

Not as simple as you might think



David Bellamy, one of the original icons of the environmental movement has recently attracted its ire over his views on climate change and wind power. Has he turned his back on his roots? Or is he just misinformed? Or is he right? Simon Hodgson found that the situation was more complicated than that.

Yes, this is certainly David Bellamy. The voice, the beard, the hand gestures are all familiar from dozens of TV programmes. Ok, so the nearest plants are in Hyde Park, and Bellamy isn't waist-deep in an oozing swamp, but it's him all right: passionate conservationist, charismatic campaigner, eccentric academic. The David Bellamy who has spent almost thirty years showing us the wonder of the natural world around us, and urging us to protect it. "How exciting" said my colleagues in the office, when they learned of the interview, "he's one of my heroes – one of the reasons I went into the environment in the first place". Bellamy is associated for many of us, with our earliest interest in conservation.

This perhaps explains why the criticism of some of his recently published views by other prominent environmentalists has been so fierce: it comes from a sense of betrayal. As George Monbiot put it in his public correspondence with Bellamy, "Do

you have any idea how much damage your articles have caused? Do you have any idea how your name is being used by ... Exxon executives to suggest that 'if even an environmentalist like David Bellamy says global warming isn't happening, then it can't be true?'" How can it be that this man, one of our founding fathers, has turned on us in this way?

And yet, Bellamy is as passionate as ever. "We are suffocating Mother Nature. We have screwed up the world – there is not a single part of the world where there isn't some banned chemical in the food chain, or it isn't overgrazed, or it isn't eroding" he states firmly. Now past seventy, he still works eighteen-hour days and is associated with more than 48 environmental NGOs as president, trustee or patron. It is obvious that he has lost none of his zeal.

And he's qualified too. Bellamy has a PhD in Botany, and was at Durham University. "I had 22 marvellous years there" he smiles, "They were wonderful cuddly places, Universities, we had no syllabuses, and I could just talk to my students about whatever I like." He was senior lecturer at Durham, with an honorary professorship and has published a huge number of scientific papers and books.

So how could he find himself so far from mainstream environmental thinking?

Well firstly, he's just too optimistic for the current mood. He's an enthusiast, an irrepressible communicator and he loves good news. "We've always sat here trying to get out good news. I could make a new television programme every day about really fantastic things happening, but we never see these" he says. Bellamy prefers to concentrate on the positive, believing it has much greater power to motivate people into action: "Bad news spooks people. The Green moment runs on bad news. It's all doom and gloom - we're all going to burn to pieces so why bother?"

"Bellamy is arguing backwards ... he doesn't want to believe in global warming, so he won't let himself"

But a bigger element, I feel, is Bellamy's total devotion to conservation, to the protection of a specific habitat, right here, right now. If you want someone to don his wellies and lie down in front of the bulldozers, he's the man. "I was at the forefront of campaigning against things – I was with John Prescott (not that he can remember it) when he swam across the river Thames with Greenpeace" he recalls. In 1983 he was jailed for blockading the Franklin River, protesting against plans to dam it. He talks about skylarks, rainforest canopies and mangrove swamps. He quotes Churchill: "Britain has a countryside worth dying for' and I'd damn well die for it! We're going to cover one third of Britain with concrete and one third with wind turbines and what the hell's it going to do?"

It's not that he argues against climate change: "The climate has always been changing," he says "If we'd have been sitting here 12,000 years ago we'd have been under ice." Nor does he dispute the need to save energy: "I believe we need to save energy, but it's because I've got lots of kids and lots of grandchildren and I want them to have coal in the future as raw material for their plasto-chemical lifestyles". But climate change is "a completely natural phenomenon about which we can do nothing at all". The implication is that it's certainly not worth wasting beautiful countryside on wind turbines to solve a non-existent problem.

And there's the rub. If it comes to a straight fight between a real, touchable, beautiful ecosystem and an intangible, generalised global problem, my guess is that Bellamy will back the here and now every time. "In my opinion, so much of the real conservation has disappeared" he laments, "and they've put all their eggs in this wonderful basket of global warming, which is either going to kill us all, or make us totally bankrupt trying to solve it." He's an old fashioned conservationist, and it seems to me that Bellamy's simple message of local action is out of place in a world of climate models and global treaties.

As I listen, I can't shake the feeling that Bellamy is arguing backwards. That he doesn't want to believe in global warming, so he won't let himself. He quotes studies: "Afghanistan has had the coldest weather on record. 99% of glaciers are growing not melting, and the Antarctic and Arctic ice caps are getting

thicker, but they don't report that and they don't put that into their models." He explains that he doesn't have a television and "keeps up to date with the world with emails", and indeed, there's a whiff of the internet conspiracy theory about his arguments.

He's the first to admit that these are not simple issues, but he feels there is a lot of "muddy mysticism" out there. Bellamy likes to keep it simple - we're damaging the world, and we need to restore it. Maybe global warming just doesn't fit into this picture - maybe it's just too big. As I walk out of the door and into Hyde Park, with wildfowl breeding successfully on the Serpentine, but thousands of cars belching out carbon dioxide on the West Carriage Drive, I reflect that the world is a very complex place.

On the one hand I don't agree with David Bellamy: we have a huge global challenge ahead. On the other, there are undoubtedly good things going on in the environmental field, many of which can trace their origins back to a bearded Bellamy's enthusiastic support.

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Changes to ISO 14001?

You could be forgiven for thinking that last year's revision of ISO 14001 was as far-reaching as that of ISO 9000. At SGS we like to keep things in perspective - in reality the changes are largely editorial.

Definition: some have been 'clarified' but even the redefinition of environmental performance is not a real change - after all who would accept an EMS as compliant if there was not measurable improvement in performance?

Policy: The previous "other requirements" are now termed "other environmental requirements". The policy needs to be communicated.

Environmental aspects: if you were thorough when working to the 1996 version there is no real change. There is still no proper definition of significance.

Objectives, targets and programmes: sensibly these have been joined together as the continual improvement process. The previous reference to "new developments" has been moved to the aspects-identification process.

Resources, roles, responsibility and authority: this change relates to "ensuring the availability of resources" rather than the previous "provide resources".

Competence, training and awareness: you have always needed to ensure that those who work for or on behalf of your organisation are trained, aware and competent, so there is no real change.

Communication: the opportunity was missed to clarify what was meant by "external communication on significant aspects".

Monitoring and measurement: there is really no change to monitoring and measurement if your system includes tracking of performance and analysing data related to significant aspects. Compliance confirmation has been moved to a separate sub-clause. The opportunity to include realistic and detailed calibration requirements (such as in ISO 9001) has been missed.

Evaluation of compliance: a new sub-clause emphasises this essential and changed requirement. You now need to be sure to include confirming compliance with "other environmental requirements" as well as legal and regulatory requirements.

Non-conformity corrective and preventive action: no practical change. If the aspects and emergency preparedness processes are functional the key ingredients are already in the EMS.

Internal audit: no practical change. IAF guidelines for certification bodies always required objective and independent internal auditors.

Management review: there are now some defined inputs and outputs to the review.

In summary, the standard has been tidied up and a few clarifications have been added, but companies certified by a competent and experienced body should have little difficulty addressing the changes.

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