



House of Commons  
Environmental Audit  
Committee

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**Government Response  
to the Committee's  
Eighth Report, Session  
2003-04, on Greening  
Government 2004**

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**Seventh Special Report of Session  
2003–04**

*Ordered by The House of Commons  
to be printed Wednesday 10 November 2004*

## The Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

### Current membership

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The constitution and powers are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally Standing Order No. 152A. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: [www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/environmental\\_audit\\_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/environmental_audit_committee.cfm).

A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Mike Hennessy (Clerk); Lynne Spiers (Second Clerk); Eric Lewis (Committee Specialist); Elena Ares (Committee Specialist); Francene Graham (Committee Assistant); Caroline McElwee (Secretary); and Robert Long (Senior Office Clerk).

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### References

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by page number as in 'Ev12'. number HC \*-II

# Seventh Special Report

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## Greening Government 2004—Government Response.

1. The Environmental Audit Committee published its report on *Greening Government 2004* on Tuesday 27 July 2004 as HC 881.
2. The Government's Response to the Committee's Report was received on Wednesday 27 October 2004 in the form of a memorandum to the Committee. It is reproduced as an Appendix to this Special Report.

## Appendix

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### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT: "Greening Government 2004" (Eighth Report of Session 2003-04).

#### *Introduction*

1. The Government welcomes the Eighth Report of the Environmental Audit Committee, the latest in its series of reports on the *Sustainable Development in Government* initiative. The Report, with its supporting Memorandum prepared by the National Audit Office, provides a detailed analysis of the 2003 Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) Report.
2. In its Response to the Committee's *Greening Government 2003* report, the Government indicated that it would continue to prepare a separate report on the operational management of its estates. The next (2004) SDiG Report will be published shortly and will, as its predecessor, report on departmental progress against targets in the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (Framework). In doing so, the report will incorporate as far as possible the Committee's recommendations in its 2003 report.
3. In line with its earlier Response, the Government reported on policy issues in this year's annual report on sustainable development, the last in the series *Achieving a better quality of life* (2003). The annual report provided a detailed look at progress covering the period 1999-2003 across the three pillars of sustainable development – the economy, society and the environment. It also provided a summary of actions taken by the Government to build sustainable development into its policies and decisions. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Commission carried out an assessment of the Government's progress on sustainable development over the past five years, *Shows promise. But must try harder*, published in April 2004.
4. Since the annual report, the Government has continued to take steps towards better and more sustainable policy making: sustainable development was a cross-cutting theme in the 2004 Spending Review, and sustainable development considerations in the expanded

Regulatory Impact Assessment regime, which now covers public sector activity, were strengthened. Both of these measures systematically integrate sustainable development criteria into the normal processes of policy assessment and decision making.

5. Further, as the Committee will know, the Government completed consultation this summer on a new UK sustainable development strategy in which we also sought views on how to strengthen sustainable development in government. The strategy, due for publication in 2005, will build on what has already been achieved to improve the delivery of sustainable development outcomes and to focus on delivery in the longer term, looking forward to 2020.

6. The Government's detailed Response is set out below. The Committee's recommendations are highlighted in bold and cross-referenced to the body of its report.

## **Response to the Committee's Conclusions and Recommendations**

### ***The Sustainable Development in Government 2003 annual report***

**Recommendation 1: The latest Sustainable Development in Government annual report is far narrower in scope and significance than previous Government reports in this series. It focuses only on operational management issues, and does not cover the mainstreaming of environmental objectives within policy development—including environmental screening and appraisal, setting environmentally related policy targets, monitoring and reporting on them, and raising awareness in both departments and their associated bodies. (Paragraph 10)**

**Recommendation 2: The Sustainable Development in Government 2003 report includes a commitment that these other key policy and awareness aspects would be reported on in the annual report on the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. However, DEFRA did not include in the 2003 departmental questionnaire any questions relating to these aspects, and the annual report on the UK Strategy (March 2004) does not in fact contain any objective data or comparative analysis of departmental performance in this respect. (Paragraph 13)**

