

BIR meets in Shanghai

Home to more than 23 million people and to the largest container port in the world, Shanghai is a city in a constant state of churn. In late May, around 1100 delegates and accompanying persons from a total of 57 countries converged on this ever-expanding metropolis for the latest BIR World Recycling Convention. In the following series of articles, 'Recycling International' provides feedback from the meetings hall.

Surviving under still-darker skies



To reflect the challenging business outlook, our coverage of last October's BIR Convention in Barcelona was headlined 'Clouds over Catalunya'; in Shanghai, it was clear that the skies overhanging the global recycling industry had darkened still further in the intervening seven months. Squeezed margins and even survival prospects provided points of debate at a number of the commodity meetings. But the man rather than the message earned a deserved share of the limelight at BIR's first-ever gathering in Shanghai. After 38 years at the world recycling organisation, including more than three decades as the head of its Brussels secretariat, Francis Veys was attending his final Convention as BIR director general. He is due to step down on August 31 and will be succeeded by Alexandre Delacoux, who joined BIR last year and is currently its general manager. To many of those attending BIR Conventions over the years, the outgoing director general has been an ever-present. At the General Assembly in Shanghai, Veys was described by

'You need to pay attention to poor quality exports or your export efforts will fail.'

BIR's re-elected world president Björn Grufman as the 'mastermind' who merits a huge measure of the credit for creating the global organisation seen today, carrying the industry fight on such important issues as the 'waste' definition and overseeing a threefold increase in its membership.

And yet, as Grufman pointed out, Veys has 'always been the man behind the scenes and not the diva in the spotlight'. He has been 'a perfect diplomat' who has developed highly-productive working relationships with a succession of different characters within the BIR hierarchy and wider recycling world. Veys will continue to work with BIR in an advisory capacity, most notably with responsibility for its Conventions.

'Green Fence'

Given that the latest BIR Convention was being staged in Shanghai, the Chinese government's recently-introduced 'Green Fence' import

crackdown was always likely to command significant meeting time in Shanghai. Veys broached the subject at a pre-Convention press gathering, emphasising that the import controls had been in place for some time but that, since February, the Chinese government had been putting an increased emphasis on their enforcement. He described this approach as 'absolutely acceptable' but also underlined the desirability of adequate warning of such moves. Cui Lei from the China Certification & Inspection Group (CCIC) told BIR's International Trade Council that the 'Green Fence' initiative was 'quite normal' and a reflection of regulations that had been in place for some time. 'Only a small percentage of your exports are of poor quality but you need to give this small percentage your attention or your export efforts will fail,' he warned.

'Hurting' export markets

Renwu Cai, general manager of Guangzhou GISE-MBA New Plastics Technology, told the BIR Plastics Committee that 'Green Fence' was designed to 'crack down on illegal enterprises', but he acknowledged that even law-abiding companies had been hit by customs clearance delays and thus additional costs.

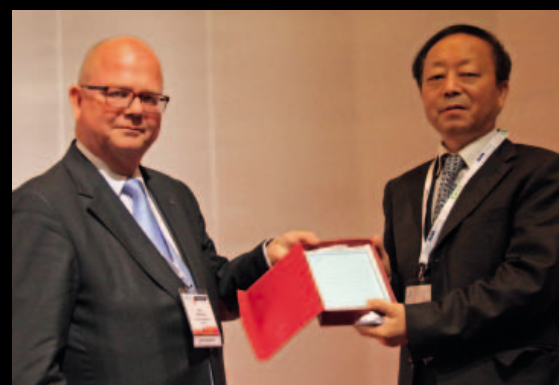
At the same meeting, Dr Steve Wong - managing director of China's Fukutomi Co. - said 'Green Fence' was forcing many domestic consumers to pay more for their scrap and was thus reducing their competitiveness. And in similar vein, Minnie Kong - associate economist (fibre) at RISI - told the BIR Paper Division that 'Green Fence' was not only 'hurting' export markets in North America and Europe but also creating problems, 'at least temporarily', for Chinese paper mills relying on imported recovered fibre. Despite buying foreign fibre on a scale that cannot be matched by any other country, mills in China are anxious not to lose their competitive position in the import market, she added.



Dr Alvaro Rodríguez de Sanabria said collaboration is essential in dealing with radioactive scrap.

These latter two speakers both insisted, however, that China will remain a dominant force in the plastics scrap and recovered paper import arena.

Also at the Paper Division meeting, outgoing president



Ma Hongchang was presented with a BIR award by its world president Björn Grufman for his help in developing a strong bond with the CMRA.



The JMC Recycling Systems team flew to Shanghai to promote its newest technology.

Ranjit Baxi of J & H Sales International in the UK urged recovered paper exporters to pay close attention to the often long-established quality requirements of the individual importing countries. In the case of China, he pointed out, NEPA authorities' list of prohibitive materials dated back to early 2008.

