

**The Blues and the Greens:  
Complementarities and Conflicts between Landowners and  
Environmentalists.**

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**Introduction and Purpose**

- 1 There is a tendency for environmentalists to be associated with a left-of-centre, statist, approach to life. This presumably originates from the perception of environmental issues as being failures of the predominant private market ethos of the developed world and indicative of the need for an interventionist, collective approach from government. Such approaches are often associated (whether rightly or wrongly) as coming more naturally from Governments of the left. In addition, the environmental point of view has often been portrayed as being part of the 'alternative', anti-establishment, viewpoint outside the prevailing private, corporatist, capital based, power structure in our societies. It has often also been linked, in a rather vague, and usually not very helpful, way with issues such as animal welfare, ethnic minority rights, social equity issues, anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation. The purpose of this paper is to dispel these unhelpful generalisations and to pursue in a more down-to-earth and practical way the idea that here is actually a large degree of overlap in the interests of environmentalists and private landowners and managers. Thus there may be at least as great a degree of common cause between the Greens and the 'Blues' as between the Greens and the Reds.
- 2 This is important for the ELO because environmental issues from global climate change, biodiversity protection, landscape management to resource protection and waste management are moving steadily up the political agenda in European member states and the EU. Environmental NGOs are now well established and often exceptionally well resourced. They employ large numbers of knowledgeable and extremely competent staff, they often have influential leadership and they are now well versed in the art of influencing public opinion and political decisions. They have also shown themselves capable of influencing private decision making in large national and multi-national corporations.
- 3 To the extent that the basic idea of this paper, that there are large areas of common interest between environmentalists and landowners, is true, then joint lobbying from the two could be extremely potent. The fact that there are also significant areas where the interests of the two groups are opposed does not necessarily undermine this statement. It means that we have to be clear-minded and realistic about the limits of the complementarities and agree to differ on the approaches to the areas in which our interests conflict.
- 4 The purposes of this paper are: first, to explain the common framework which provides potentially a strong glue or cohesive force which can give land owners and environmentalists a healthy political return to joint action. Second, to identify the areas of complementarity and conflict between the two groups. Third to suggest a series of actions to pursue ways in which we can capitalise on the areas of common ground to the benefit of both.

## A framework

- 5 A framework for identifying the common ground, and areas of conflict, between landowners<sup>1</sup> and environmentalists is provided by two simple but powerful concepts. These are externalities and property rights.
- 6 An intellectually rigorous, and yet also practically helpful, way of understanding environmental problems as externalities or market failures was clarified *inter alia* by the (Nobel prize winning) economist Richard Coase. At risk of over-simplification, his idea was that many of the most important environmental problems could be attributed to the unclear definition of property rights. This applies equally to the so-called negative externalities of over-production of pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources, and to the positive externalities of under-provision of certain semi-natural habitats and landscapes. It is because no one 'owns' the atmosphere, ground water or the oceans that private individuals and businesses do not count the external costs of using (or indeed abusing) these resources in their internal economic decision making. It is therefore not surprising that such resources are then over-used. Correspondingly, for positive externalities, if society does not recognise that these exist and have value and if society does not reflect this value back to those managing the land, then of course there will be under-production of such environmental benefits. The Coasian 'solution' is always first to explicitly define who has the property rights in question and second, having done this it indicates the policy action required to 'internalise' or correct the over-supply of environmental 'bads' and the under-supply of environmental 'goods'.
- 7 The socially accepted basis for property rights in land<sup>2</sup> is now clearer internationally than at any previous time in human history. Much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (from 1917 to 1989) was dominated by an intellectual and political struggle over the appropriate ownership of the means of production. For agriculture a fundamental factor of production is land. The debate over whether agricultural land should be under collective 'ownership' and management or private individual ownership and management has now been settled in favour of the latter.
- 8 Putting these two ideas together, it seems clear that getting the appropriate sustainable use of private agricultural land necessitates a close dialogue between environmentalists and landowners.
- 9 Accepting these ideas requires adjustment in the mind set and attitudes of both groups. Saying this does not imply that *all* environmentalists and *all* landowners have the attitudes summarised below. On both sides there are strong signs that leaders have already absorbed these messages. There is still the task of bringing the broad memberships on board with these ideas.
- 10 Environmental groups have to soften their instinctive anti-market, anti-private property attitudes. Property rights in land overwhelmingly are, and should remain, in private ownership. As a big part of the rural environmental problem is the under-delivery of environmental and cultural landscape services then a big part of the solution will have to be arranging the correct economic incentives for these services. Thus making progress on legitimate environmental goals requires environmental NGOs to join in partnership with landowners.
- 11 Equally, landowners must learn to lose their instinctively defensive reaction, and tendency towards denial, when pollution and other negative externalities like soil erosion are mentioned. Likewise they must overcome their fear of the necessity for a government regulatory framework to help solve environmental problems. The phrase regulatory

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout, for brevity, the phrase landowners should understood to include land managers.

