

# How to: lobby your MEP



**Friends of  
the Earth**

The European Union (EU) is currently made up of 27 countries, comprising a total population of nearly 500 million. The EU sets most of the environmental laws for each of the member states, including the UK. Campaigner **Becky Slater** explains why you should get to know your MEP, how you can influence the decision-making process at European level, and how the EU works.

## Why should I get to know my MEP?

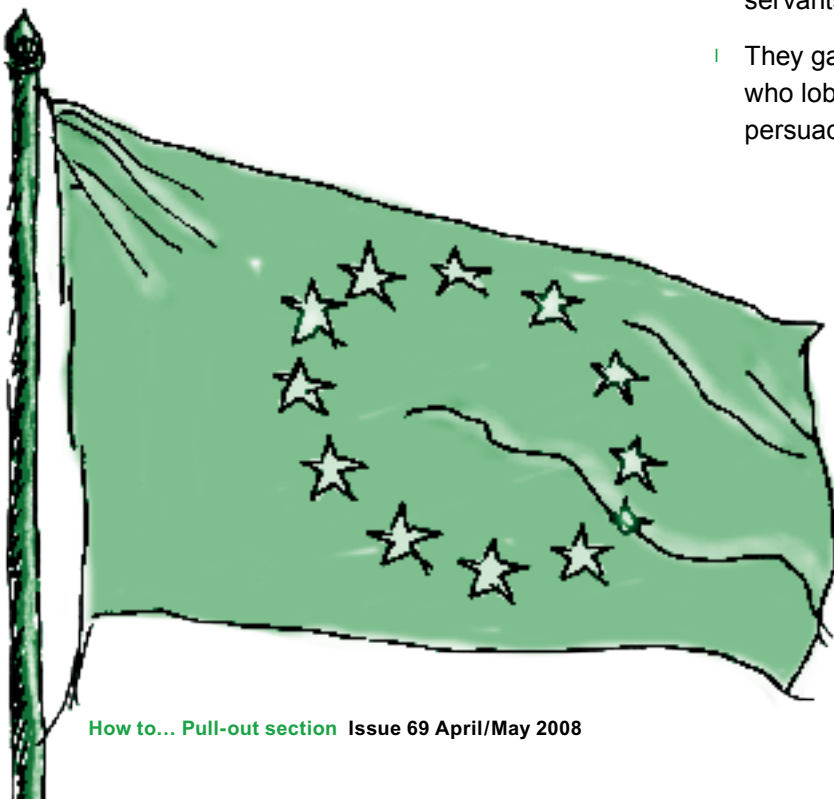
Because they vote during the creation and revision of EU legislation. We'll be campaigning around many important EU decisions over the next few years. You can help our campaigns by putting pressure on MEPs, for example writing letters and letting them know that they'll receive local coverage on how they vote.

## Who is my MEP?

The UK is divided into 12 regions. Each region has between three and 10 MEPs who represent the people living there. Find out who your MEPs are at [http://www.europarl.org.uk/uk\\_meps/MembersMain.htm](http://www.europarl.org.uk/uk_meps/MembersMain.htm)

## What should I know about MEPs?

- ▮ They are democratically elected, so they want their electorate to know what they are doing, and are keen to get re-elected.
- ▮ They are members of a political party and an EU-level political group.
- ▮ They are member of at least one committee focusing on a topic (eg Foreign Affairs, Environment, or Agriculture). Within their Committee they sometimes lead the debate on a specific issue, writing a report on which the Parliament later votes. They can also propose changes to other MEPs' reports.
- ▮ They are not protected or controlled by civil servants like a UK Government Minister.
- ▮ They gather their own information from the people who lobby them, and their colleagues. They can be persuaded by good arguments.



*Getting to  
know EU..*

## How can you influence your MEPs?

This is not much different to lobbying your local MP. For example, you could:

- | Write to them
- | Set up a meeting with them
- | Build a relationship with them
- | Work with them to get press coverage

On the whole MEPs are happy to take media opportunities in local press or on TV as they generally feel that they don't get much exposure in the UK press. Therefore you may be able to influence your MEPs' votes on an issue if they know you will be trying to get coverage on how they vote in local media.

