



## The ASPO Conference - Final Afternoon

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on September 22, 2007 - 10:00am

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [china](#), [energy alternatives](#), [government](#), [ireland](#) [[list all tags](#)]

*The summaries of the first day of the ASPO conference can be found [here](#) and [here](#). The second day's morning summary can be found [here](#).*

The overlying theme of this year's conference was Time to React? The final session was set-up to respond to that question, or perhaps it would be more cautious to say to explore it. The session was guided by [Eddie Hobbs of RTE](#), and began with [Debbie Cook](#), a former Mayor of Huntington Beach, CA. She talked about how some the issues should be addressed in local government. She felt that the challenge that we face is more of an adaptive one than that of technology. Because they see some of the highest power costs in the United States, they worked to incentivize power savings for the utilities. As a consequence she learned the benefits of selling problems at the local level. And the scale of the local use was large, with 495,000 gal/yr of fuel used for City Services, 525,000 gal of fuel/year for Waste pickup and recycle (they pick up 4,500 tons of trash a week and recycle 60% though some is sent to China where it is burned to make energy). The City did an Energy Audit and learned that keeping a single Coke machine costs \$500 a year in power.

It takes 10% of their \$4 million electric bill to move water around the City, and they were spending 365,000 kWh/day on sewage, but have put in a processing unit, and now generate 280,000 kWh/day from using the methane recovered from waste treatment. She noted that over a period the phrase "Peak Oil" appeared not at all in the Los Angeles Times, though in that same period it appeared 34 times in the Irish Times. She further noted that public opinion precedes political will, but media attitude leads public opinion.

The system has lots of inertia, but it depends how and where you frame the question as to how successful you will be. She has learned that if you want to interact with Government it helps to take some experts along. And in that regard if you are not the best messenger for this, you had better find someone who is.

She was followed by [Rob Hopkins](#) of [Transition Towns](#), which has been developed in Totnes. They even have their own currency, to encourage local shopping. They had looked at future energy scenarios, much influenced by four books, of which [Powerdown](#) seemed to fit their perception better than others.

In 1930 all businesses in Totnes were locally owned, and large market gardens, within the city limits, supplied townsfolk with produce. These gardens have now been reduced to parking lots, with plans for building construction.

He got started with a student project at [Kinsale](#), a neighbor to Cork, and this has now become a seminal work for transitioning cultures. It helped to form a steering group (but one that designs

into the process their own demise). He repeatedly made the point of having to collaborate and communicate, they use YouTube to communicate and have trained folks to use it. They try to act as a catalyst for action.

The third speaker was [Eddie O'Connor](#) who spoke as an Irishman at the end of a very long supply line for fuel, and who was becoming concerned about long-term viability. He listed the major Chinese purchases of oil and gas and the growing energy density of their culture. With no Energy Treaty in Europe they do not have the clout to compete, and thus must look for an alternate reliable source. This they believe they have found in wind, and by bringing these together in a grid that covers the country they hope to show that collectively the farms can produce at 35% because of the areas around the country that they lie in.

Getting there requires not only adding turbines, but once they reach 3,100 MW they must substantially upgrade the grid to come to a wind produced power target of 6,100 MW by 2020. Unfortunately on land there are a lot of regulations and restrictions, it is even difficult to get permission to install overhead Power Lines, and a ten-year permitting time is common – so that if this the route to be taken, then processes should begin immediately. He feels that they can generate enough power to justify electric cars, but to be sure of uninterrupted supply they would be better forming a grid with a few nations in Europe, But it will take 7 years just to get this started. The first step is a European Off-shore Supergrid. This will have high up-front costs – turbine prices have gone up 50% in the last 3 years, but when introduced they should allow remove of the most expensive power stations from the net.

The platform party was now joined by four additional members to make up a panel. These included [Eamon Ryan](#) the Irish Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; [Edward Schreyer](#) the former Governor General of Canada; [Michael Meacher](#) a Labor MP from the UK and [former Minister of the Environment](#), and [Michael Martin](#) the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

One of the first comments related to the cost of wind power, it being noted that the towers are becoming thinner as costs escalate and materials become more difficult to get. Production is apparently booked through 2010, though the Chinese do not have a presence in this market yet. And it is hard to have to hand over \$125 million, two years before construction begins.

The concern was debates as to whether the public took the topic seriously, or what could be done to get folk to react. The concern was that the general public did not care to hear about the issue, let alone debate it. This, however, extends beyond the general public. There are tremendous costs for fuel associated with running a farm, or a military, and this extends into the facilities that support farming but that have energy costs beyond just the transportation of that energy.

The Conference was closed, (after a gracious speech by Chris Skrebowski thanking Colin Campbell for all he has done for the Association) by Eamon Ryan the Minister for Energy.

He noted that Irelands Energy demand is growing 3% pa. and at present 60% of it is oil, with folk using an average of 10 pints of oil a day. Much of it goes into transportation, but in face of a doubling of price over the past years, demand has grown 8% and so it is unlikely to be successful to control demand by introducing a stiff gas tax.

I found the whole meeting very informative, as much for the conversations in the breaks and meals, and was delighted to meet so many folk who contribute to, and read this site. You who were also there might want to chip in with your own impressions. I will try and add a comment of my own, this being more reporting of what they said with an effort not to editorialize. That post

may follow in a couple of days or so.



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