



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

Annual Report 2003

First Report of Session 2003–04



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

Annual Report 2003

First Report of Session 2003–04

Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed on Tuesday 13 January 2004*

HC 215

Published on Thursday 22 January 2004
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

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

Mr Peter Ainsworth MP (*Conservative, East Surrey*) (Chairman)
Mr Gregory Barker MP (*Conservative, Bexhill and Battle*)
Mr Harold Best MP (*Labour, Leeds North West*)
Mr Colin Challen MP (*Labour, Morley and Rothwell*)
Mr David Chaytor MP (*Labour, Bury North*)
Mrs Helen Clark MP (*Labour, Peterborough*)
Sue Doughty MP (*Liberal Democrat, Guildford*)
Mr Paul Flynn MP (*Labour, Newport West*)
Mr Mark Francois MP (*Conservative, Rayleigh*)
Mr John Horam MP (*Conservative, Orpington*)
Mr Jon Owen Jones MP (*Labour, Cardiff Central*)
Mr Elliot Morley MP (*Labour, Scunthorpe*)
Mr Malcolm Savidge MP (*Labour, Aberdeen North*)
Mr Simon Thomas MP (*Plaid Cymru, Ceredigion*)
Joan Walley MP (*Labour, Stoke-on-Trent North*)
David Wright MP (*Labour, Telford*)

Powers

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.

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.

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); Emma Downing (Committee Specialist); Eric Lewis (Committee Specialist); Anna O'Rourke (Committee Assistant); and Caroline McElwee (Secretary).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk, Environmental Audit Committee, Committee Office, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 6150; the Committee's e-mail address is: eacom@parliament.uk

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'.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Remit and core tasks	2
Core Tasks	2
Overview of 2003	2
New Chairman	3
Working with a cross-departmental remit	5
Liaison with other select committees	5
Keeping up to-date	5
Key themes of the year	6
Waste	6
Greening Government	6
Fiscal Issues	8
Energy	9
Education for sustainable development	10
World Summit Follow-up	12
Government responses	12
Looking ahead to 2004	13
Past reports from the Environmental Audit Committee since 1997	18

Remit and core tasks

1. The Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) is the Commons select committee responsible for scrutinising how far the Government is mainstreaming sustainable development across its departments and policies.

Core Tasks

2. As a result of the Modernisation Committee's February 2002 report¹, the House of Commons Liaison Committee agreed four overall objectives and ten core tasks against which House of Commons departmental select committees are encouraged to report annually. This is intended to engender a systematic and comprehensive approach to their committee scrutiny activities. The objectives encourage Committees to examine and comment on the policy, expenditure and administration of the departments they shadow and to assist the House in debate and decision. The Liaison Committee has acknowledged that not all of these core tasks are appropriate to the remit of a non-departmental committee such as the EAC. However, we do seek to apply the overall objectives in our wider remit of examining sustainable development across Government and this report outlines how we have worked to those objectives in 2003.

Overview of 2003

"The challenge for this Government today is in continuing to integrate the goal of environmental modernisation into our vision of Britain. To combine greater economic development with better environmental impact—bringing the environment, economic development and social justice together.

I believe our approach offers the best hope for reversing the conditions that lead to hunger and division, and for building a more prosperous, just and stable world."

The Prime Minister, 24 February 2003

".....there is indeed an impressive range of policy documents and guidance in place which relate to sustainable development. But our fear is that much of the work undertaken on this agenda occupies a limbo existence which has little impact on departments' real priorities. It is a fear which is compounded by the very concept of sustainable development which can all too easily be used to obfuscate as well as empower."

House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee
Greening Government Report, November 2003

¹ First report from the Modernisation Committee, Session 2001-02, on Select Committees, HC 224.

3. The Committee has made effective use of its cross-departmental remit this year and has ranged across a wide spectrum of policy and administration issues. We have received oral and/or written evidence from at least nine Government departments, and have analysed and reported on the data provided by *all* departments regarding the incorporation of environmental objectives into both policy and operations (see Table 1 overleaf). We have also made timely contributions to the formulation of the Energy and Aviation White Papers whilst continuing to monitor our regular themes such as the Sustainable Development Headline Indicators, Greening Government, and the Budget and Pre-Budget Report.