For his part, BIR Non-Ferrous Metals Division president Robert Stein of Alter Trading in the USA termed the increased scrutiny of non-ferrous scrap entering China as 'a surprise' to many exporters 'because of the suddenness of its implementation'.

'No going back'

Although the 'Green Fence' initiative is expected to end later in the year, many experts in China and beyond believe its impact on the market has been dramatic and potentially permanent. A leading buyer of recovered paper for the Chinese market has told 'Recycling International': 'There is no going back. In quality terms, this is the new reality when it comes to exporting recovered fibre to China.'

'Dramatic' was also the word used by ITC chairman Robert Voss of UK-based Voss Interna-

Francis Veys wins first-ever Recycling International Award

'This year marks the 15th anniversary of our magazine "Recycling International" - a good starting point for a new tradition,' announced its editor Manfred Beck at the BIR Convention in Shanghai. He then handed over the first-ever Recycling International Award to a man who had come instantly to mind when considering potential recipients, namely BIR director general Francis Veys.

'When thinking of who should get the first award, it took us not even one second to decide,' Beck confirmed. 'In our opinion, there was one person in the world who deserved this award more than anyone else; a man who started his work for the industry back in 1975 and who, rather than becoming a diplomat (his first choice), decided instead to become the figure-head of the global recycling industry.'

Beck added: 'During the past 38 years, Francis has needed all his diplomatic skills to steer the organisation through many difficult times, while at the same time having to deal with many different presidents and boards.'

Veys was praised in particular for defending the interests of the global recycling industry and for providing the foundations for the organisation's membership to grow to more than 900 members in 70 different countries. 'And these numbers are still rising, even in these difficult economic times,' Beck pointed out.

Although Veys will be stepping down as director general in August this year, Beck underlined that 'he will not be lost to BIR' as he will continue to advise the board and will remain involved in the organisation of the world body's Conventions. The Recycling International Award takes the form of a unique stainless steel statue crafted by Dutch sculptor Bert Krabbenborg. Veys said he was 'very moved and grateful' to receive this accolade, offering his sincere thanks to Beck and the entire 'Recycling International' team.

'It took us not even one second to decide,' says Manfred Beck when awarding Francis Veys with the first-ever Recycling International Award.



Dancing dragons welcomed the many delegates during the colourful opening act.

theft and fraud since his committee had run a special workshop on these issues at last year's BIR Convention in Rome. On the upside, however, there has been evidence of an increasing number of exporters taking steps to protect themselves against theft through improving the quality of seals on containers or by assessing the potential for using tracking devices on seals, on containers or even on the materials themselves. And BIR's decision to join the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) - a crime-fighting unit of the International Chamber of Commerce - has already spared many exporters a potential headache through access to its 'huge' database. Voss underlined the need for BIR members to feed through experiences of theft and fraud in order to help the IMB to build its information store and thus to increase its ability to protect their interests.

Russia votes against

Recycling industry representatives have been heavily involved in the development of a code of conduct covering radioactivity in scrap. But the draft document, created under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), received a setback in February this year when some 60 nations voted to approve it - but Russia voted against.

So what happens next? At the BIR's International Environment Council meeting in Shanghai, its former chairman Dr Alvaro Rodríguez de Sanabria of Arka Consulting in Spain contended that the Code of Conduct on the Transboundary Movement of Radioactive Material Inadvertently Incorporated into Scrap Metal and Semi-finished Products of the Metal Recycling Industries was still a valuable tool which underlined the importance of collaboration in response to the discovery of radioactive mate-

rial in scrap. He also expressed the hope that the draft code would achieve international acceptance at some point in the relatively near future. BIR Environmental and Technical Director Ross Bartley also emphasised that it remained a useful reference document.

The code recognises that, in most cases, radioactive material found at a metals recycling facility has been delivered by a third party without the consent or approval of the facility in question, and that the absence or loss of proper control has led to the inadvertent incorporation of radioactive material into scrap metal. In effect, when a radioactive source is discovered, blame should not be apportioned to the finder.

Pivotal role

Two of the Chinese recycling industry's leading lights were honoured at the BIR Convention in Shanghai. Ma Hongchang, who until recently was vice-secretary general of the China Nonferrous Metals Industry Association Recycling Metal Branch (CMRA), was presented with an award and praised by the BIR's world president for his pivotal role in developing strong links between their two organisations. In response, Ma told the BIR General Assembly that he envisaged a 'bright future' for CMRA/BIR co-operation.

A few hours earlier, at the BIR Paper Division meeting, the latest Papyrus prize was awarded to Cheung Yan - chairlady and founder of the world's largest recovered paper-based paper manufacturer, the Nine Dragons Group (see Paper Division report). □



Robert Voss underlined that more exporters are taking steps to protect themselves against metal theft.