



A month or so ago this column carried a report on the Renewables Obligation Banding Review, which was somewhat less than enthusiastic about some biomass and biofuels options – in particular where crops are being grown for fuel instead of food. This week no less a body than food giant Nestlé threw its weight behind the argument, warning that US and EU biofuel targets could trigger a world food crisis, cutting production and driving up prices at a time when the US in particular is experiencing its worst drought in decades.

"Agricultural food-based biofuel is an aberration," said its chief executive Paul Bulcke, reported in The Guardian. "We say that the EU and US should put money behind the right biofuels."

He was speaking at the end of the National Water Week conference in Sweden.

During the conference he also reiterated a call for water to be valued more to prevent and discourage its widespread waste. He called for governments to take the lead in devising credible, cost-effective strategies to address water shortages, while stressing that business, civil society and other stakeholders must be prepared to take greater responsibility for the problem.

"If something isn't given a value, people tend to waste it," said Mr Bulcke. "Water is our most useful resource, but those using it often don't even cover the costs of its infrastructure."

"Fresh water is being massively overused at nature's expense, but it seems only a global crisis will make us realise the importance of the issue."

The theme of the conference was 'Water and Food Security', with speakers investigating the link between water and food shortage.

Another strand was taken up by Torgny Holmgren, executive director of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI): that of food waste and water use.

"More than one-fourth of all the water we use worldwide is taken to grow over one billion tons of food that nobody eats," he said. "That water, together with the billions of dollars spent to grow, ship, package and purchase the food, is sent down the drain.

"Reducing the waste of food is the smartest and most direct route to relieve pressure on water and land resources. It's an opportunity we cannot afford to overlook."

At home it was reshuffle time, with a new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Owen Paterson is currently at the centre of an argument about his fitness for purpose in the role. In an article in *The Guardian* it was pointed out that his brother-in-law is the pro-fossil fuels writer and philosopher Matt Ridley. Some took that as an assertion that Paterson himself is a climate change sceptic, which it manifestly is not. He may or may not be. What he is, however, is in favour of shale gas drilling and badger culling and against renewables subsidies.

Interestingly, Adam Vaughan, who his profile says is editor of *The Guardian's* environment site, asked in a tweet: "Where has this meme that Owen Paterson is a climate sceptic come from?"

Another reshuffle fact: it transpires that the new Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin, who will be tasked with overseeing the battle over Heathrow's third runway, has a fear of flying.

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