



House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Work of the
Committee in 2005–06**

First Report of Session 2006–07

Report, together with formal minutes

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Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated bodies.

Current membership

Mr Michael Jack (Conservative, Fylde) (Chairman)
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Conservative, Torridge & West Devon)
Mr David Drew (Labour, Stroud)
James Duddridge (Conservative, Rochford & Southend East)
Patrick Hall (Labour, Bedford)
Lynne Jones (Labour, Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Daniel Kawczynski (Conservative, Shrewsbury & Atcham)
David Lepper (Labour, Brighton Pavilion)
Mrs Madeleine Moon (Labour, Bridgend)
Mr Jamie Reed (Labour, Copeland)
Mr Dan Rogerson (Liberal Democrat, North Cornwall)
Sir Peter Soulsby (Labour, Leicester South)
David Taylor (Labour, North West Leicestershire)
Mr Roger Williams (Liberal Democrat, Brecon & Radnorshire)

Mr Shailesh Vara (Conservative, North West Cambridgeshire) was a member of the Committee during the 2005–06 session.

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

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/efracom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Chris Stanton (Clerk), Jenny McCullough (Second Clerk), Jonathan Little and Dr Antonia James (Committee Specialists), Marek Kubala (Inquiry Manager), Andy Boyd and Alison Mara (Committee Assistants) and Mandy Sullivan (Secretary).

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Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
1 Overview of the Committee’s work in 2005–06	3
Introduction	3
Visits	4
Conferences and informal meetings	6
2 Core tasks	8
Introduction	8
Inquiries into:	9
Government policy proposals	9
Areas seen by the Committee as requiring examination because of deficiencies	10
Departmental actions	12
The work of the Department’s agencies and associated public bodies	13
Major appointments	14
Implementation of legislation and major policy initiatives	14
Examination of draft legislation	15
Examination of expenditure	15
Evidence from ministers	16
Public Service Agreements	16
Assisting the House	17
3 Working methods	18
Introduction	18
Committee ‘away day’ and self-examination of working methods	18
Public outreach	18
Avian influenza ‘Observatory’	19
Media coverage	19
The Scrutiny Unit	19
National Audit Office	20
Working with Defra	20
Provision of papers and information	20
Evidence from former ministers and officials	20
Annex: Informal meetings with visitors to Westminster	21
Formal minutes	22

1 Overview of the Committee's work in 2005–06

Introduction

1. This report is a review of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's work between the General Election in 2005 and the end of 2006. We set out the main developments during the year in this introductory section, and then review the Committee's performance in relation to the 'core tasks' for select committees, as interpreted by the Liaison Committee.¹ In the final section of our report we discuss the working methods we have adopted in the 2005 Parliament and comment on our relationship with Defra.

2. The Committee is charged with the responsibility of examining the expenditure, administration and policy of Defra and its associated public bodies. In carrying out our remit we seek to strike a balance between undertaking detailed inquiries into major policy issues, systematic examination of the Department's discharge of its duties across the range of its activities, and responding rapidly to important developments, including the publication of key consultation documents and legislation in draft. The range of subjects which we have tackled in 2005–06 reflects the wide reach of Defra's remit and its responsibility for "delivering the essentials of life".²

3. Our report on the reform of the EU sugar regime informed the Government's position in European Council negotiations. The inquiry into climate change: the role of bioenergy produced a detailed assessment of Government policy in the area, and a comprehensive survey of the current state of bioenergy technology and the market for its development. Through our work on the Government's proposals for the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, we conducted a public outreach exercise which was valuable not only to our inquiry but also to our relationship with the farming and wider rural community. Our examination of deficiencies in the implementation of the Single Farm Payment Scheme led us to seek, and secure access to, documents not previously disclosed to select committees. A full list of the subjects on which we took evidence is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Subjects covered by the Committee in 2005–06

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Evidence sessions in 2005–06</i>	<i>Sub-committee?</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Work of Defra 2005	1	No	Evidence, November 2005

1 following a Resolution of the House made on 14 May 2002.