**Recommendation 3: It is regrettable that the Government appears to have abandoned monitoring policy and awareness aspects of the Greening Government initiative in a systematic and objective manner. It is still more surprising that ENV(G) sanctioned such a change to the coverage of the 2003 departmental questionnaire, and the Government should state explicitly whether it did in fact do so. It should also explain how, in the absence of comparative information, ENV(G) proposes to assess departmental performance in greening policy and raising awareness, or whether it now sees its role as being limited to greening operations. (Paragraph 15)**

**Recommendation 4: The Government should, in future, collect information systematically from departments on a range of issues relating to greening policy and raising awareness, and report on these in the Sustainable Development in Government**

annual report. If it does not intend to do so, we will return to the practice of collecting such information ourselves. (Paragraph 16)

**Recommendation 5: Environmental targets in policy-related areas are likely to play a far more important and crosscutting role in the future, particularly if the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy highlights key priorities for action. A structured approach—akin to that now adopted for operational management—to both output and process related targets should therefore be developed as part of the reviews of the Sustainable Development Strategy and the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate. (Paragraph 19)**

7. The role of ENV(G) remains unchanged. The Committee continues to have responsibility for sustainable development in policy making, awareness raising and operational activities and has actively engaged in a number of initiatives over the past year. The details of Cabinet Committee business are, however, confidential. In determining policy for sustainable development, ENV(G) works alongside other Cabinet Committees, notably ENV, although other Cabinet Committees also handle aspects of sustainable development. Additionally, the Sustainable Development Task Force, chaired by Margaret Beckett, and with Ministerial and outside membership, focuses on sustainable development in the context of the review of the UK sustainable development strategy and on follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Task Force papers and minutes are available on the Government's sustainable development website.

8. In line with its Response to the Committee's 2003 report, the Government is considering how best to take forward reporting on sustainable development policy. It will continue to provide a separate report on the management of its estate and performance against Framework targets. The Government is not, however, persuaded of the value of detailed centralised reporting on all issues. For example, data on numbers of staff working in sustainable development units or on departmental awareness raising strategies are in themselves relatively poor indicators of the extent to which a department has incorporated sustainable development into all its activities.

9. The inclusion of sustainable development as a cross-cutting theme in the Spending Review and the changes to Regulatory Impact Assessment are highly significant in requiring departments to take steps to mainstream sustainable development objectives within policy development. Both measures provide for greater accountability and reporting by departments so further embedding sustainable development in the activities of each government department.

10. In the Spending Review 2004 (SR2004), every department was asked to consider the economic, social and environmental implications of their policy priorities and objectives, and to integrate these into their spending programmes and policies. This commitment to sustainable development is reflected in decisions on departmental spending settlements and on Public Sector Agreement (PSA) targets. As a result of the Spending Review all 15 of the headline indicators of sustainable development are now reflected in PSA targets spanning ten government departments.

11. The changes in the Spending Review process reflect the extension from April 2004 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) regime to cover all policies and proposals that will have a substantial impact on the public sector. When completing RIAs, departments are now required explicitly to identify any significant environmental and social costs and benefits, as well as economic costs and benefits. The combined effect of these changes means that consideration of a wide range of impacts, including environmental impacts, is mandatory for all new significant policy proposals. The mandatory RIA will therefore replace the previous Government commitment to environmental appraisal. Government departments and other bodies will also need to comply with the European Directive on strategic environmental assessment (SEA), which requires systematic consideration of significant environmental effects likely to arise from a wide range of plans and programmes.

12. The Cabinet Office's revised web-based guidance on RIAs draws on the analytical approach of HM Treasury's Green Book, the basis for all cost/benefit analysis. It also includes recommended checklists, which provide prompts to help policy makers identify the full breadth of impacts early on in the RIA process. These checklists (on economic, environmental, social and distributional impacts) provide the same coverage as the Integrated Policy Appraisal tool previously used by some departments. Defra has now also provided revised guidance to assist policy makers in assessing environmental impacts.

13. RIAs are subject to rigorous scrutiny within departments and centrally through the Cabinet Office's Regulatory Impact Unit and Cabinet Committee. RIAs are open to public scrutiny through publication on departmental websites and in the House libraries. The Government will look to the NAO to comment on the sustainable development aspects of the sample of RIAs analysed in its annual evaluation report.