4. This year has seen a number of firsts for the Committee. We have used our power to establish a sub-committee, taken oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills; and heard evidence from members of the public in a family home.

New Chairman

5. After six years as Chairman of the EAC, John Horam MP, Conservative Member for Orpington, stood down in July and Peter Ainsworth MP, Conservative Member for East Surrey, was elected as the new Chairman. Mr Ainsworth has been on the Committee since 9 January 2003 and was a member of the Environment Committee (now Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) in 1993/4. An Early Day Motion² expressed Members' gratitude to Mr Horam for the invaluable contribution he had made to environmental audit and sustainable development during his time as Chairman and recognised his role in establishing the Committee not only as an influential driver for change in Government but also as a strong advocate for sustainable development within Parliament and beyond.

2 EDM No.1604 (Session 2002-03), *Honourable Member for Orpington*.

Table 1: Departments contributing oral and/or written evidence to EAC inquiries in 2003

DEPARTMENT ³	INQUIRY CONTRIBUTION	
	ORAL & WRITTEN	WRITTEN ONLY
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)		Learning the Sustainability Lesson
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002— From Rhetoric to Reality Waste—An Audit Genetically Modified Food—Evaluating the Farm Scale Trials. (current inquiry)	Sustainable Development Headline Indicators Learning the Sustainability Lesson
Department for Education and Skills (DfES)	Learning the Sustainability Lesson	
Department for International Development (DFID)		The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002— From Rhetoric to Reality
Department for Transport (DoT)	Budget 2003 and Aviation	
Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)	Energy White Paper—Empowering Change	
Export Credits Guarantee Department (EGCD)	Export Credits Guarantee Department and Sustainable Development	
Home Office	Buying Time for Timber/Greening Government	
HM Treasury	Pre-Budget Report 2002 Budget 2003 and Aviation	

3 The Committee's report *Greening Government 2003* drew on data provided by all Government departments.

Working with a cross-departmental remit

Liaison with other select committees

6. Our cross-departmental remit inevitably means that our inquiries overlap with the work of departmental select committees, especially in relation to topical issues.

7. This year, we were keen to scrutinise waste management issues, as were the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee. Both committees were aware that key legislative deadlines and a pertinent report by the Government's Strategy Unit were on the horizon. We worked together with the EFRA committee to co-ordinate the timing and scope of the inquiries to ensure that the issue was effectively scrutinised whilst avoiding unnecessary repetition of written and oral evidence. Our resultant report, *Waste—An Audit* was then the joint subject of an Estimates Day debate in the House in June, along with the EFRA Committee's report on the future of waste management.⁴

8. We have also co-ordinated inquiries on genetically modified food with the EFRA Committee. That Committee has considered the GM Debate whilst we decided to follow-up our 1999 report on the Farm Scale Evaluations—the three year programme of research designed to test particular herbicide regimes used with specific GM crops against conventional farming methods in terms of their impact on biodiversity. The first trial results were published in October 2003 and we are examining both the design and operation of the trials and the implications for future commercialisation of GM crops in the UK.

9. Energy was a hot topic for select committees this year with the preparation for, and follow-up to, the Government's long awaited Energy White Paper. Our energy report, *A Sustainable Energy Strategy? Renewables and the PIU review*, was debated in Westminster Hall on 12 June along with reports from the Science and Technology Committee and the Trade and Industry Committee which had examined the research and development and security of supply respectively.⁵

Keeping up to-date

10. Our cross-departmental remit and the scope of sustainable development policy itself requires us to keep abreast of a wide range of issues. We are arranging an increasing number of informal briefing seminars to help orientate ourselves before embarking on new inquiry areas or updating ourselves on recent developments if returning to a subject. In January 2003 we invited a range of individuals involved in education for sustainable development to help us scope our education inquiry. In December 2003 we were briefed on current waste issues by the Environment Agency and Wastewatch ahead of our oral evidence session with Rt Hon. Margaret Beckett MP, the Secretary of State for

4 See HC Deb, 19 June 2003, col 565-594 and Eighth Report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2002-03, on the Future of Waste Management, HC 385-I.