2 *Delivering the essentials of life: Defra's five year strategy*, Cm 6411, December 2004

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Evidence sessions in 2005–06</i>	<i>Sub-committee?</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Reform of the EU Sugar Regime	3	No	Report, November 2005; Government response, February 2006
Avian influenza	1	No [an informal 'Observatory' was established to monitor developments in this area]	Evidence, November 2005
The Animal Welfare Bill	1	No	Report, December 2005
Defra's Departmental Annual Report 2005	1	No	Report, December 2005; Government response, March 2005
Rural Payments Agency	9 (including 1 in Main Committee)	Yes	Evidence (in Main Committee), Interim Report, January 2006; Evidence April 2006–December 2006)
Bovine TB: badger culling	1	No	Report, March 2006
The Environment Agency	4	No	Report, May 2006; Government and Environment Agency responses, July 2006
Work of Defra 2006	1	No	Evidence, July 2006
Climate change: the role of bioenergy	6	No	Report, September 2006; Government Response, December 2006
Defra's Departmental Report 2006 and budget	2	No	Evidence, July 2006, December 2006
The UK Government's "Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy"	5	No	Evidence, June–October 2006
Climate change: the "citizen's agenda"	6	No	Evidence, October 2006–

Visits

4. Two major areas of our work in 2005–06—climate change and the future of the Common Agricultural Policy—related to aspects of environmental and agricultural policy

with significant international implications. In undertaking overseas visits in connection with these inquiries we took the principled step of dividing into smaller groups, in order to cover more ground than would otherwise have been possible, in the most cost-effective manner. With the assistance of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, careful planning allowed us to supplement our programmes with participation in events such as farm visits and an academic seminar. We are most grateful to those who hosted the Committee during our overseas visits.

5. Our visits within the UK have also played a significant part in our work in 2005–06. We comment in more detail on our visit to the Royal Agricultural Show at Stoneleigh below.³ The informal meetings we held during our visit to Leicester in September served as a useful introduction to our programme of oral evidence on climate change: the “citizen’s agenda”.

6. A full list of our visits in 2005–06 is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Visits by the Committee in 2005–06

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Purpose of visit</i>
Abbotts Hall Farm, Essex	November 2005	Committee away day ⁴
Rural Payments Agency, Reading	December 2005	Rapporteurs’ visit to the RPA
Environment Agency, London	December 2005	Inquiry into the Environment Agency
Hong Kong	December 2005	WTO Ministerial Conference (travel in a representative capacity)
Brussels	January 2006	Visit to the European Commission and European Parliament

³ See paragraphs 45–47.

⁴ See paragraphs 42–44.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Purpose of visit</i>
USA [Washington DC, San Francisco and Sacramento] and China [Beijing and Changchung]	March 2006	Inquiries into climate change: the role of bioenergy, the “citizen’s agenda” and international climate change policy post-2012
Poland and Romania; France and Germany	June 2006	Inquiry into the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy”
Vienna	June 2006	Conference of EU Environment Committees (delegation)
Royal Agricultural Show, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire [including a visit to the “Environmental vision”] ⁵	July 2006	Inquiry into the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy”
Helsinki	September 2006	Asia-Europe Climate Challenge Dialogue (travel in a representative capacity)
Leicester [“Eco House” and “Solar Streets” projects, and Eyres Monsell Primary School]	September 2006	Inquiry into climate change: the “citizen’s agenda”
Helsinki	October 2006	Conference of EU Agriculture Committees (delegation)

Conferences and informal meetings

7. As set out in Table 2, in 2005–06 we sent delegations to two conferences of EU parliamentarians. As part of Parliament’s involvement in the UK’s Presidency of the EU in 2005 we co-hosted—with House of Lords EU Sub-committee D—a conference of

⁵ A “virtual farm” hosted by the Rural Development Service, English Nature and the Countryside Agency, designed to display the Government’s vision of rural England since new environmental grants were introduced.

environment and agriculture committees of EU national parliaments and the European Parliament.

