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MEP Contact Newsletter

Spring 2008

Giles Chichester MEP elected Chairman

South West Region MEP Giles Chichester has elected Chairman of the UK Conservative Delegation.

"I am honoured to be elected as Chairman of the Conservatives in the European Parliament and I look forward to carrying on the good work done by my predecessor," he said.

Conservatives in the European Parliament will continue to strongly support David Cameron in all he is doing to secure a Conservative victory."

Philip Bushill-Matthews (West Midlands) was elected Deputy Chairman. He said: "I look forward to supporting our new Chairman, Giles Chichester, with whom I have worked closely for many years on business-related legislative issues and we will be playing our part to remove an increasingly discredited and incompetent Labour Government" ■



Giles Chichester MEP, Chairman of the Conservative MEPs with Party Leader David Cameron MP

Prince Charles: We are destroying our planet's air conditioning system



Addressing the European Parliament recently, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales called for "courageous and revolutionary" measures to be taken in the war against "the doomsday clock of climate change."

He highlighted figures showing that every year 20 million hectares of rainforests – an area the size of England, Wales and Scotland

combined – are destroyed or degraded.

"In the simplest of terms, we have to find a way to make the forests worth more alive than dead," he said. "Unbelievable as it might seem, we are destroying our planet's air-conditioning system. But the loss of biodiversity is also terrifying. It has been compared to burning down a library of previous knowledge without first reading the books."

The Prince praised the European Parliament and Commission for their work in tackling climate change.

"Determined and principled leadership has never been more needed. Surely, this is just the moment in history for which the European Union was created," he said. Prince Charles was given a standing ovation by MEPs. The only person who did not join in was UKIP Leader Nigel Farage. Challenged on his extreme discourtesy, Mr Farage said that he did not think Prince Charles should have been allowed to give a speech in Brussels: "It reminded me of young Mr Grace in that old TV series 'Are You Being Served,'" he said.

Before giving his address, His Royal Highness met privately with Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament Giles Chichester MEP who is a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Climate Change.

Mr Chichester said: "I was most interested in His Royal Highness' call for a tripartite approach to climate change with insurance, pensions and banking sectors joining forces to develop new approaches to help tackle the challenges that face us."

"Everyone has their part to play in meeting these major environmental challenges. We, as Conservatives in the European Parliament, will continue our fight and commitment to tackling climate change across the EU." ■

Conservative MEPs Step U

Conservative MEPs have stepped up their campaign for a referendum on the revived EU Constitution, to coincide with debates on the issue at Westminster

At the end of February, the European Parliament voted to endorse the Lisbon Treaty which, as Conservatives have demonstrated, is just the rejected EU Constitution, re-packaged and given a new name.

The Parliament's report, drafted by a Labour MEP, described the new Treaty as a "substantial improvement" on existing treaties and called for it to be ratified as soon as possible. Labour and Liberal Democrats MEPs voted for the report. Conservatives voted against.

The day before the vote, Conservative MEPs launched a new poster campaign which showed how Gordon Brown had reneged on Labour's manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on the EU Constitution.

On the day of the vote, Conservative MEPs held a mock referendum outside the European Parliament debating Chamber. The MEPs voted on mocked-up ballot papers to call for a referendum in the UK and to reject the EU Treaty.

Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament, Giles Chichester MEP, said: "Gordon Brown continues to peddle the myth that the Lisbon Treaty and the European Constitution are different. But they are not. And the British people know that the Prime Minister is not being straight with them."

Every other European Leader openly acknowledges that they are almost identical.

The German Chancellor has said: "The substance of the Constitution is preserved. That is a fact." The Spanish Prime Minister has said "We have not let a single substantial point of the Constitutional Treaty go."

The Labour Party's 2005 election manifesto said: 'We will put it – the EU Constitution – to the British people in a referendum and



Up Referendum Campaign

campaign whole-heartedly for a "Yes" vote'.

Just before he became Prime Minister last year, Gordon Brown said: "The manifesto is what we put to the public. We've got to honour that manifesto. That is an issue of trust for me with the electorate."

Giles Chichester said: "By failing to honour his commitment to a referendum, the Prime Minister is fatally undermining trust in his Government's word."

