



# The role of BIR is more important than ever: Björn Grufman



Björn Grufman, President, BIR

*As the global organisation for the recycling industry, BIR plays a key role as it provides a dynamic forum for its members to share their knowledge and experience. It serves as a platform to establish successful business relations and to promote recycling among other industrial sectors and policy makers. Today, it is a global recycling industry organisation representing over 850 member companies from the private sector and 40 affiliated federations from more than 70 countries. These members are global leaders in the supply of raw materials.*

*The BIR Convention & Exhibition will be held from 26-29 May in Shanghai. We thought it would be a perfect time to have a brief conversation with the President himself as head of this dynamic organisation and a businessman. And luckily for us, the World President of BIR, Björn Grufman agreed to the interview.*

By Swaliha Shanavas

**Could you tell us about your experience in the recycling industry? Since when have you been involved in it?**

I started in 1978 with the Swedish Axel Johnson group, at that time a very important trade partner to the Soviet Union. Since 1984 I have been running more or less my own company. I have been a regular participant at the BIR Conventions since 1989.

**What is your professional background? Tell us about your business activities and facilities.**

I have a Bachelor of Economics from The Stockholm School of Economics. We have a small secondary aluminium plant, a small lead smelter for production of semis and three scrap yards, all in Sweden. But we are very dependent of the world market.

**What is the state of the recycling industry worldwide and in your region?**

The recycling industry has of course, a great future but for the moment there is a lack of availability and that makes margins small and profitability poor, for the moment. But in the longer perspective, I am sure that this industry has a great future and it is a part of the sustainable society.

**Since when have you been associated with BIR and in what capacity?**

I became member of the Non-Ferrous

board during the second half of 90s. I was the chairman of EUROMETREC, the EU daughter organisation 2003-2008, when I became Treasurer of BIR and since 2011 the President.

**What is the significance of BIR in the recycling industry, particularly in the current economic scenario?**

The role of BIR is more important than ever. Our World organisation gathers together all major national trade associations from the recycling sector and all major players in the Steel, Non-Ferrous Metals, Paper and Textiles recycling field. In the global economy which requires more and more raw materials, BIR members have become key suppliers of vital commodities for the industrialised world and for the emerging countries. At the same time, BIR members contribute to the protection of our environment, conserving natural resources and reducing Co2 emissions.

**About the BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition in Shanghai**

BIR has four Commodities Divisions to look after Ferrous, Non-Ferrous, Paper and Textiles and two Commodity Committees for Plastics and Tyres/Rubber. The commodity meetings will discuss the current and future market situation for each of the materials, address trade and environmental issues

related to recycling and invite speakers who will cover specific topics which could have an impact on BIR members' business.

**What is the significance of holding this edition of the conference in China? What are the key issues you seek to address at the conference?**

BIR is meeting in China because this country is currently (despite some slowdown over the past months) the largest market for raw materials and recyclables. China's need for Steel Scrap, Non-Ferrous Metals scrap and recovered Paper will continue to grow over the years to feed their steel mills, foundries, smelters, paper mills which have to participate in the development of the industrial growth of the country (new infrastructures, more manufacturing goods...).

As a result, the number of BIR members in Asia is continuously growing and after a World Recycling Convention and Exhibition in Beijing in 2006 and in Singapore in 2011, it was felt that Shanghai was the right place to meet.

During the Shanghai convention we will offer to our members from more than 70 countries a unique forum to meet potential customers, to be informed about the latest market developments and to learn about the latest Chinese Trade and Environmental Legislation about recycling.

Interestingly, the Chinese Governmental Authorities want to develop a strong national recycling industry, but they simultaneously look for quality 'materials' and well established and reputed foreign suppliers. They are more and more environment conscious and they have published strict regulations with respect to imports of scrap and recyclables which BIR member companies are eager to follow in order to deliver the quality materials to the Chinese industry.

**What are the current concerns in the global recycling industry and what role can BIR play in addressing these issues?**

Recycling being a global industry, it is clear that BIR members – like any entrepreneurs from other international business sectors – have quite a number of commercial, financial, technical, social and environmental issues to deal with.

As a World Organisation, BIR can assist its members with advices and solutions not only at the time of the BIR half-yearly

conferences but also – all through the year – with the help of the BIR World Secretariat, which is based in Brussels. BIR has also asked for the assistance of international lawyers, consultants or specialised agencies to address BIR members concerns.

Metal theft from containers and Fraud were high on our agenda in 2012, and they will continue to be serious issues for which we have signed a contract with the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) and the Commercial Crime Investigation Service of the International Chamber of Commerce. As soon as the BIR Brussels Secretariat is alerted about an issue which could affect global trade of recyclables / scrap, there is a subsequent inquiry or immediate action to address the matter to the best interest of the membership.

**How do you see the Middle East and Asian recycling industry? How does it compare with the developed countries and what are the areas that need attention?**

As stated above, emerging countries in Asia and in the Middle East will need growing volume of raw materials and commodities to feed their local industry and satisfy their citizens' growing appetite for manufactured goods. They will need to import raw materials – primary and secondary – but also to develop national or regional Waste Management plans and local recycling operators will have to deal with their own domestic resources. The more a country is developed, the more it consumes goods, the more it creates waste, the more it needs to recycle.

After Europe, the USA, Japan, Korea, countries in the Middle East and in BRIC (Brazil, India, China) but also any emerging economy (Thailand, Malaysia and so on) will join the global recycling society. They still need materials which they do not have and which they must import, but they will sooner or later become self-sufficient and develop their own close loop recycling industry.

**What are your hobbies and other interests?**

I am an outdoor man. I love to hunt, sail, ski and so on. I appreciate very much to be together with my family. In spite of the fact that our children since long are grown up (33 and 35 years old) we do go for skiing vacations together.

