

2% limit proposed EU move counts as success for lobbying by scrap consumers

BIR, BMRA dismayed by push for stringent directive on copper

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For scrap processors and traders, the European Commission's proposal that copper scrap should be categorised as waste unless it is at least 98% pure copper represents a missed opportunity to reduce the administrative burden of treating and trading scrap in the EU.

But it is a victory for secondary producers who believe – rightly or wrongly – that a looser threshold would lead to a surge in scrap exports out of the union.

For recycling associations such as the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) and the British Metals Recycling Assn (BMRA), the decision to recommend a 2% foreign materials limit, as opposed to the 5% threshold they had lobbied for, is a maddening one that will mean that, as the BIR estimates, about 90–95% of the copper scrap their members process and trade will continue to be classified as waste.

Both the BIR and BMRA welcome the principle of the new end-of-waste directive, but bemoan its impractical stringency, as they told Metal Bulletin last week.

"The BIR has always felt that material that leaves the scrapyards after being processed should be treated as a non-waste material. We are very happy to see that at last, at an EU level, the authorities have accepted this principle," BIR director-general Francis Veys said.

"But nevertheless we find the recommendation on copper scrap unexciting because this 2%

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EU scrap proposal under fire from copper recycling associations

requirement is absolutely not realistic. We're happy with the principle, but disappointed with the percentage ... it's a missed opportunity," he said.

The recycling associations have been closely involved in the technical working group that has guided the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in creating the proposed directive, but since the first meeting of the group in 2010, their calls for a 5% tolerance have been resisted by scrap consumers in Europe.

Two sides to the argument

During two meetings at the Seville offices of the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) in 2010, each side rationalised and argued for outcomes that were diametrically opposed: the associations hoped, ideally, that the designation of scrap as waste would end, and at the least that the directive would remove that classification for the high-value forms of scrap they commonly trade.

By contrast, scrap consumers would ideally have preferred that all forms of scrap – even the purest forms – would continue to be treated as waste, and expressed strong resistance to

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proposals to overturn this status quo.

"It's no secret that there has been a degree of resistance to the principles of end-of-waste from some producer, or scrap consumer, groups. In my mind their fears are misplaced, but it appears they have lobbied effectively to establish the threshold at 2%," Ian Hetherington, director-general of the BMRA, told Metal Bulletin.

"The reason for smelters to want a high threshold is that, as users of raw materials, they have every interest in it continuing to be called waste because it gives them better visibility over where the material comes from, and they feel it will prevent the movement of 'waste' out of Europe – which is pure paranoia," Veys said.
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