

Decisions, Decisions!



Scotland says No! Better Together! But not back to square one. The genie is out of the bottle and the hangover in Westminster will be with us for some time. If the politicians are true to their words – even partly – there may be a price to pay in Belfast, Cardiff, London or other large cities in England. In my lifetime we have had more administrative boundary changes than the rest of the EU put together; let's hope we don't have too many more.

We commend MapAction on their brave decision to deploy two volunteers and their chief executive, Liz Hughes, to Liberia to help in containing the Ebola outbreak. As usual in any emergency, knowledge of the geography of events is vital to any planned and coordinated response. Their decision to help will enable teams on the ground to make better decisions that could mean life or death for thousands.

A recent blog post on Linked-In from Nathan Heazlewood in New Zealand, sometime GI expert at Defence Estates here in UK, summarises what many of us feel but perhaps haven't articulated very well: "Be proud geospatial people: you are making a difference to the world!" He discusses both the obvious examples like MapAction above and the much less visible roles played by so many in different organisations in government or industry and in applications from 'green' environmental causes to natural resource exploitation or defence.

Which brings me to a decision which is not being made often enough: to become one of us 'geospatial people' with encouragement from industry, government and the educational establishments. Why not? Because, as Karl Donert from the EURO GEO put it at the Geobusiness conference last May "There is no geospatial job category in Britain – we do not know how many people work in geospatial occupations or how many will be needed – without this identity or relevant statistics how can we build capacity, plan university courses or encourage potential students". Stephen Booth, in his editorial for our sister magazine Geomatics World, has made a heartfelt plea for better recognition for our disciplines and contrasts us with the Dutch – go look at <http://geo-pickmeup.com/why-we-need-geographers-the-go-geo-campaign/>

One decision you can make right now is to look at the rest of this magazine and dip into several interesting case studies – legal deposit libraries, fire brigades, cross country pipelines, local authority services – and three articles which might just convince you to help set and/or use 'standards'. Then you might want to use a DIY 'drone' or think carefully about coincidences – in geometric space or time! Finally, we have an interesting personal reflection from John Wilkinson who has just retired after leading Land and Property Services in Northern Ireland for several years.

Some decisions are very difficult – and I am not talking about the recent vote to let women golfers join the Royal & Ancient! Decisions on how to organise, manage and fund some of our cherished institutions, such as Ordnance Survey and the Land Registry require political judgements in the context of very powerful vested interests – some of them internal to the institutions themselves (turkeys don't vote for Christmas) and others from powerful lobbies for or against the status quo. In a report Professor Bob Barr (see p 16) writes that 'our National Mapping Agency is obliged to defend its business model by making spurious assertions about "coincidence" or "substitution" – in the context of OS MasterMap and the Land Registry Index Map. We can't help noticing that the 'dividends' paid to government from the Land Registry surplus last year would more than cover the costs of operating Ordnance Survey. Why then, for goodness sake, are we arguing about the percentage coincidence of their respective map databases?

This article was published in GIS Professional October 2014