

Björn Grufman *Profile of*

The BIR world recycling body affirmed Björn Grufman of Sweden as its new World President at the recent Spring Convention in Singapore. Having devoted three years to the role as Treasurer of BIR, he now takes on the world organisation's highest-profile job. Here, he talks to Recycling International.

Have you always worked in the recycling industry?

Not always. In 1979, I joined the Axel Johnson group which later became Axel Johnson Ore and Metals AB. We did very little scrap trading but we were trading all kinds of raw materials for the metallurgical industry. Prior to that, I had been with a subsidiary of SAS Scandinavian Airlines.

I left Axel Johnson in early 1984 to form a company of my own, together with a colleague. At the beginning, we were active only in primary metals and ferro alloys. In 1986, we started to trade some scrap and, in 1989, we bought Ivar Thulin AB - a typical Swedish scrap trading and processing company that had been in business since 1914. Ivar Thulin had the BIR membership that was transferred to my present company Metallvärden some five years later.

So was this a good grounding for your move into recycling?

As I was already well versed in the metallurgical industry, it was easy for us to enter the scrap sector in 1986. We signed a contract with Swedish Telecom to buy all its automatic switch stations in the southern half of Sweden. That contract was also the entrée to our co-operation with Ivar Thulin - the first company in the recycling industry that we bought. During the last 25 years, our recycling activities have been mainly in the Nordic Countries, but between 1995 and 1998 we did have a large scrap yard in Murmansk in the north west of Russia, although it was closed down in 1998 for economic reasons. I have been one of the principal owners of Metallvärden since we started up in 1984; and since going public, I am by far the leading stakeholder with approximately 25% of the shares and voting rights, alongside 2300 other shareholders.

Can you tell us more about your company's activities?

We have two facilities where we process scrap of all kinds. We also have a small shredder - but it is up for sale at present. We are mostly involved in the non-ferrous sector even though, in a market like the Nordic countries, you are

fa BIR President

forced handle all sorts of scrap due to the long transportation distances. At our aluminium smelter, we produce deoxidation aluminium dabs for the steel industry; we also use secondary lead to produce lead sheets, wire, profiles and similar semi products; and since the end of last year, we have also been involved in electronics recycling. Our headquarters are situated in the Swedish capital Stockholm but most of our activities are located quite far from the city. Today, some 30 people work for our group and our total turnover for the coming year is estimated at Euro 15 million.

How have these logistics issues affected your region's recycling sector?

In Scandinavia, we have a total population of only 20 million. We are all well-educated and society provides good possibilities for the recycling industry. But as mentioned, logistics solutions are relatively expensive and therefore the recycling industry has developed a little differently than in the rest of western Europe. Waste management companies have moved into the recycling industry to a large extent, and at the same time the larger scrap industry companies such as Stena have moved into waste management.

When did you first become involved in BIR?

My first BIR Convention was in London in 1989 and I have attended most of them since then. I was a member of the Non-ferrous Metals Division board from the second half of the 1990s and, under Larry Sax of the USA, I was Vice President for some years. When Fernando Duranti of Italy became President of BIR in 2003, I was elected President of Eurometrec (the European Metal Trade and Recycling Federation). And finally, some three years ago, I was elected Treasurer of the BIR.

Why is the work of BIR so important and what are the main benefits you think it brings its members?

There are, of course, several key benefits with a trade organisation like BIR. I believe many of

our members think that BIR provides the best possible marketplace when organising its Conventions around the world. Others hopefully see the advantage of having a world organisation representing the industry in various forums such as the United Nations and the OECD.

For me and many others, the EU institutions are even more important because most of the regulations governing our industry are initiated in Brussels before spreading across the globe; therefore, BIR's daughter organisations - EFR (the European Ferrous Recovery & Recycling Federation), Eurometrec and ERPA (the European Recovered Paper Association) - fulfil an important role in parallel to, and also in support of, the BIR. Our secretariat in Brussels has developed an enormous amount of knowledge over the years about legislation and about the various rules and regulations which apply around the world to our industry - and this knowledge is something from which all our members benefit.

Finally, I also think that society as a whole needs an organisation like ours from which it can

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obtain the specialist information required about how best to increase the recycling of all kinds of materials, thereby enabling us to develop the sustainable society that we all want to have.

Do you think it is an advantage to have been BIR Treasurer before becoming President?

For me it has been an advantage because I have gained knowledge about the organisation, its possibilities and its restrictions. I think we are facing some challenges during the next couple of years and I do believe BIR needs all our expertise to be able to serve our members and

to develop the organisation further. We need to strengthen and increase our membership base and to work for a strong economy, enabling us to be the representatives of our industry when our politicians are trying to create the sustainable society.

Your first words as BIR President were to describe the recycling industry as 'the future leading raw material suppliers'. Why is gaining recognition of this fact important to you?

As I said earlier, I do believe that our organisation must play an important role in society's future development. The world must increase its levels of recycling - especially of the raw materials that we are already sure we cannot continue to consume as we do today. Our organisation and its members must offer all of its combined expertise to enable the creation of the Recycling Society.

Since becoming President, we understand that you have been interviewed by world-renowned names like the

Reuters press agency, among others. What does this tell us about the importance now being attached to recycling and to the role of BIR?

Once again, we can see that the whole of society is looking at our industry as a solution to many structural problems. Sometimes I am daunted by the expectations that some people have of our industry. You see this growing interest in recycling also in the form of so-called 'risk capital' entering our industry.

Outside of work, what are your main interests and how do you choose to relax?

I am an 'outdoor' man. I enjoy hunting, skiing, sailing or just being out in our wonderful nature - and preferably with my family which is very important to me. □