8. The conference made a valuable contribution to the debate on climate change among European parliamentarians, with speeches from Rt Hon Elliot Morley MP, the then Minister for Climate Change and Environment, Stavros Dimas, European Commissioner for Environment, and Lord Oxburgh, former Chairman of the UK Inter-Agency Committee on the Environment and Global Change; and remarks from Dr Kevin Anderson, Senior Research Fellow at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, and Professor Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency. We are grateful to our counterparts in the Lords and to the Overseas Office (European Section) in the House of Commons for working with us to make the conference a success.

9. In November 2005 we met informally with the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, to hear from members of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM). The meeting gave us a clear idea of the progress CoRWM had made towards an assessment of the options for managing radioactive waste in the UK. We have also held informal meetings at Westminster with, amongst others, a delegation from the Danish European Affairs Committee, agriculture and environment ministers from New Zealand and Australia, German parliamentarians with an interest in food issues, and academics and environmental management professionals from the Netherlands and India.⁶

⁶ For a full list of these informal meetings, see the Annex to this Report.

2 Core tasks

Introduction

10. Following a resolution of the House made on 14 May 2002, the Liaison Committee established a set of common objectives or ‘core tasks’ for select committees. Committees are invited to review how they have met these objectives in their annual reports.

11. Accordingly we set out to show how our work in 2005–06 relates to: Government policy proposals, areas seen by the Committee as requiring examination because of deficiencies, departmental actions, associated public bodies, major appointments, and implementation of legislation and major policy initiatives; examination of any draft legislation; examination of expenditure; and examination of Public Service Agreements.

12. Committees are also invited to report on ministers’ appearances before them, and on how they have assisted the House in debate and decision. Table 3 summarises our work in relation to the ‘core tasks’. This is followed by a more detailed commentary.

Table 3: Liaison Committee ‘core tasks’ relevant to 2005–06 inquiries

	Government policy proposals	Examination of deficiencies	Departmental actions	Associated public bodies	Major appointments	Implementation of legislation and major policy issues	Draft legislation	Expenditure	Evidence from Minister	Public Service Agreements
Work of Defra 2005	√	√	√			√		√	√	√
Reform of the EU Sugar Regime	√		√			√	(√)		√	(√)
Avian Influenza		(√)	√	√		√			√	(√)
The Animal Welfare Bill	√						(√)		√	(√)
Defra’s Departmental Annual Report 2005	√	√	√	√	(√)	√		√		√
Rural Payments Agency	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Bovine TB: badger culling	√	√	√	(√)				(√)		(√)
The Environment Agency		(√)	√	√		√		√	√	√
Work of Defra 2006	√	√	√			√		√	√	√
Climate change: the role of bioenergy	√	√	√			√		√	√	(√)
Defra’s Departmental Report 2006	√	√	√	√		√		√		√

	Government policy proposals	Examination of deficiencies	Departmental actions	Associated public bodies	Major appointments	Implementation of legislation and major policy issues	Draft legislation	Expenditure	Evidence from Minister	Public Service Agreements
and Defra's budget										
The UK Government's "Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy"	√	(√)	√			√		√	√	√
Climate change: the "citizen's agenda"	√		√	(√)		√				√

√ = the work of the Committee on this inquiry fulfils the criterion

(√) = the work of the Committee on this inquiry is relevant to the criterion

Subjects in the shaded area relate to inquiries on which the Committee has not yet reported. In addition the Committee plans to report again on the Rural Payments Agency.

Inquiries into:

Government policy proposals

13. We scrutinise Defra's policy proposals in a variety of ways: in conducting related inquiries (such as our suite of inquiries into climate change, which take into account the strategy set out in *Climate Change: the UK Programme 2006*),⁷ in responding rapidly to developments (such as the launch of a consultation on controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle in high incidence areas in England: badger culling, on which we took evidence in February 2006, and on which we make further comment below,⁸ and in holding evidence sessions with the Secretary of State on the Work of Defra and the Permanent Secretary on Defra's Departmental Annual Reports.