14. The developments described above will see increasing focus on departmental delivery in mainstreaming sustainable development. Furthermore, work on the new sustainable development strategy has identified thematic priorities where Government will be looking to specific departments to take action to deliver, measure and report progress. As part of the strategy, consideration will be given to what central reporting will be required.

15. To support these various initiatives, there are a number of programmes within departments and across Whitehall to promote awareness and understanding of sustainable development. For example, Defra officials are working with the Civil Service College (CMPS) and the Cabinet Office to provide specific training on sustainable development, through Ministers@breakfast events and delivery skills workshops for senior civil servants, and also more widely to strengthen the way that sustainable development is brought into the College's general policy courses.

16. In addition, the Sustainable Development Commission is working on a communications plan, to be published shortly, which will include a cross-government initiative to provide greater information and support for departmental staff on sustainable development.

## Greening Operations

Recommendation 6: Progress on completing the Framework remains slow, and we are disappointed that procurement remains a crucially important area where targets have yet to be set. The implications of the huge growth in the Private Finance Initiative are immense, given the need to embed far higher environmental standards within such projects, and this is a subject to which we intend to return in future. (Paragraph 22)

17. Three new chapters of the Framework were published this October, on procurement, on estates management and construction, and on social impacts. These and the earlier chapters on energy, waste and biodiversity apply explicitly to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public Private Partnership (PPP) contracts. The Government will also be considering the recommendations of the recent Green Alliance report, *PFI: meeting the sustainability challenge*.

18. The Framework chapter on procurement takes forward the recommendations in the Sustainable Procurement Group report published last October. Through its Market Transformation Programme, Defra is developing the 'Quick Wins' initiative which committed departments from November 2003 to meet minimum environmental standards when purchasing certain types of goods. OGC buying solutions has developed a pilot website to provide dedicated guidance for buyers.

19. There are a number of other important initiatives across Government that will promote more sustainable purchasing. For example, the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) is leading a cross-departmental group to develop a Schedule of Common Minimum Standards for the procurement of built environments, which will include key sustainability requirements; OGC intends to publish shortly the last in the series, *Achieving Excellence in Construction Procurement*, Guide 11: Sustainability; and the Government is committed to help support and develop a single national Code for Sustainable Building, following on from the recommendations in the report of May 2004 by the Sustainable Buildings Task Group. The Government also plans to publish guidance on how to take social issues into account in purchasing; and the Department of Trade and Industry is working with Defra to explore the scope for government procurement to stimulate the market in environmental technologies.

20. Public procurement was identified as a key policy tool in the UK Government Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production, *Changing Patterns*. Sustainable consumption and production will also be one of the major themes in the new UK sustainable development strategy.

**Recommendation 7: Our overall conclusion is that the picture of departmental performance emerging from the NAO analysis of the Sustainable Development in Government 2003 report does not differ substantially from our own analysis of operational data for the previous year. The data in the report has significant weaknesses, which limit the conclusions that can be drawn from it. However, taking it at face value, departments' performances appear to vary hugely. Some departments have made good progress in certain areas, while others report only minimal achievements. (Paragraph 23)**

**Recommendation 8: Examples of such variations include: (Paragraph 25)**

- **The percentage of staff covered by a certified environmental management system.** This ranged from 0% (CO, DfES, DfID, ECGD, HMT, LCD, LOD) to 70% for DWP, 80% for ONS and 100% for DCMS.
- **The number of alternatively powered vehicles (including LPG).** Of those departments with significant car fleets, the Department for Work and Pensions does commendably well, with 624 vehicles out of a fleet of 2852; whereas Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue, and the Home Office, with 5836 vehicles between them, could only manage a total of 183 alternatively powered vehicles.
- **The percentage of waste recovered.** Six departments were unable to produce any data, while the remaining departments ranged from 0% (Export Credits Guarantee Department) to 79% (Department of Trade and Industry).
- **The percentage of renewable energy purchased.** Six departments purchased 10% or less of their electricity requirements from renewable sources. By contrast, six other departments purchased between 50% and 90% from such sources.
- **The proportion of desk-top paper purchased which met the recycling specification.** This ranged from 0% (Cabinet Office, Export Credits Guarantee Department) to 100% (Department for Culture, Media and Sport). The performance of the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Work and Pensions, which between them account for over 50% of all desk-top paper bought, remains very poor (2% and 3% respectively).