5 See HC Deb 12 June 2003, col 309-352.

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which was a follow-up session to our April report, *Waste—An Audit*.

Key themes of the year

11. This year we have published ten Reports. These are listed on the back of this annual report. They cover a wide range of topics, from aviation to education and from energy to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Waste

12. We devoted the first quarter of 2003 to auditing the Government's progress on meeting the requirements of its Waste Strategy 2000 and found that the strategy had yet to be implemented effectively.⁶ We published the Government response as a special report in October with commentaries from outside organisations including the Environmental Services Association (ESA), WasteWatch, and the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWEM). We felt that the Government response did not comprehensively address our concerns and therefore took further oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in December. The Committee questioned the Secretary of State in particular about the UK's readiness for dealing with hazardous waste after July 2004 when the practice of co-disposing hazardous waste and non-hazardous waste will be banned by the EU Landfill Directive.⁷

Greening Government

13. Our work on Greening Government forms a core part of our role. The phrase refers not only to incorporating environmental objectives in operational aspects of departmental performance (eg by reducing energy and water consumption and recycling waste); but also—and in some senses more importantly—to greening the fundamental objectives of departments by ensuring that full weight is given to environmental impacts in policy appraisal and development.

14. Our greening government scrutiny takes on a number of forms. It may be a “traditional” inquiry or desk-based. We may also take the opportunity to ask a Minister “greening government” questions when appearing before us regarding other matters, or have a specific session if there are particular issues we would like to explore. These sessions do not always result in a report but allow us to monitor and highlight developments in this area. For example, in July 2003 we questioned Fiona MacTaggart MP, Green Minister at the Home Office and her officials regarding GreenPeace's allegations that illegally logged timber had been used in the sheets of plywood added to the original site hoarding for the Home Office's new headquarters at 2 Marsham Street, London. The Government has a

6 Fifth report of the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2002-03, *Waste—An Audit*, HC99-I, para 70.

7 Sustainable Development in Government: First Annual Report, DEFRA, November 2002.

policy of only purchasing timber from legal and sustainable sources and this session highlighted the current difficulties the Government is experiencing in implementing this policy.⁸

15. In November 2003, we published the latest in our series of reports on this topic—*Greening Government 2003*. This was based on an analysis of *Sustainable Development in Government: First Annual Report*—the Government’s own monitoring report in this area and the successor to the series of reports from the Green Ministers Committee.⁹ Our report was unusual insofar as it was based almost entirely on a desk-based analysis of questionnaire returns provided by departments and published by DEFRA on the Government’s Sustainable Development web site. Indeed, we noted in the report that the National Audit Office would be well-placed to carry out this work and assist us with future inquiries. We anticipate that the NAO’s input might be not only in the form of a regular annual submission analysing departmental data and performance against targets, but also analyses of specific issues arising and we look forward to working with the NAO on this topic during 2004.

16. With regard to the impact of our work on Greening Government, we are very pleased that DEFRA has made publicly available the complete departmental responses to the questionnaire it regularly sends out. This is a direct response to a recommendation we made nearly four years ago.¹⁰ As we commented in *Greening Government 2003*, this marks a significant step forward in terms of transparency and accountability, and has enabled us to carry out a more extensive analysis than we could otherwise have done.

17. We also welcomed the development by the Government of a new Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate. This constitutes a more comprehensive approach to setting targets across all departments and monitoring them in a systematic way, and it goes some way towards responding to our previous recommendations on this score and providing a more formal basis on which we could fulfil our role of auditing departmental performance. However, we also noted that the Framework covers only operational aspects of departmental performance, and that there is still a need for the Government to develop a more systematic approach to setting sustainable development targets in a policy context as a way of providing greater accountability to Parliament through the EAC.

18. As our report was only published in the Autumn, we still await the Government’s response. We were, however, disappointed to note a significant shift in the approach of Government’s latest Sustainable Development in Government report, published towards the end of November 2003. Previous reports have dealt comprehensively with the three key aspects of Greening Government—integrating sustainable development into decision

8 See House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee Minutes of Evidence, *Greening Government and Timber*, Home Office, Wednesday 2 July 2003. This was a follow-up session to the Committee’s Sixth Report of Session 2001-02, *Buying time for forests: Timber trade and public procurement*, HC 792-I.