14. Much of Defra's work—and therefore our work—is generated by the UK's membership of the EU. In seeking to exert influence on Defra's policy we are very much aware of the European dimension. Following up the work of our predecessor Committee on the subject, our inquiry into the Reform of the EU Sugar Regime was carefully planned and swiftly carried out to ensure that we were able to inform the UK's negotiating position ahead of the key European Council meeting where agreement on a sugar reform package was

⁷ *Climate Change: the UK Programme 2006*, Cm 6764

⁸ *Controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle in high incidence areas in England: badger culling—a consultation document* issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, December 2005; see paragraph 17.

secured.⁹ The Government response to our Report noted that the overall framework of the agreed package was very much in line with the Committee’s recommendations.¹⁰

15. In December 2005, HM Treasury and Defra launched their joint paper, “A Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy”. The paper intended to stimulate debate by describing where the UK Government was aiming to be, in terms of European agricultural policy reform, in 10 to 15 years’ time. We decided to examine the Government’s proposals, in order to explore the “Vision” in detail and to test the validity of the assumptions underlying its conclusions. We will publish a report on this subject shortly.

Table 4: Reports on Government and European Union policy proposals

<i>Report</i>	<i>Principal findings</i>
Reform of the EU Sugar Regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –urged the Government to support the Commission’s stance on price cuts –concluded that direct payments to sugar beet growers should be fully decoupled from production –called for recognition of the UK’s sugar industry in any compensation package, and for equitable terms of competition between the cane and beet sectors in the UK –urged the Government to support the maximum possible increase in the level of assistance for the African, Caribbean and Pacific sugar-supplying countries

Areas seen by the Committee as requiring examination because of deficiencies

16. Identifying deficiencies in the actions of Government departments or agencies has been the main objective of our work on the Rural Payments Agency. In 2005 we appointed rapporteurs to follow up the work of our predecessor Committee, which had commented on delays in making subsidy payments, particularly to cattle farmers, and urged Defra to keep a watchful eye on the development of a new IT system under the Agency’s Change Programme. On the recommendation of the rapporteurs we held an evidence session in January, after which we produced an interim report.¹¹ We subsequently extended our inquiry and appointed a sub-committee to take further evidence. We will publish a report on this subject shortly. We comment on this inquiry in more detail below.¹²

17. When Defra issued a consultation paper on badger culling in December 2005, the Committee decided to hold a short inquiry which would focus on the key questions Ministers needed to address in reaching conclusions on the issues set out in the consultation paper. The evidence we received identified a number of concerns about the

9 Second Report, Session 2005–06, *Reform of the EU Sugar Regime*, HC 585

10 Fourth Special Report, Session 2005–06, *Reform of the EU Sugar Regime: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report*, HC 927, p 1

11 Fifth Report, Session 2005–06, *Rural Payments Agency: interim report*, HC 840

12 See paragraph 56.

consultation process and whilst we did not undertake a full-scale inquiry into the proposals, we presented a summary of these concerns with the evidence we took as our contribution to the consultation.¹³

18. Following concerns raised in our evidence session on Defra's Departmental Report 2006 and subsequent developments in relation to the budgets of agencies and other public bodies sponsored by Defra, we decided to extend our inquiry and take further written and oral evidence on Defra's management of its finances. We comment on this inquiry in more detail below.¹⁴