**Recommendation 9: The Government should conduct a detailed analysis of the reasons for the large variations in departmental performance as it is unlikely that they relate to inherent differences in their estates and activities. Future Sustainable Development in Government annual reports should comment in more depth on the reasons for such variations. (Paragraph 27)**

21. The Government welcomes the Memorandum prepared by the NAO which provides a useful analysis of departmental performance against targets and helps to highlight shortcomings and priority areas for action by individual departments. In this Response, the Government will not comment on the detailed performance points outlined by the Committee. New data will be published shortly in the 2004 SDiG Report, based on the year April 2003-March 2004, and an independent consultancy has been appointed to analyse departmental data and to prepare the written report for publication.

22. The Government has committed to review the Framework during 2004-05. The review will be wide-ranging and will include consideration of the reasons for variations in departmental performance. Any input from the NAO would be welcomed.

**Recommendation 10: The Government should clarify on what basis bodies are, or are not, to be included in the Sustainable Development in Government report, and it should explain how this relates to the exemptions in the Sustainable Energy Act. It must also ensure that departments do include in returns all those bodies—in particular, executive agencies—which should be included. (Paragraph 31)**

23. When the Framework was introduced in 2002, it was intended that it should cover central government departments and their executive agencies; it did not cover Non-Departmental Public Bodies and other associate bodies, (although departments were seen as responsible for promoting sustainable development to their associate bodies), or the devolved administrations. The Sustainable Energy Act has the same coverage as the Framework.

24. The questionnaire issued to departments in preparation for the 2004 SDiG Report made clear which bodies should be included in departmental responses. Wider issues related to the coverage of the Framework will be considered as part of the review.

**Recommendation 11: Data reliability remains a significant problem and may explain anomalies in departmental performance. In accordance with best practice, departments should be required to provide evidence that all their environmental performance data has been independently validated. (Paragraph 32)**

25. Government recognises that data reliability remains a problem. As a pilot, Defra has engaged independent consultants to audit its returns for the 2004 SDiG Report; and the findings of this exercise will contribute to the Framework review.

**Recommendation 12: The Government should ensure that operational targets, and the methodology for monitoring them, are clear and unambiguous. The rationale for setting specific targets in relation to current performance and industry norms should also be clearly explained in the Framework. (Paragraph 33)**

26. In order to strengthen monitoring of performance against the Framework, independent consultants were appointed to draw up the departmental questionnaire for the 2004 SDiG Report. In doing so, they took on board the Committee's comments in its *Greening Government 2003* report and consulted the Committee's advisers, and officials from the NAO and from central departments.

27. The rationale and suitability of current targets will be considered as part of the Framework review.

**Recommendation 13: The Sustainable Development in Government report should include aggregate data for the performance of the Government estate as a whole, and the narrative could usefully include more discussion and comparisons of trends across Government over time. (Paragraph 34)**

28. This year's SDiG Report will include aggregate data for the performance of the Government estate as a whole, and discussion and comparison of trends over time.

**Recommendation 14: DEFRA should consider publishing a composite version of the report and the associated data as a single file for download, as an aid to those who seek a complete text or single electronic document for research or analysis. (Paragraph 35)**

29. The 2004 SDiG Report and the associated data will be available as a single file for download.

**Recommendation 15: The Government must ensure that the move to intranet-only publication does not lead to a downgrading of the priority and importance accorded to the Sustainable Development in Government Report and the provision of related data. (Paragraph 36)**

30. The Government is moving away from printed copy towards making information available online: online systems are more efficient and reduce paper wastage. We believe that provision of the SDiG Report on the Internet will increase accessibility and ease of data use by external parties.

31. The data submitted by departments for the 2004 SDiG Report has been signed off in each department by a senior official, as well as by the reporting officer responsible for compiling the data. The departmental Green Minister remains responsible for the performance of his/her department.

**Recommendation 16: The poor quality of current data and the need for independent validation is likely to lead to more formal departmental systems for reporting environmental impacts. We are therefore exploring with the NAO how they might assist us in assessing the adequacy of these systems in relation to both policy and operations. (Paragraph 38)**

32. The Spending Review 2004 and Regulatory Impact Assessment bring sustainable development into each department's core business and, although central monitoring of the effectiveness of key processes will continue, Government will increasingly be looking to individual departments to report on their own performance in delivering sustainable development. It will be important, therefore, for departmental reports to reflect these changes and we welcome any input from the NAO on how departments could improve their reporting on sustainable development.