9 These reports can be found on the Sustainable Development in Government website at <http://www.sustainabledevelopment.gov.uk/sdig/reports/index.htm>.

10 Environmental Audit Committee, Fifth Report of Session 1999-2000, *The Greening Government Initiative: First Annual Report from the Green Ministers Committee*, HC341, para 12.

making, improving the performance of the Government Estate, and promoting understanding of sustainable development across Government. However, the latest report deals only with estate management issues such as waste, water and energy. It goes on to suggest that commentary on the two other key aspects might more appropriately be contained in the Government's annual report on the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. We are seriously concerned about this development and trust that the Government will think again when it comes to respond to our report.

Fiscal Issues

19. The examination of fiscal issues continues to be a regular feature of our annual workload. This reflects our commitment to assessing the progress the Treasury is making in implementing the Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation, in which it promised to reform the tax system over time and shift the incentives from environmental "goods" to "bads". We published our *Pre-Budget Report 2002* in April 2003 and followed this up with a further report, *Budget 2003 and Aviation*, examining the proposals for expanding aviation capacity in the context of the environmental costs associated with aviation.

20. In both these reports we raised a number of strategic concerns over the Treasury's environmental tax strategy and its increasing reliance on evaluating environmental impacts in financial terms. One of the points we made was that current approaches do not take account of the risk of significant or catastrophic changes to the environment. We were pleased to note that the Government, in response to our Aviation report, has acknowledged this difficulty and is currently reviewing its approach in this area through the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on the Social Cost of Carbon. However, the responses do little to address the other issues of principle we raised over the robustness of financial evaluations or the conflict between financial and non-financial approaches to evaluating environmental impacts.

21. On some more specific issues, impacts from our reports have been varied. We argued in our Pre-Budget Report that the Government's Climate Change strategy was seriously off-course and current progress and future projections must be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The Treasury hit back, claiming "factual inaccuracies" in the report masked the government's environmental successes, and that data published shortly after our report was agreed showed a 3.5 per cent fall in UK carbon dioxide emissions in 2002 putting the UK firmly on course to meet climate change targets.¹¹ We are, however, sceptical about the extent to which this data reflects a significant downward trend as there are various factors relating to it which need to be taken into account. Indeed, further information released later in the year by the DTI appears to vindicate our claim that the Government will struggle to get anywhere near its 20% carbon reduction target.

22. By contrast, in the same report we argued that the Treasury had no strategy for fuel duties which reflected environmental benefits. While the Government's formal response to our conclusions in this area conceded little and added nothing, we noted with some

¹¹ "MPs criticise greenhouse gas progress and urge chancellor to raise environmental taxes", *Financial Times*, 2 April 2003, p.8.

satisfaction that the Government's latest Pre-Budget Report does now include a proposed Alternative Fuels Framework that outlines the rationale for decisions on Government support for alternative fuels to meet environmental objectives. We plan to examine the adequacy of this framework when we come to report on the Pre-Budget later this year.

23. Some progress has been made this year on introducing fiscal incentives in other areas—in particular, on water abstraction and Landfill Tax. However, we are concerned about the length of time which this is taking. We experienced a feeling of *déjà vu*, for example, when we learned that the Treasury intends to consult the possible use of fiscal incentives to combat diffuse water pollution—some six years after research on this topic was originally conducted. Similarly, consultation on replacing the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme initially began in 2000, while consultation on domestic energy efficiency fiscal incentives has continued to drag on for years. We still see no evidence within the Treasury of an overall strategy and commitment to implement the Statement of Intent and drive forward initiatives in a coordinated and timely fashion.

Energy

24. Energy is of immense importance to all aspects of modern society, and the UK cannot claim to be sustainable without having a sustainable energy policy. The publication of the Energy White Paper on 24 February 2003 marked a significant milestone, concluding as it did nearly three years of intense discussion, consultation, and analysis by various organisations on the nature of a future energy strategy. We therefore took the opportunity to assess to what extent the White Paper fulfilled recommendations from key previous reports by other organisations—including our own 2002 report on a sustainable energy strategy, the Government's response to which was only released on the same day as the White Paper. Our report, *The Energy White Paper—Empowering Change?*, was published in July 2003.

