



It's funny how the same event can appear completely different to different people. Press reports and environmental blogs on the meeting in Bonn of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change spoke of disappointment and anger at the failure on many Environment Ministers to attend.

Writing in *The Guardian* on 6 June, Matt McGrath said: "Negotiators and campaigners have reacted angrily to the failure of many environment ministers to attend UN talks in Bonn.

"They say governments gave an undertaking last year to come here and update plans to cut emissions.

"But so far, around 50 ministers have turned up, with representatives from the UK, France and Brazil notably absent."

The sentiment was echoed by Mohammed Adow from Christian Aid. "They agreed last year in Warsaw and they have now broken that," he said. "It undermines their commitment to craft a global deal when they don't show up, it sends a distressing signal."

The final communiqué from the Convention itself saw the same facts in a different light.

"The June meeting also for the first time included two days of ministerial meetings where Environment Ministers from several countries also spoke in different ways of the need for a long

term vision of a carbon neutral world in the second half of the century.”

So, when few converts to several the world is a brighter place.

Another issue on which the UK Government has come under fire is the maintenance of flood defences. This time the attack came from the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Launching its Report on Winter Floods, its chair Miss Anne McIntosh said: “We have repeatedly called on the Government to increase revenue funding so that necessary dredging and watercourse maintenance can be carried out to minimise flood risk, yet funding for maintenance remains at a bare minimum. Ministers must take action now to avoid a repeat of the devastation caused by the winter floods.

“Regular work to dredge and keep rivers clear can be an essential flood prevention measure, yet this is exactly what gets squeezed out when budgets are tight. The Government needs to recognise the importance of regular maintenance work and put it on an equal footing with building new defences.”

The MPs called for more local responsibility for maintenance, utilising local knowledge of priorities. The system of allocating budgets was also seen as a barrier, so to speak, to effective utilisation of funds, whereby capital budgets cannot be used for day-to-day maintenance and vice versa. In a rare outbreak of common sense among politicians the committee called for a ‘total expenditure’ approach, giving more flexibility to spend according to priorities.

One way to alleviate flooding (apart from the obvious one of tackling climate change) is the installation of sustainable drainage systems, or SuDS. Such systems are the stock-in-trade of Susdrain, the “community for sustainable drainage”. Hitherto the installation of SuDS has been seen principally as part of the development process; now, however, Susdrain is pushing the retrofitting of SuDS.

Susdrain is a group within CIRIA, the Construction Industry Research and Information

Association. Another group within CIRIA, its Biodiversity Interest Group, has announced the inaugural BIG Challenge Awards to mark the first anniversary of its BIG Challenge (Biodiversity Interest Group – BIG: geddit?). The challenge aimed to “encourage organisations to undertake one new biodiversity enhancement on their construction site or development or building”.

The awards, which will take place on 14 October 2014 in London, will “...identify and reward the participants of the BIG Challenge who have gone beyond their normal business practice to enhance biodiversity and reward those who have incorporated biodiversity at different scales and through innovative measures.”

**Chris Stokes**