13 Sixth Report, Session 2005–06, *Bovine TB: badger culling*, HC 905

14 See paragraphs 31 and 32.

Table 5: Reports on deficiencies in the work of Defra and its agencies

<i>Report</i>	<i>Principal findings</i>
Rural Payments Agency: interim report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –concluded that neither Defra nor the RPA gave sufficient consideration to the administrative complexity of the chosen payment model for implementing the Single Farm Payment –registered alarm about the scale of the cost overrun on the revenue of the RPA’s IT contract with Accenture and more generally about the IT problems encountered by the RPA –criticised the Government’s failure—close to the proposed date for making payments, and nearly a year after that date was announced by the RPA—to give a definitive statement about when full payments would be made, or whether farmers would instead initially receive partial payments
Bovine TB: badger culling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –highlighted key concerns raised in evidence: lack of pre-consultation soundings of scientists or other interested parties, insufficient recognition of the “edge effect” (increase in incidence of bovine TB immediately outside an area subject to culling), lack of consideration of the ‘human dimension’, lack of capacity to carry out the culling options set out, and insufficient recognition of measures other than culling

Departmental actions

19. The Committee has taken evidence on specific departmental actions during the course of 2005–06, as part of ongoing inquiries and in connection with important developments. One such development was the rapid spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1. In a “one-off” session we took evidence from Ben Bradshaw MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (now Minister of State) for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare, Ms Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive, State Veterinary Service, and Dr Debby Reynolds, Chief Veterinary Officer.¹⁵

20. We examined actions taken by Defra and the State Veterinary Service in relation to matters such as contingency planning for an outbreak of H5N1 in the UK, quarantine and trade arrangements for exotic wild birds, wild bird surveillance, and requirements for poultry keepers and the poultry industry. We comment on our subsequent work on avian influenza below.¹⁶

21. Our inquiry into climate change: the role of bioenergy included an analysis of the policies Defra had developed on bioenergy, and how it had pursued them. We concluded that if its actions in this area were to be indicative of its commitment to the domestic

¹⁵ Oral evidence taken before the Committee on 15 November 2005, HC (2005–06) 682-i

¹⁶ See paragraphs 48–49.

climate change agenda, the Government needed to renew and redouble its efforts to exploit the potential of bioenergy.¹⁷

Table 6: Inquiries into Departmental Actions

<i>Report</i>	<i>Principal findings</i>
Climate change: the role of bioenergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –concluded that the Government is not making the most of bioenergy as a means of reducing carbon emissions and recommended an increased focus on renewable heat –recommended that departments work much more closely together to develop a more streamlined and coherent strategy –urged the Government to examine the barriers to further progress on ‘second generation’ biofuels –recommended changes to the terms of the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation to encourage investment in advanced bioenergy technology
Government response to the Committee’s Report ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –the Committee commented that the Government’s response to the Report did not show evidence of any heightened ambition, or increased drive for coherent action across Government on bioenergy policy
Avian influenza	—

The work of the Department’s agencies and associated public bodies

22. Defra’s ‘delivery landscape’ accommodates executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies, public corporations and a range of other organisations, including regional and local authority representative bodies.¹⁹ In 2005–06 we heard evidence from the State Veterinary Service,²⁰ the Rural Payments Agency,²¹ English Nature (now part of Natural England), and Natural England.²²

23. Following up a series of inquiries by our predecessor Committees, we also fulfilled our commitment to examine the work of Defra’s agencies and associated public bodies by undertaking an inquiry into the Environment Agency. Ten years after its establishment, we set out to review the Agency’s effectiveness and funding, and its relationships with Defra and other key bodies.

17 Eighth Report, Session 2005–06, *Climate change: the role of bioenergy*, HC 965

18 First Special Report, Session 2006–07, *Climate change: the role of bioenergy: Government response to the Committee’s Eighth Report*, HC 131

19 A full list is available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/delivery/landscape/map/index.htm>

20 See above at paragraph 19.

21 See above at paragraph 16 and below at paragraph 56.

22 English Nature gave evidence to the Committee on its inquiry into the Environment Agency; Natural England gave evidence on the UK Government’s “Vision for the CAP”.

