice which should be subjected to the highest scrutiny under the new Charter. Let's hope we are not too late!! If the next generation of power plants is still several years away, then let's get our current plants using Best Available Technology. The ESG has and will continue to highlight community concerns over the impacts from our current power stations which cause significant noise and air pollution and affects health and ones quality of life. Under the Charter one would expect this intolerable situation for many to be actioned as a priority.

Other impacts from the dockyard, the bunkering industry, the Waste Oil Treatment Plant, airport and main roads affect the quality of life for many who know that local laws and Environmental directives have, to date, not been able to safeguard their right to a clean, peaceful and healthy environment. Let us hope therefore that the Charter and action plan will help address these problems in practical terms.

In the long term the Charter and Action plan should consider Gibraltar's unsustainability which lies in our fragility and reliance upon the continued stability in the rest of the world for our continued economic prosperity. We need to build in environmental contingency measures to deal with issues that global warming and climate change will bring to the rest of the world – we cannot exempt ourselves from these realities!!

In our view an overview and vision is needed which will be the principle goals of how Gibraltar will function over the next few decades in terms of improving its environmental performance and improving its sustainability. This should be the overriding policy commitment under which the charter and action plan must be carried out by the Government of the day. The Chief Minister's announcement of his Government's intention to become a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol is another positive signal in recognition of this intent and we look forward to hearing more on this very important issue soon.

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