

ARTICLE FOR CHRONICLE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Q: What is the ESG doing towards it – and why do you want to start these debates?

The ESG is an environmental NGO and formed out of a need to have a grassroots organisation to involve the local community in environmental issues; to raise awareness and promote the need for action at a political level. Climate change, an alarming by-product of humanity's polluting and wasteful practices, falls clearly within our main areas of concern as this is linked to energy use and pollution, and the need to protect and preserve our environment.

The idea of these climate change public debates/discussions was initially inspired by the film, "An Inconvenient Truth". In it Al Gore engages with the public, everywhere, in the USA and in other parts of the world discussing climate change and highlighting several global environmental issues. By encouraging open, local discussion of such a crucial global issue as climate change we hope to help create real impetus for change.

Q: Who are they aimed at?

Everyone. The idea of holding these at informal and central locations is to try and attract people not just to one, but hopefully to others that will follow as people become better acquainted with the issues surrounding climate change. We are **all** receiving information and news daily about how we can play our part in reducing the worst outcomes from climate change and now we need to embrace these ideas and solutions as a community, in whatever sphere of work or life we might find ourselves today. Climate change requires all of us to participate purposefully in an environmental revolution, before circumstances dictate that we are regulated or forced into changing our ways – or, as warned by several climatologists and the IPCC report, we shall face the consequences if we will do too little, too late.

Q: Will the ESG be putting more resources in creating awareness on climate change?

The ESG is a voluntary group with minimal resources. However, we work hard to promote the environment; to draw attention to the harmful effects from pollution both locally and in the Bay and to encourage best practice. Apart from a series of climate change debates, out of which could emerge a wealth of ideas from the community as to what we can collectively do in Gibraltar to reduce our own carbon footprint, the ESG will incorporate the challenges of climate change into every project and campaign we do in 2007.

Q: People may say well it won't affect us – so why should we do something about it;

Well, we are not sure which planet these people are living on!! Apart from the direct experience of how our immediate and regional environment is drying up and getting hotter, we are regularly informed, by reliable and authoritative reports, that the southern Mediterranean will become uninhabitable as little as in 100 years time. The ESG has also tried to raise the profile of how a diminishing resource like oil, on which we are totally reliant on at present, could affect life on the Rock and this will also form part of our debates. Al Gore spelt it out very clearly when he

used the example of the frog in a slowly warming glass of water to boiling point to illustrate how dangerous it would be for us to simply wait and not take appropriate action until it's too late. A growing number of people are beginning to sit up and pay attention to the evidence of the damage we could be facing from the worst consequences of global warming and what our children could be expected to cope with and that this should be the motivation for us to take the correct, moral and urgent action.

Q: How does Gibraltar come into the picture?

Gibraltar is small, but nevertheless has an equal responsibility to all other global citizens in addressing this issue. It has a huge ecological/carbon footprint for its size, being completely unsustainable, relying entirely on external resources for its survival (similar to Japan for example). It would be wise for Gibraltar to explore ways in which it can become more sustainable, reduce its carbon footprint and this is expected to take up much of the debate time on Wednesday. Gibraltar, for such a small country, also engages in high impact businesses like bunkering, for example, and all of must therefore be measured accordingly.

Q: What about Gibraltar and the surrounding areas and the groups you work with in the area – are they wanting to further raise the issue?

Yes, all environmental groups are behind the climate change campaigns. Only last week the ESG was invited to a two day seminar in Algeciras on Sustainable Industries. This had been organised by CC.OO, a Spanish union and member of La Plataforma por El Estudio Epidemiológico. The seminar was addressing the need for industries to move towards best practices and sustainability because of Climate Change and because of the impacts on workers, communities and the environment. More contacts were made at the seminar which will prove useful at some future date. Much of the Bay environmental groups' focus is on the massive pollution from refinery and petrochemical industries as well as the power plants. Apart from the proven harmful health effects from their emissions, their contribution to greenhouse gases and global warming is considerable: Andalucia accounts for one fifth of the CO2 emissions for the entire Iberian Peninsula and we know that the Association for Large Industries in the Bay recently applied to increase these same emissions from a number of the local plants which must be rejected.

Q: Will this be a one off debate – and how will the subject be tackled?

Not at all, we are hopeful that it will be so interesting and energising that people will leave wanting a date for the next debate. We shall definitely be repeating such debates and also plan to hold similar discussions at the John Mackintosh Hall and at our schools. The debate will look at whether Gibraltar truly recognises the full potential of climate change; what if anything is being done at present and finally what options exist in Gibraltar to radically reduce our footprint and make us more sustainable.

The format will be organised to ensure everyone who wants to can participate.

ESG on Climate Change Forum

The ESG welcomes the recent announcement by Government of a Climate Change forum.

The science surrounding climate change is fairly well understood as is Gibraltar's small, but nevertheless local and increasing contribution to global greenhouse gases; a subject of ongoing ESG campaigns both on grounds of pollution (with its health impacts and energy inefficiency) *and* CO2 emissions.

The Gibraltar Governments' public statement on meeting Kyoto Protocol Targets while applying to the EU emissions trading scheme with a projected doubling of our CO2 emissions is in conflict.

It is hoped that a forum on climate change in Gibraltar will help accelerate the conversion to renewable energy and use of energy efficient technologies without which, any significant reductions to our own CO2 levels will not be achieved.

One important role for the forum will undoubtedly be to scientifically assess the potential impacts from climate change on Gibraltar's landscape. A report such as that produced by Sir Nicholas Stern, an expert economist, has helped raise the fearful spectre of what a "business as usual" attitude could ultimately cost in financial terms and economic security. The report recommends action TODAY and we urge our own Government and ancillary expert panels and forums to also adopt this sense of urgency.

It is hoped too that the ESG will play some role in this important debate which we have undoubtedly help develop in Gibraltar culminating with the screening today of "An Inconvenient Truth", a documentary setting out the shocking realities of climate change and currently making a huge impact across the globe.