Table 7: Reports on the work of bodies associated with Defra

<i>Report</i>	<i>Principal findings</i>
The Rural Payments Agency: interim report	See Table 5
The Environment Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –noted concerns that the Agency was experiencing difficulties managing its wide range of responsibilities –called on Defra to examine whether the Agency was adequately equipped for the cross-cutting environmental challenges facing it –noted the strong case for placing more of the burden of enforcement costs on to fines, rather than charges –registered concern that the Agency was finding it difficult to recruit specialist staff –welcomed increases in funding for flood defence work; called for further increases –recommended that Defra provide Natural England with clear guidance on using agri-environment funding in order to avoid tension in the relationship between the Agency and Natural England.

Major appointments

24. Our predecessor Committee recommended that the Department put in place procedures to inform it in advance of all major appointments pending and/or made. In 2005–06 major appointments have coincided with relevant Committee inquiries. The House was informed of the appointment of an acting Chief Executive of the Rural Payments Agency in March 2006; we took evidence from Mark Addison shortly after he retired from this role, in June 2006, and from his successor, Tony Cooper, on 27 November 2006.

25. Defra’s new Permanent Secretary, Helen Ghosh, gave evidence to the Committee in connection with its inquiry into Defra’s Departmental Annual Report 2005, in November 2005, a few days after taking up her post, and again on 4 December 2006, on Defra’s budget.²³ Soon after Natural England was established, we took evidence from its Chief Executive, Dr Helen Phillips, in connection with the Committee’s inquiry into the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy”.

Implementation of legislation and major policy initiatives

26. In 2005–06 we have scrutinised the implementation of legislation as part of our wider inquiry and other work. In monitoring developments in relation to avian influenza we gathered information on how EU legislation is transposed and implemented by the UK Government.

²³ The Permanent Secretary also gave evidence on Defra’s Departmental Report 2006 on 19 July 2006. See paragraphs 31 and 37–8.

27. Our inquiries into the Environment Agency and the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy” gave us the opportunity to consider how one aspect of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act—the creation of Natural England—has been implemented. Our inquiry into the Rural Payments Agency has also focussed heavily on how the Single Payment Scheme had been implemented in England. We note that these are examples of “post-legislative scrutiny”, an area in which Parliament is often said to be deficient.

28. In connection with our inquiry into climate change: the “citizen’s agenda” we are considering evidence on the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006 and will monitor the implementation of the Act. We will examine the major policy initiatives which we expect to follow the publication of the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change as a key part of our work on climate change, particularly in relation to our planned inquiry into international climate policy post-2012.

Examination of draft legislation

29. In 2004 our predecessor Committee undertook detailed scrutiny of the Government’s draft Animal Welfare Bill. We announced a short inquiry to follow up the work of our predecessor Committee in October 2005. The evidence we received confirmed that the process of pre-legislative scrutiny had helped to produce a better-drafted bill.²⁴

30. We have made it known to Defra, and we reiterate it here, that we welcome the opportunity to consider legislation in draft. We had hoped to be able to scrutinise a draft Marine Bill in the 2005–06 session. Whilst no mention of the Bill was made in the Queen’s Speech we place on record our wish to conduct pre-legislative scrutiny of this Bill if it is published in draft. We also await details of the process that will lead to the introduction of a Climate Change Bill and we have informed Defra of our wish to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of a draft Climate Change Bill. Our predecessor Committee played a crucial role in driving the Government to be more rigorous both in terms of its policy development and its drafting of legislation on animal welfare. The benefits of pre-legislative scrutiny in this case were evident, and the Government should make it possible for legislation on climate change to be improved in the same way.

Examination of expenditure

31. The Committee undertakes an annual scrutiny exercise in relation to Defra expenditure through a series of inquiries into Defra’s Departmental Reports. In conducting the most recent inquiry of the series, into the 2006 Report, we heard evidence of a substantial change to Defra’s budget for 2006–07; Defra subsequently provided more information to the House in the form of Written Answers.²⁵ In order to establish the reasons for the reduction, and to assess its effects on the services and projects run by Defra and its associated bodies, we extended our inquiry to seek further written and oral evidence. Helen Ghosh, Permanent Secretary, and Ian Grattidge, Director of Finance, Planning and Resources at Defra, gave evidence on 4 December 2006.