## Do MEPs have surgeries?

Most MEPs do not have surgeries in the same way that MPs do, although they do have a constituency office. Because MEPs travel so much it is a good idea to fix a meeting well in advance. Because there is often more than one MEP per UK party in each region, they may share offices, so you could meet more than one at a time.

## When should you lobby an MEP?

It is best to lobby them about something that is already on their agenda, for example something that they will soon be discussing or voting on. If they are involved in writing a report on a specific issue, they will spend many months working on it. You can find out more about the best time to lobby an MEP on a certain issue by contacting the relevant Friends of the Earth campaign team.

## Who influences MEPs?

MEPs are influenced by a wide range of factors, including the position of their EU political group on an issue, policies of their national government, lobbying from the different organisations in Brussels (industry and NGOs), and lobbying from their constituency by businesses or individuals.



## How do constituents find out about MEPs' interests?

It is useful to find out about your MEP's interests before contacting them and to know whether they are:

- | On either the Environment (ENVI) or Industry (ITRE) Committees, which are the most important committees for Friends of the Earth's work (you should prioritise full members of these committees over substitute members)
- | Chair or vice chair of their European political group
- | Spokespeople for their UK Party in the European Parliament on environment, health or industry issues.

The UK office of the EU parliament site (overleaf) lists committee memberships for each MEP and links to their websites.

## Is it better to contact MEPs in Brussels or the UK?

It doesn't matter as enquiries are dealt with out of both offices. It's probably easiest to contact the UK office if you are trying to set up a meeting in the UK, and the Brussels office if you want to set up a meeting in Brussels or Strasbourg.

Lobbying letters can go to either, but the assistants working in the Brussels offices are more likely to be knowledgeable about the detailed policies.

MEPs are most likely to respond to a personal letter or e-mail. Postcards, standard letters and e-mails do have the effect of highlighting an issue, but they must be signed or contain the constituent's name and address. If an MEP can't see that you are definitely one of their constituents, the letter is likely to be binned.

Getting to know all about EU...

## How does the EU make decisions?

There are three key components of EU governance:

### European Commission

This is the executive and administrative branch of the EU. It is divided into departments or Directorate Generals (DG), such as DG Environment and DG Enterprise. It initially proposes and drafts legislation, often after a request from Council (see below).

The political head of each DG is the Commissioner, who is in many ways the equivalent of a Government Minister.

See [http://ec.europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm)

### Council

The Council is made up of Ministers from the Member State governments, and acts as one of the two chambers of EU decision making. Each subject area has a separate Council of Ministers, for example Environment Ministers make up the Environment Council. The presidency of the Council rotates every six months; the country with the presidency has the responsibility to chair all council meetings during this period, and set the agendas.

See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.ASP?lang=en>

### European Parliament

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by the people of Europe every five years. Each EU Member State has an allocation of seats, with the larger Member States electing more MEPs. There are currently 785 MEPs, 78 of whom come from the UK.

For most EU decisions, the European Parliament acts as the other of the two chambers of EU decision making. There are a few exceptions, for example agricultural spending, where decisions are made entirely by Council.

See [http://www.europarl.eu.int/home/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/home/default_en.htm)

MEPs organise themselves into political groups, and also into committees for different topics to enable effective scrutiny of legislation. The centre-right European People's Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED), which includes British Conservatives, is the largest political group. British Labour MEPs belong to the Party of European Socialists (PES), the second biggest group.

## How is EU legislation created?

There are two main types of legislation:

- Directives which must be incorporated into Member State law
- Regulations which are immediately legally binding in all Member States.

Most EU legislation is passed through the co-decision process. First the Commission drafts a proposal. Both the Parliament and the Council discuss, amend and vote on the proposal through two readings and sometimes a final conciliation process. By the end of the processes, the Council and the Parliament must have reached an agreement on the final proposal, which then enters into law on publication in the EU's Official Journal.

Lobbying your MEPs will be key to win our biofuels campaign. Sign up to take part in the summer of action on biofuels by sending an email to [biofuel\\_action@foe.co.uk](mailto:biofuel_action@foe.co.uk).