**Recommendation 17: We find it bizarre and highly unsatisfactory that the Government should have set a target of sourcing at least 10% electricity from renewables by 2008 when analysis of the latest data shows that 17 out of the 20 ministerial departments already meet—or in many cases significantly exceed—this target. The Government must explain why it has not set a more challenging target. We also expect all individual departments which are currently meeting or exceeding the target to set their own appropriate and challenging targets. (Paragraph 41)**

33. It is encouraging that most departments are already meeting or exceeding this target. The scope for departments to increase the amount of renewable energy they purchase is constrained: the market is still relatively small and developing, and most departments need to renegotiate their renewables contract regularly. Further, departments are in competition with each other and the private sector for existing supplies and increased demand could in the short term lead to price increases and market instability.

34. Nevertheless, the Government will take the opportunity of the Framework review to look again at this target.

35. In addition to the commitment to source at least 10% electricity from renewable sources by 2008, the Framework chapter also requires departments to source 15% of

electricity from Good Quality Combined Heat and Power by 2010. This target will also be reviewed in the light of departmental progress and market developments.

**Recommendation 18: The extensive delay in publishing departmental energy performance data is unacceptable and the Government must ensure that data for 2003-04 is available far earlier. It should also state how much of the 12.5% carbon reduction target is likely to be met simply through changes in the fuel mix by 2010-11 rather than by actual reductions in demand. (Paragraph 42)**

36. Energy use figures for the Government estate are collected every year by Defra's Sustainable Energy Policy division and analysed by them with the assistance of the Building Research Establishment (BRE). Departmental energy performance data for 2002-03 are now available on the SDiG website; anomalies in data delayed publication and returns were affected by changes in department and departmental estates. Data for 2003-04 will be published shortly with the 2004 SDiG Report.

37. The 12.5% carbon reduction will not include any contribution from the purchase of renewable electricity; the reduction will be based on reduced consumption, primarily through improved energy efficiency, although also through reductions in estate size. The only fuel mix changes which may contribute to the carbon reduction figure are changes from oil or solid fuel to gas for heating, but these are expected to be minimal.

**Recommendation 19: It is regrettable that the Government should claim a likely carbon reduction in government departments of 29% by 2010 against a 1990 baseline, when the NAO has concluded that figures for performance from 1990 to 2000 are unreliable and cannot be audited. (Paragraph 44)**

38. Although the NAO was unable to verify the data for the baseline year 1990-91 from original documents, trends in the data do indicate that government departments have made steady progress over a number of years. Government departments will be playing a full role in helping the Government to achieve its 20% reduction target for the economy as a whole by 2010.

## **Conclusion**

**Recommendation 20: Our findings indicate that, although progress continues to be made in some departments on some aspects of the Greening Government initiative, there is a perceptible loss of overall momentum—particularly in embedding sustainable development within policy making. The review of the Framework provides a timely opportunity for the Government to demonstrate a new commitment to the Greening Government initiative and ensure that the Sustainable Development in Government annual report does indeed live up to its name. (Paragraph 47)**

39. The Government strongly disagrees. Government has increased momentum on embedding sustainable development in its policies through significant changes to RIAs, through the 2004 Spending Review, through the establishment of the Sustainable Development Task Force and with a major review of the UK sustainable development strategy and its associated indicators. The Committee has misinterpreted the decision to report on these policy aspects separately from progress on operational performance.

40. Through the review of the Framework Government will seek to drive forward the sustainable management of its own estate and to encourage similar behaviour by others.

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Fifth	GM Foods – Evaluating the Farm Scale Trials, HC 564
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Twelfth	World Summit for Sustainable Development – From rhetoric to reality, HC 98 ( <i>Reply, HC 232</i> )
Thirteenth	Greening Government 2003, HC 961 ( <i>Reply, HC 489,2003-04</i> )

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- Sixth Buying Time for Forests: *Timber Trade and Public Procurement*, HC 792-1 ,  
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- Fourth The Pre-Budget Report 1999: pesticides, aggregates and the Climate  
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