24 Third Report, Session 2005–06, *The Animal Welfare Bill*, HC 683

25 HC Deb, 6 November 2006, col 731W; HC Deb, 8 November 2006, cols 1581–82W

32. In attempting to evaluate the statements made by Defra in which ministers or officials have attributed the budget cuts to changes in Treasury procedures, our inquiry has implications for departments across government. We asked the Treasury to assist us with our inquiry, by providing written evidence and by briefing us on an informal basis. We were annoyed and disappointed that our invitations were declined, particularly in light of the emphasis placed by the Leader of the House in the last Parliament on “the presumption that the provision of information will be agreed to, including the presumption of co-operation on joined-up inquiries”.²⁶

Evidence from ministers

33. In 2005–06 the Committee heard evidence from ministers on seven occasions. We note that in the most recent Cabinet reshuffle, Defra lost all but one of the Ministerial team appointed after the 2005 General Election.

34. We place on record our gratitude to the Secretary of State for taking up the invitation extended to his predecessor to appear before us.

Public Service Agreements

35. Several of our inquiries examined aspects of the work of the Department which related to its Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets, although performance against the PSA might not have been the focus of the inquiry. These are set out in Table 8.

Table 8: Relationship between our inquiries and Departmental PSA targets

<i>Inquiry</i>	<i>PSA target²⁷</i>
Defra’s Departmental Report 2005	Target 2 (SR 2002/2004); Target 3 (SR 2004) ; Target 4 (SR 2004)
Reform of the EU Sugar Regime	Target 5 (SR 2002/2004)
Animal Welfare Bill	Target 9 (SR 2004)
Avian influenza	Target 9 (SR 2004)
Rural Payments Agency	Target 3 (SR 2004) ; Target 5 (SR 2004))
Bovine TB: badger culling	Target 9 (SR 2004)
Climate change: the role of bioenergy	Target 1 (SR 2004); Target 2 (SR 2004)
The UK Government’s “Vision for the CAP”	Target 5 (SR 2002/2004); Target 3 (SR 2004)
Climate change: the “citizen’s agenda”	Target 1 (SR 2004); Target 2 (SR 2004); Target 7 (SR 2004)

26 Liaison Committee, First Report of Session 2004–05, *Annual Report for 2004*, HC 419, paragraph 130

27 Defra, Departmental Report 2006, Appendix 1, pp 272–276

36. In our report on Defra’s Departmental Annual Report 2005, we reported on Defra’s performance in achieving some of its Public Service Agreement targets. In particular, we registered our disappointment that Defra had not been able to assess progress against its PSA target relating to rural affairs (which went ‘live’ on 1 April 2003), and recommended that the Department begin working towards a more appropriate PSA target ahead of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.²⁸

37. In giving evidence to the Committee on Defra’s Departmental Report 2006, the Permanent Secretary to Defra told us that the Department had “a slightly strange set of PSAs” and that in preparing for the 2007 Comprehensive Spending review, it would:

“want undoubtedly to focus more on outcomes and think more effectively about how we engage broader government in our objectives and work coherently to UK Government objectives across the whole piece”.²⁹

38. We welcome the Permanent Secretary’s invitation to the Committee to work with Defra on its PSA targets and look forward to receiving from Defra the draft PSAs it is discussing with the Treasury.³⁰

Assisting the House

39. On 6 June 2005, the Order Paper drew attention to our predecessor Committee’s report on the Government’s Rural Strategy and the draft Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill (and the Government’s response to our report), as being relevant to the Second Reading of the Bill. On 7 December 2005, the Order Paper drew attention to our predecessor Committee’s report on the future for UK fishing and the Government’s response, as being relevant to an adjournment debate on fisheries.