25. Once again, we found a tantalising mix of positive and negative features. The Government's commitment to a 60% cut in carbon dioxide by 2050 is bold and admirable. Yet we were concerned that the policy mechanisms in place were simply not adequate, coherent, and radical enough to ensure that this long term target could be achieved. Since the publication of our report, the Government has now responded to some of the concerns expressed by ourselves and others—for example, by publishing proposals in September to increase Renewable Obligation targets on a rolling basis with the percentage rising to 15% by 2014-15. We were also pleased that the long-delayed new planning guidance on renewable energy offers such strong guidance to local authorities in favour of renewable energy projects.

26. However, we note that the TXU debacle¹² has once again raised concerns among investors about how serious the Government's commitment to renewable energy really is.

12 The energy supply company, TXU (UK) Ltd went into receivership during 2003 and failed to present the required number of Renewables Obligation Certificates or make the full alternative payment to the Renewables Obligation buy-out fund before 1 October 2003. As a result there was a shortfall of £23 million in the sum of money available within the buy-out fund, seriously affecting the confidence of financial investors and reducing the returns of those companies which had successfully met their obligations. Under current statutory arrangements, it is not legally possible for the administrators to make payments to the buy-out fund after the cut-off date of 1 October 2003,

Our concerns were reinforced by the way the Government are pushing ahead with its £60 million Coal Investment Aid scheme while failing to provide firm guarantees for the bankrupt but important ARBRE biomass project.¹³ These developments are also of concern given the evidence which is now emerging for the continuing increase in the use of coal in electricity generation, up by 25% in the second quarter of 2003 over the same period in the previous year.

27. Whatever the relative merits of the Energy White Paper, its long term aspirations have been shot to pieces by the publication in December 2003 of the Government's proposals for aviation expansion. If one accepts the scientific consensus on the impact of radiative forcing, the forecast growth in aviation will give rise to the equivalent of at least 170 million tons of carbon dioxide a year by 2030—three-quarters of the UK's overall target of 229 million tons by 2050. The Government will claim, of course, that aviation emissions are excluded from national targets as they are regulated on an international basis. But it can hardly claim that an increase from 180 to 500 million passengers per annum reflects a sustainable aviation strategy based on sustainable consumption policies.

28. Combating climate change remains the single most urgent priority facing mankind, and we have yet to be convinced that the UK government has in place a coherent and effective set of policies for doing so. The Government is due to publish its energy efficiency implementation plan in February 2004 and we look forward to seeing how far this meets some of our concerns.

Education for sustainable development

29. Time and again during previous inquiries we have demonstrated that policies which seek to promote sustainable development will not bring about the changes required, at the speed required, if the public remains largely unengaged and unimpressed with the whole sustainable development agenda. Everyone needs to play their part to make sustainable development a reality whether at school, work or home and to become better equipped to understand the challenges of the 21st century. Education can be a significant driver for change—ensuring for example, that engineers understand the requirements of our international climate change commitments, business school graduates are up-to-date on corporate social responsibility and citizens understand how their individual actions can make a difference.

30. In January 2003, we established a Sub-committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to examine how far the Government was seeking to harness the power of learning (both informal and formal) in promoting a better understanding of its sustainable development goals. Our report, *Learning the Sustainability Lesson* (July 2003), highlighted a lack of clear vision or strategic thinking relating to ESD within the

though they have made some payments directly to suppliers to reimburse them for part of their losses. Ofgem is still considering whether to take further enforcement action against TXU (UK) Ltd.

13 ARBRE was a high tech gasification plant converting wood chips into gas. The 8-megawatt plant near Eggborough in Yorkshire, planned as the forerunner of many others, was forced to close in August 2002 after only eight full days of operation. See Eighth Report of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (Session 2002-03), Energy White Paper —Empowering Change?, HC 618, paras 31 & 32.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES). In oral evidence to Committee, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the Rt Hon. Charles Clarke MP, admitted that DfES had not been demonstrating sufficient commitment to sustainable development. The Committee also criticised DEFRA's last two major awareness raising campaigns relating to sustainability and lamented the lack of progress on integrating ESD into higher education curricula.