"This Treaty will create powerful new positions and institutions in Brussels, and will make existing EU institutions more powerful. It will establish an EU President, an EU Foreign Minister, and an EU diplomatic service. National vetoes will be scrapped in 61 new policy areas ranging from justice and home affairs to sport, transport and energy. The EU will gain new powers in sensitive areas such as criminal law, asylum policy and policing.

"There can be no question that the scale of these changes, and the differences they imply for the relationship between the EU and the UK, mean that this Treaty must be put to the British people in a referendum."

Mr Chichester added that, if the campaign for a referendum were successful, Conservative MEPs would campaign vigorously for a 'No' vote.

He said: "Without widespread public support, the European Union will lack proper legitimacy for what it is doing. It needs to move on from its obsession with institutions.

"Our Party has a different vision for the future of Europe – a Europe that is more open, dynamic and transparent and less centralised, less uniform and inflexible."

"To be fit for the 21st century, the EU needs to focus on issues like the environment, on economic competitiveness and global poverty, to demonstrate it is worthy of public support. It is these things that the future of Europe should be about." ■



Conservative victory over fish discards



Conservative MEPs have won an important victory in their battle to end the grotesque practice of discarding unintentionally-caught fish. More than one million tonnes of healthy fish are dumped back into the sea every year because of EU rules.

But now the European Parliament has approved amendments calling for a total ban on discards and an effective monitoring system, including the installation of CCTV cameras on fishing boats.

Scotland's two Conservative MEPs, Struan Stevenson and John Purvis have long argued for a policy allowing fishermen to land everything they catch during a set period. Undersize fish or other species that previously would have been dumped overboard could then be sold to the processing sector, desperate for raw material to supply the fishmeal and fish oil industry.

They said: "Now we have won this key vote against fierce opposition, we expect to see rapid change. The EU cannot continue to condone a policy which leads to more than one million tonnes of healthy fish being discarded every year. We now look forward to the introduction of legislation aimed at putting an end to the discards debate." ■

Labour faces EU hurdle over Northern Rock plan

Conservative MEPs believe it is "inconceivable" that the European Commission will allow Northern Rock to continue to operate on a 'business as usual' basis in the wake of Labour's nationalisation of the bank, despite the claims of Chancellor Alistair Darling.



Jonathan Evans MEP, Conservative spokesman on Economic Affairs, said: "Labour's Northern Rock nationalisation could soon fall foul of the EU's state aid rules – jeopardising the Chancellor's 'business as usual' claim. The Chancellor's statement is completely incompatible with the operation of a free, fair market in mortgage banking.

Labour must get state aid clearance by March 17th but Commissioner Neelie Kroes stands in their way.

"The European Commission has a clear responsibility to other mortgage banks to maintain fair competition. Northern Rock is currently able to offer market leading interest rates to investors guaranteed by the British taxpayer, which is a clear distortion of the mortgage banking market," said Mr Evans. "Northern Rock will be a test of Commissioner Kroes's determination. State Aid should be short term, and based upon a fundamental restructuring of the business, which does not distort competition." ■

MEPs vote for sensible cuts in car pollution

MEPs have approved a report calling for EU legislation to reduce CO₂ emissions from new cars and vans to 125g CO₂/km by 2015. This is a lower limit than originally proposed by the European Commission (130g CO₂/km), but the time period to achieve it is three years longer. Average car emissions last year in the EU were about 160 g/km.



Conservative spokesman on the issue, Martin Callanan MEP, welcomed the compromise. He said: "Legislation is unlikely to be finalised before 2009 at the earliest and it is therefore unrealistic, given long industry lead times, to expect radical reductions to be implemented by 2012, as the Commission originally proposed. 2015 is a more realistic date.

"At the same time, we opted for a lower emission cap than the Commission proposed. This is by far the most ambitious emission cap in the world. It is also important to stress that we need to make the cleaner cars affordable. If consumers do not buy new vehicles, that simply results in older, more polluting vehicles remaining on Europe's roads for longer, which is in nobody's interest."

A proposal from Liberal Democrat MEP Chris Davies to impose an EU-wide ban on all cars capable of over 100 mph was defeated at an earlier stage in the process. ■