

# Winter 2005 MEP's report to Labour party members

by Richard Corbett MEP

**As usual in European affairs, it's only the gladiatorial drama of the European Council's budget negotiations that makes the headlines. But it's also been a busy few months in the European Parliament, where we've been considering all kinds of legislative proposals.**

Environmental policy is one important area where our decisions are best taken together with our European neighbours – pollution is no respecter of international borders! – so we agree most of our environmental law at European level. In December, we considered the question of how to make batteries more environmentally friendly.

In 2002, half a million tonnes of used batteries were shovelled into landfill sites – yet these batteries contain high levels of poisonous substances such as mercury and cadmium as well as precious metals such as silver and cobalt. So MEPs have now passed a directive setting strict limits on the levels of hazardous chemicals that manufacturers can use, and requiring free recycling facilities to be made widely available. The cost of setting up these facilities will be borne by the battery manufacturers.

Another area where joint European action has been very successful is in improving animal welfare. 2006 started with a new agreement that the EU will immediately end financial subsidies on exporting live cattle for slaughter. The decision removes incentives for farmers to send their cattle to the Middle East, a trade repeatedly exposed for its immense cruelty. It's a great victory for animal welfare, and as a member of the all-party Animal Welfare Intergroup in the European Parliament, I welcome it wholeheartedly.

Finally, MEPs have also been asked to take difficult decisions on the Data Retention Directive, which aims to regulate how telecommunications information can be used for combatting terrorism and cross-border criminality. Some of our neighbouring countries were keen to push through these new measures as an intergovernmental agreement, so it was to the credit of the UK Presidency of the Council that they managed to secure agreement with the European Parliament too. In the end, MEPs negotiated a balanced compromise to allow the police access to vital information for anti-terrorism investigations, whilst also protecting individual privacy.