31. Our report also considered informal public education and we took oral evidence from five members of the public, including two school children—all members of one of Global Action Plan's Eco-teams.¹⁴ We chose the unusual venue of their co-ordinator's Nottingham "eco-home"—a Victorian, semi-detached home which is being converted to improve its energy efficiency with due consideration also being given to the effect that every aspect of the house has on the environment. We took advantage of our time in Nottingham to visit Nottinghamshire City Council which is operating a number of ESD initiatives. During the course of the inquiry we also visited students and teachers at Hampstead Comprehensive (Cricklewood), and Ealing, Hammersmith, and West London College.

32. We were pleased to observe that even before the production of our report, the process of our inquiry catalysed the Department for Education and Skills' preparations to deliver a sustainable development action plan for education and skills. The July publication of our report was timed to feed in to Charles Clarke's summer consideration of a draft plan. DfES published their final document on 23 September incorporating both departmental operations and educational policy. DfES' response to our report points to this action plan as a vehicle for meeting most of our recommendations.¹⁵

33. We recognised that the holiday period was not the optimum time to stimulate discussion and we "relaunched" our report on 15 September. Instead of the more usual Westminster press conference, the launch took place as part of the Council for Environmental Education's (CEE) Policy Forum event—*Strategic approaches to ESD in the schools sector*. We were delighted that Ofsted decided to take the opportunity to launch its own report on the benefits of education for sustainable development in schools at the same event, advocating that ESD "should be taken seriously by all schools".¹⁶

34. We also produced a promotional flyer, for the first time, to accompany the report which summarised our recommendations and was available free of charge on request. There was great demand from a variety of local authorities and educational establishments and we have distributed 500 to-date.

14 An Eco-team is a group of 6-8 households who agree to meet together with a facilitator once a month over a 4 month period to work on ways in which to change their consumption practices.

15 Environmental Audit Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2002-03, Government response to the Committee's tenth report, Session 2002-03 on Learning the Sustainability Lesson, HC 1221.

16 Ofsted press release, Education for Sustainable Development should be taken seriously by all schools, 15 September 2003.

World Summit Follow-up

35. In September, we delivered our verdict on the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which took place in Johannesburg in August/September 2002. Our report, *WSSD 2002—From rhetoric to reality* was a follow-up to our examinations of the UK Government preparations for the Summit and observations of the performance of the UK delegation at the Summit.¹⁷ We were especially pleased to have the opportunity to hear a non-UK perspective on WSSD-follow up, by taking oral evidence from the Canadian Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development as well as the Chair and members of the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

36. In our report, we praised the Government for its approach to implementing its WSSD commitments and its leadership in preparation for (and during) the Summit. However, we concluded that the Implementation Plan agreed by Heads of Government at the Summit was too vague and too woolly itself to provide an effective blueprint for domestic action, although it has the potential to generate some real policy changes across Whitehall. We are therefore looking to the Government to translate the Action Plan into a more robust and auditable implementation programme against which progress can be reported to Parliament and we will continue to monitor how far the Johannesburg commitments are reflected in specific departmental targets and objectives, including those set in the 2004 Spending Review.

Government responses

37. The Government is normally expected to provide a substantive response to each Report from a select committee within two months of its publication. Only two of our ten reports this year have received a response within the recognised deadline (see Table 2). In five cases, the Committee has agreed extensions to the deadline because the Government is about to publish a White Paper (e.g in the case of our energy and aviation reports), or the deadline falls over a holiday period.

38. The response to our timber report arrived ten months late—an unacceptable delay. The Minister for the Environment and Agri-Environment, Elliot Morley MP, formally apologised to us for the “inordinate time” it took which he attributed to the range of departments which needed to be consulted, a decision to incorporate the results of work which was then delayed, and administrative error.¹⁸

39. On average, even taking into account agreed extensions, responses have been 58 days late. This record is skewed by the extraordinary delay with the timber response. If this is

17 See Third Report (Session 2001-02), *UK Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, HC 616-I and—Second Report (Session 2002-03) *Johannesburg and Back: The World Summit on Sustainable Development—Committee Delegation Report on Proceedings*.