<sup>2</sup> In what follows most attention is given to agricultural land. There are similar issues raised where the primary use of the land is for forestry or recreation, including field sports, but there are also some important different issues. These other land uses are not treated further in this paper. Note also that the more the non-agricultural environmental outputs of land are recognised, the definition of what *is* agricultural land becomes blurred.

framework does not necessarily mean regulation in the negative, 'thou shalt not do' sense. It means regulation in the way of having laws (regulations and directives) which provide the corrective information, guidance, advice, incentives and, where necessary, strict rules or limits on behaviour. The point is that environmental problems, as market failures, generally necessitate some kind of collective 'regulatory' action, the challenge is to use the appropriate type and scale of regulation.

### Identifying the areas of Complementarity and Conflict.

- 12 This section is kept as brief as possible by simply tabulating rather than justifying or explaining the nature of the Complementarities and Conflicts. This is done to stimulate members of the Bureau and the Policy Group to contribute more examples and issues and to offer their views of the nature of the issues.

### General areas of Complementarity and Conflict

- 13 This is summarised in the following three tables which try to characterise, respectively, the different Aims, Approaches and Anxieties of Land Owners and Environmentalists and to summarise where they may come into harmony or conflict. The arrows in the first table are intended to show the range of interests of the two groups indicating their priorities (i.e. in the first table sustainable livelihood is the prime objective of land owners and resource protection is the prime target of environmentalists).

<b>Aims</b>	<b>Complementarities</b>	<b>Conflicts</b>
<b>Land owners</b>	Rewarding, sustainable livelihoods	Private profit
—	Employment	(Over) Exploitation
	Landscape beauty	
	Private enjoyment	Public access
	Habitat maintenance and regeneration	_ Over-restrictive standards
—	Biodiversity	_ Over-prescriptive management
<b>Environmentalists</b>	Resource protection	—

- 14 Tentative conclusion: there is not so much difference in aims of the two groups, both want all the things listed in the second column. The differences lie in the priorities each group gives to the individual elements of their objectives.

<b>Approaches</b>	<b>Landowners' preferences</b>	<b>Environmentalists' preferences</b>
	Voluntary	Compulsory
	Private ownership and action	Collective provision and prescription
	Information, advice, guidance, Incentives	Orders, rules, fines and imprisonment
	Compensation	Confiscation

- 15 This table is written in such a way that it suggests there is invariably a conflict in approaches taken by the two groups. This may be too polarised and provocative. Are there deeply ingrained differences in approaches as this suggests? Are there ways in which the approaches are complementary? Are there any possible generalisations about whether either group prefers a top down or bottom up approach? Do the two groups have different ranking of preferences for local, national, supra-national and international approaches? The starting, tentative, conclusion offered is that it is in this area that there are most conflicts, and these are conditioned by different attitudes. If true, this is an optimistic conclusion as attitudes can be changed by persuasion and facts (whereas fundamental interests usually cannot).

- 16 Constructing a table of anxieties is easy for landowners, more difficult for environmentalists without asking them. There is no correspondence suggested across the rows of the tables, these are just independent lists.

<b>Anxieties</b>	<b>Landowners</b>	<b>Environmentalists</b>
	Bureaucratic Intrusion,	The historic power of landowners
	Unrecoverable costs imposed	Irrecoverable loss of species or habitat
	Predisposition to designated areas	The loss of control implicit in market solutions
	Loss of privacy	

### Specific areas of Complementarity and Conflict

- 17 This section is where most work remains to be done. Below is a list of policy areas and (empty) boxes to flag if the existence and nature of conflicts or complementarities, and also a box to indicate if the issue is mostly an EU policy matter or a Member State matter (or both). Only by trying to complete such a table do we discover if this is a helpful way of identifying the policy areas in which there is scope for Landowners and Environmentalists to work together or to avoid doing so. The Bureau is invited to fill in some of the boxes. It is possible that the individual row headings are too broad to be useful, in which case suggestions for sub-headings are invited.

<b>Policy area</b>	<b>Conflicts</b>	<b>Complementarities</b>	<b>EU, MS or both</b>
<b>Environmental</b>			
Habitats directive			
Birds directive			
Nitrates directive			
Water Framework directive			
Waste directive - general			
Sewage sludge			
Energy - fuel taxes			
- wind power			
- biomass			
Global climate change			
<b>Rural Policy</b>			
- CAP reform			
- Agri-enviro. schemes			
- Cross compliance			
- Less favoured areas			
- Organic farming			
- Rural development			
- International trade			
<b>Other policies</b>			
Animal welfare -intensive livestock production			
- animal transport			
Food safety			
Genetic modification			
Other new technologies			

## **Next steps**

- 18 Comments are invited from members of the Bureau on the ideas suggested in this paper. Is the general approach taken useful? What other aspects of the subject should be treated? Into what degree of detail should we go to explain the specific conflicts or complementarities for each policy area?
- 19 The target should perhaps be to identify the target issues in which there are significant complementarities and for which we should be seeking to make common cause with environmental NGOs. This should be done at Brussels level, but also member organisations are invited to consider using this in discussions with environmental groups in their country.
- 20 There may also be value in propagating the paper more widely than just the target environmental NGOs e.g. to the Brussels institutions, as a helpful indicator for them of where they can expect certain stakeholders to agree or disagree.

**Allan Buckwell**  
**Chairman, ELO Policy Group**  
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