

## CIEEM AND OUR FUTURE ROGER CROFTS

I am very privileged to be awarded the CIEEM Medal for 2016. To be recognised in this way by one's professional peers is indeed a singular honour. This is not only a personal recognition, but also a recognition of the continuing importance of environmental management in our society.

Starting, as I did, in the 1960s to learn about how the natural environment worked and as a geographer and geomorphologist undertaking research on soft coastal systems in Scotland, I rapidly came to the view that managing our environment better was essential. I saw far too many non-natural solutions being put in place by engineers working against nature, often without realising it. So, when the then Nature Conservancy Council asked me what I thought about re-engineering the mouth of the North Esk on the border between Angus and Kincardineshire in order to preserve the salt marsh component of the St Cyrus NNR, I was surprised that they were thinking in those terms at all. Learning from the natural evolution of the area meant that I brought forward a 'working with nature' solution.<sup>i</sup> Not rocket science to any CIEEM member: just 'natural common sense'. And, then, with colleagues in Geography at Aberdeen University to survey all of the sandy beaches of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and make recommendations on their future management. Whilst our academic colleagues considered this work to be traducing our academic status, our team knew that we were in a better position to advise than those without up to date technical knowledge and a desire to improve management where this was needed.<sup>ii</sup> I am sure that all CIEEM members recognise the need for a sound scientific basis for informing our management advice. But that is enough on my environmental management origins.

When we met in the splendid Birmingham Botanical Gardens for the 2016 CIEEM Awards, we were all in total shock a week after the result of the EU Referendum. We were annoyed and angry, devastated and shocked, confused and uncertain. So, was I right to argue in my short speech of thanks for the medal that we should think forward as a profession and as a professional institute? I think so. But these uncertain times are ones which we can capitalize on for our collective benefit. Those who know me will not be at all surprised to hear me suggesting that it is time for a new paradigm and some fundamental shifts in the way the environment is valued by society.

First, it is time to argue that the CBD and EU biodiversity targets are too little. Indeed, they are a lowest common denominator of a political process where the protagonists against us always win, rather than a highest common factor. So let's change the mind on big targets:

- **a net GAIN for biodiversity** rather than the 'no net loss' target. The latter is clearly not being achieved nationally, regionally or globally, so it is time to raise the bar and in so doing raise the stakes;
- **half for nature** rather than the 17% of the terrestrial sphere and 1% of the marine sphere being protected by 2020 as in the Aichi targets. Let's seriously adopt the growing global movement of arguing for 'half for nature'. This means that the land and water should be much better stewarded well beyond the protected areas. And we need to recognise that even in those countries and regions where the targets are being met, there is no guarantee that they will be met in perpetuity which is surely the holy grail for biodiversity and geodiversity conservation.

These are big asks at a time when the global economy has by no means recovered from the aftershocks of the economic crisis and the Brexit vote in the UK. But, it means for us professionals even greater knowledge of and expertise in negotiation and conflict resolution: another challenge for our CIEEM training programme and for each of our CPD programmes. It means seeking alliances not only those with similar outlooks and agendas, but with the wealth sector, the health sector, and the education sector. Maybe, we might be helped with an Oxford educated geographer Theresa May as UK Prime Minister.

But this is only a start. In the post Brexit era, we should be focusing our collective efforts on improving some major existing schemes and developing others to replace those that are outmoded. We produced an excellent paper on the arguments for remaining in the EU, and now an excellent briefing note on Brexit. There are many components to this, I will just flag up the two that I think are most significant for us to concentrate on.

First, we must ensure that the Natura scheme and its accompanying domestic legislation are not thrown away. We all recognise that Natura is far from perfect - inadequate resources, too widely defined biogeographic regions, unbalanced list of habitats to be protected etc. But equally we all recognise the many benefits: specifically, that nature would be in a much worse position without it and that we still lead the world with a regionally applied scheme.<sup>iii</sup> Most of all, Natura is not a network despite what the Habitats Directive says. So, let's use all of our policy and practical experience to make our UK version of Natura fully fitting for the 21st century.

Second, let us assume that leaving the EU means that the Common Agricultural Policy is dead. Surely, this will be great benefit for the environment, partly because of the constant fixation with support under Pillar I and, partly, as we will no longer have to negotiate with the French and German farmers whose views rule the roost on CAP reform in Brussels. What we need is a new environment management scheme for farmland and for sporting land which is focused on enduring environmental stewardship, including protection of that most basic land resource - the soil, and making sure that any payments to owners and managers are only given where there is full compliance with environmental stewardship codes of practice.

Allied to these two efforts, we should also be putting more effort into advocating and helping to implement whole landscape and whole seascape approaches. Otherwise, we will see the 'march of concretization' causing the loss of naturalness in our land and sea areas, the loss of the best agricultural land, the canalizing of our water courses and the loss of buffering for our prime protected areas. Many CIEEM members are working on these larger schemes and have deep knowledge of our land use planning systems, so collectively we have a lot of experience on which to base further development and implementation of the large-scale approaches.

If we are active on all of these fronts we will surely increase the profile of our profession and enhance the credibility of CIEEM. Let's remember, this will mean continuing with what we have been doing well, and especially maintaining the highest professional standards through rigorous implementation of CPD and Codes of Conduct and the accompanying disciplinary procedures. And, finally let us capitalize on our membership to further develop the role of the Chartered Institute. Let us make sure that we provide timely and relevant inputs on key issues. Let us demonstrate to others best practice on the ground. Let us grow our membership and further diversify it to include more of the scientific community based in our universities and research institutes. And, let us capitalize on our membership of the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) by networking with colleagues globally and regionally in the commissions and their many specialist groups, as well as attending key international, European and national events.

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<sup>i</sup> Crofts, R. 1972. 'Coastal processes and sediments around St Cyrus', in C.M. Clapperton (Ed), *North East Scotland Geographical Essays*, Aberdeen University, pp15-19. Crofts, R. 1980. Landform development. In Marren, P. (Ed). *The natural history of St Cyrus NNR*. NCC, Edinburgh, pp.16-26.

<sup>ii</sup> Mather, A.S. & Ritchie, W. 1977. *The beaches of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*. Countryside Commission for Scotland.

<sup>iii</sup> Crofts, R. 2014. The European Natura 2000 protected area approach: a practitioner's perspective, *PARKS. The International Journal of Protected Areas and Conservation*, 20 (1), 75-86.