18 Letter of 8 September 2003 from Eliot Morley MP, Minister of State for Environment and Agri-Environment to Peter Ainsworth MP, Chairman of the EAC.

discounted, the average delay is 32 days—a marked improvement on the 2002 average delay of 68 days.

40. We are aware that our cross-departmental remit means that a number of departments may be required to sign off a response to one of our reports and are broadly sympathetic to the reality that this will occasionally mean that we have to wait longer for Government responses than we would like. However, it is unsatisfactory for the Department mediating the Government response to consider this as permission to allow the process of collating the report to drag on unnecessarily. In future, we will request formal notification by Ministers if a Government response is not going to be available by the two-month deadline, and we will require a substantive explanation of any delay.

Looking ahead to 2004

41. The EAC carries over a number of work streams into 2004. For example, our inquiry—*Genetically Modified Food—Evaluating Farm Scale Trials*, instigated in September 2003, continues into the New Year. The final evidence session, took place on 13 January 2004 with the Minister of State for Environment and Agri-Environment, Elliot Morley MP. We expect to publish our report by Spring 2004. Meanwhile, our newly established Environmental Crime Sub-committee announced its first inquiry on environmental crime and the courts on 12 December 2003 and it will be undertaking a series of short inquiries in the first half of 2004.¹⁹

42. Further elements of our 2004 work programme will be discussed at our strategic planning seminar at Farnham Castle, Surrey, on 20 January 2004. A leading contender for our attention this year will be the revision of the UK Strategy for Sustainable Development and its related indicators, which is due to be completed early in 2005. This will be a major opportunity to ensure that the Strategy reflects the UK's commitments resulting from the World Summit on Sustainable Development and is a key point of reference, not just a bolt-on extra, at the heart of policy-making.

19 Environmental Audit Committee press release, *New Inquiry: Environmental Crime*, 12 December 2003.

Table 2: Government responses 2003

REPORT	Published/ 2003	Government reply received/2003	DAYS TO REPLY	Days Overdue ²⁰
Pre-Budget Report 2002	1 April	20 May	49	0
Waste-An Audit	23 April	20 October	173	112
Buying Time for Forests: Timber Trade and Public Procurement—Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report, Session 2001-02	24 July 2002 (Original report) Response published as part of report on 8 July.	1 July (published with comment as Committee report)	341	260
Export Credits Guarantee Department and Sustainable Development	17 July	29 October (response requested by 13 October)	104	16
The Energy White Paper—Empowering Change?	22 July	10 November (Response requested by 13 October. Committee agreed to DTI request to send response with Energy White Paper.)	111	[50]

²⁰ For the purposes of these calculations we have assumed two months to equate to 61 days.

[x] denotes where the Committee agreed a non-specific extension beyond the original deadline.

Budget 2003 and Aviation	29 July	16 December (Response requested by 13 October) Committee agreed to DoT request to submit with Aviation White Paper	140	[64]
Learning the Sustainability Lesson	31 July	13 October (To EAC deadline which accounted for recess)	74	0
Sustainable Development Headline Indicators	13 October	Response requested by 15.12.03		16 as at 31.12.03
World Summit on Sustainable Development—From Rhetoric to Reality	23 October	Response requested by 6.01.04	76	1
Greening Government 2003	13 November	EAC agreed to a deadline of 29.02.04 in the light of subsequent DEFRA work in this area.	-	-

Formal minutes

Tuesday 13 January 2004

Members present:

Mr Peter Ainsworth, in the Chair

Mr Gregory Barker

Mr Malcolm Savidge

Sue Doughty

Mr Simon Thomas

Mr Paul Flynn

Joan Walley

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Annual Report 2003), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 42 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

The Committee deliberated further.

*

*

*

[Adjourned till Wednesday 21 January at 3.30pm.]

