

Dr Caroline Jackson MEP

**Conservative, South West England
European Parliament, 60 rue Wiertz, B-1047 Brussels
New House, Hanney Road, Southmoor, Abingdon OX13 5HR
caroline.jackson@europarl.europa.eu**

Dear Reader,

The European Parliament May to July 2008

This is always a letter summarising personal impressions: the office of the European Parliament (0207 227 4300) publishes a bulletin highlighting each month's main events. For me there have been two important matters to deal with over the last few months: the furore over MEPs' expenses (you would want me to tackle this first) and the successful completion of my own work on the new waste framework directive.

Currently all MEPs are paid by national authorities, receive salaries at the level of national MPs and pay national taxation. This results in wide variations in levels of payment. The daily allowance (aimed at accommodation costs) we receive when attending parliamentary meetings and the office allowance are not subject to national taxation (this was I think determined in the 1970s in a case involving a Labour MEP peer and the Revenue). The travel allowance is based on a mileage formula rather than actual ticket costs; this covers travel to and from Brussels and Strasbourg. There is no reimbursement of travel costs within the UK. Payments for staff are either made to a paying agent (I use Banks accountants of Swindon) who pays one's staff and deals with NI and tax matters or they can be paid to a "service provider", a very broad term which has apparently covered a multitude of practices.

Various bad apples have concentrated the fire of the press on this system. The Parliament authorities had however already determined that it will be radically changed from the next elections in 2009, with the introduction of a universal salary level and, inter alia, the reimbursement of actual travel ticket costs and the payment of all staff direct by the Parliament. Fired by the need to rid the party of the shadow of Derek Conway MP, David Cameron is insisting on an early dose of transparency for Conservative MEPs. I think this is understandable but unwise: we shall give the press ammunition being denied them by the other parties. It is also mildly offensive since this and the decision to leave the EPP-ED group are virtually the only lines of contact we have had with the party leadership since David became leader.

Incidentally, those of you who had dealings with him will be sorry to know that my research assistant Thomas Robertson from Poole, is leaving to work for a Brussels consultancy. His replacement is Claire Swinton from Laverstock near Salisbury. Ann McGlen continues to work as my secretary, based in Wootton Bassett, and Martin Perry as my press officer, based in North Lew, near Okehampton.

In the Parliament the issue that has dominated my life for the last 2 years came to a successful conclusion in June. This was the waste framework directive – a route map for waste management for the next 30 years or so – on which I was the Parliament's

rapporteur and therefore responsible for negotiating with other politicians, with outside lobbyists and ultimately with the Commission and Council of Ministers. We reached agreement with the Environment Council of Ministers after some very long meetings, which I chaired.

What does the directive do? As originally proposed by the European Commission it was a rather dry as dust document focussing on clearer definitions and consolidating earlier law. The sensitive issue was that it cleared the way for incineration of waste, in certain circumstances, to be designated as a “recovery” and not a “disposal” process. To qualify, such plants will have to meet high energy efficiency criteria but the new designation means they can import waste from other EU countries to use as a fuel, and, once described as recovery plants, they could be more publicly acceptable.

I and my colleagues felt that the directive needed re-balancing. It derived from a turgid Commission document entitled “A thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste” which contrived to say nothing about either. Those countries that are now struggling to meet the imperatives of switching waste from landfill (in accordance with the landfill directive which I also took through Parliament in 1998-9) might, their MEPs feared, simply opt for incineration and abandon recycling. In response to this I drafted and got agreement to the insertion of recycling targets in the directive – 50% of household waste and 70% of construction and demolition waste to be recycled by 2020. We also made the first attempt to introduce targets for the prevention of waste although these can only be quantified when we have more information about the waste generated. But at least I can claim a “first” in putting recycling targets into EU law and I hope they will make a difference where it matters – in eastern Europe, Ireland and south of Naples.

Climate change is now dominating the agenda of the Environment committee. We have agreed that aircraft emissions will be subject to the constraints of the emissions trading system from 2012 (increasing non-fare charges further). We are debating the overall EU target of generating 20% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020, with at least 10% coming from bio fuels. We are also considering the question of an EU approach on carbon capture and storage and whether the introduction of such systems should be a condition of any further coal-fired power station development. Each EU country is pursuing its own destiny on nuclear power. British policy seems to consist in endless delay and fudge plus a willingness to see a French takeover of an industry we could once have dominated. Will the South West’s nuclear power station at Hinckley Point survive to be run by a French company, bounded by a giant wind farm whose equipment is all made in Denmark?

Kate and Gerry McCann have twice visited the Parliament to promote the idea of a cross-Europe missing child alert system. I have signed the resolution behind it and I hope that the Member States will now co-operate to put the system in place.

In the July session MEPs agreed that any new political group would have to contain at least 25 MEPs from 7 member states. That effectively puts out of reach, in my view, the creation of a new alternative home for the Conservative MEPs.

Yours sincerely
Caroline Jackson MEP