Past reports from the Environmental Audit Committee since 1997

2002-03 Session

First	Pesticides: The Voluntary Initiative, HC100 (<i>Reply, HC 443</i>)
Second	Johannesburg and Back: The World Summit on Sustainable Development–Committee delegation report on proceedings, HC 169
Third	Annual Report, HC 262
Fourth	Pre-Budget 2002, HC 167 (<i>Reply, HC 688</i>)
Fifth	Waste – An Audit, HC 99 (<i>Reply, HC 1081</i>)
Sixth	Buying Time for Forests: Timber Trade and Public Procurement - The Government Response, HC 909
Seventh	Export Credits Guarantee Department and Sustainable Development, HC 689 (<i>Reply, HC 1238</i>)
Eighth	Energy White Paper – Empowering Change?, HC 618
Ninth	Budget 2003 and Aviation, HC 672
Tenth	Learning the Sustainability Lesson, HC 472 (<i>Reply, HC1221</i>)
Eleventh	Sustainable Development Headline Indicators, HC 1080
Twelfth	World Summit for Sustainable Development – From rhetoric to reality, HC 98
Thirteenth	Greening Government 2003, HC 961

2001-02 Session

First	Departmental Responsibilities for Sustainable Development, HC 326 (<i>Reply, Cm 5519</i>)
Second	Pre-Budget Report 2001: <i>A New Agenda?</i> , HC 363 (<i>HC 1000</i>)
Third	UK Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, HC 616 (<i>Reply, Cm 5558</i>)
Fourth	Measuring the Quality of Life: The Sustainable Development Headline Indicators, HC 824 (<i>Reply, Cm 5650</i>)
Fifth	A Sustainable Energy Strategy? Renewables and the PIU Review, HC 582 (<i>Reply, HC 471</i>)
Sixth	Buying Time for Forests: <i>Timber Trade and Public Procurement</i> , HC 792-I, (<i>Reply, HC 909, Session 2002-03</i>)

2000-01 Session

First	Environmental Audit: <i>the first Parliament</i> , HC 67 (<i>Reply, Cm 5098</i>)
Second	The Pre-Budget Report 2000: <i>fuelling the debate</i> , HC 71 (<i>Reply HC 216, Session 2001-02</i>)

1999-2000 Session

First	EU Policy and the Environment: An Agenda for the Helsinki Summit, HC 44 (<i>Reply, HC 68</i>)
Second	World Trade and Sustainable Development: An Agenda for the Seattle Summit, HC 45 (Including the Government response to the First Report 1998-99: Multilateral Agreement on Investment, HC 58) (<i>Reply, HC 69</i>)
Third	Comprehensive Spending Review: Government response and follow-up, HC 233 (<i>Reply, HC 70, Session 2000-01</i>)
Fourth	The Pre-Budget Report 1999: pesticides, aggregates and the Climate Change Levy, HC 76

Fifth	The Greening Government Initiative: first annual report from the Green Ministers Committee 1998/99, HC 341
Sixth	Budget 2000 and the Environment etc., HC 404
Seventh	Water Prices and the Environment, HC 597 (<i>Reply, HC 290, Session 2000-01</i>)

1998-99 Session

First	The Multilateral Agreement on Investment, HC 58 (<i>Reply, HC 45, Session 1999-2000</i>)
Second	Climate Change: Government response and follow-up, HC 88
Third	The Comprehensive Spending Review and Public Service Agreements, HC 92 (<i>Reply, HC 233, Session 1999-2000</i>)
Fourth	The Pre-Budget Report 1998, HC 93
Fifth	GMOs and the Environment: Coordination of Government Policy, HC 384 (<i>Reply Cm 4528</i>)
Sixth	The Greening Government Initiative 1999, HC 426
Seventh	Energy Efficiency, HC 159 (<i>Reply, HC 571, Session 2000-01</i>)
Eighth	The Budget 1999: Environmental Implications, HC 326

1997-98 Session

First	The Pre-Budget Report, HC 547 (<i>Reply, HC 985</i>)
Second	The Greening Government Initiative, HC 517 (<i>Reply, HC 426, Session 1998-99</i>)
Third	The Pre-Budget Report: Government response and follow-up, HC 985
Fourth	Climate Change: UK Emission Reduction Targets and Audit Arrangements, HC 899 (<i>Reply, HC 88, Session 1998-99</i>)