40. On 10 January 2006, the Order Paper drew attention to our report on the Animal Welfare Bill as being relevant to the Second Reading debate on the Bill.

28 Fourth Report, Session 2005–06, *The Departmental Report 2005*, HC 693

29 Oral evidence taken before the Committee on 19 July 2006, HC 1569-I, Q 9

30 *Ibid.*

3 Working methods

Introduction

41. In this section we discuss our working methods and the ways in which we have sought to take an innovative approach to gathering information and building relationships beyond the House. We go on to comment on the role Defra has played in helping us to meet our objectives in 2005–06.

Committee ‘away day’ and self-examination of working methods

42. Soon after our appointment we decided to hold a Committee ‘away day’ to help stimulate our thinking on our programme of work and to undertake an assessment of our working methods early in the 2005 Parliament. We are most grateful to staff of Essex Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency who facilitated our away day at Abbots Hall Farm in Essex. Our programme included a tour of the farm and coastal realignment project, and informal discussions with staff from: the Essex Wildlife Trust, English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Community Carbon Reduction Programme (CRed), Renewables East (the agency for renewable energy in the East of England), and London Array Ltd (a consortium which is developing a wind farm). We also heard from two local farmers, Guy Smith and Phil Gladwin.

43. We followed up our discussion of our working methods with an informal session at Westminster, during which we watched a recording of part of our evidence session on avian influenza. Assisted by Dr Jane Martin, then Executive Director of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, we critiqued our approach to questioning witnesses. This was a valuable exercise which has made us more aware of how we use the time we have to prepare for evidence sessions, and the ways in which we pursue lines of questioning.

44. In 2005–06 we have adopted a flexible approach to our work, adapting the format of meetings and inquiries to fit the subjects under scrutiny. Our work on the RPA, for example, has involved the use of rapporteurs, the main Committee and a sub-committee, and we have also appointed an informal group to carry out monitoring work on avian influenza.³¹

Public outreach

45. In July 2006 we visited the Royal Agricultural Show at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, not only to participate in the event itself but also to take evidence in our inquiry into the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy”. We decided to break with the usual format of evidence sessions with officials, academics and established organisations, by calling for evidence from individuals with a stake in the future of the CAP whose views would not otherwise be represented.

31 See below at paragraphs 48 and 49.

46. By recasting the terms of reference for our inquiry and advertising in the farming press we sought and sifted applications to appear before the Committee. On the day, individuals appeared in panels and gave short presentations before answering our questions. We also set aside time for informal discussions after the evidence session. We gathered useful information for the inquiry and—perhaps just as importantly in the long term—opened a dialogue with some of those whose interests we seek to represent in our work at Westminster.

47. Planning our visit to Stoneleigh took painstaking preparation and we thank all those who helped us to make it a success. With the assistance of the Community Carbon Reduction Programme (CRed)—based at the University of East Anglia in Norwich—we will conduct a similar exercise in connection with our inquiry into climate change: the “citizen’s agenda” at the end of January 2007.

Avian influenza ‘Observatory’

48. Following our evidence session in November 2005, in March 2006 we announced the establishment of an ‘Observatory’ or informal group of members of the Committee, tasked with monitoring the fast-changing situation and the corresponding policy developments.

49. The Observatory has been briefed on two occasions by Fred Landeg, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, and members also represented the Committee at Defra’s National Avian Influenza Exercise on 5 April. Establishment of the Observatory has helped us to maintain regular communication with Defra on this issue. We are grateful to the Department for the oral briefings and written information it has provided to the Committee, and in particular to the Minister of State for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare for his efforts to inform the Committee of important developments. We also thank the Department for taking on board our comments about keeping Members of Parliament informed of incidences or outbreaks which occur in their constituencies.

Media coverage

50. Media coverage of our activities helps to inform public debate and strengthen our rapport with the wide range of individuals and organisations involved in agriculture and the environment. In 2005–06 we have worked closely with our committee media officer to help the media to represent our work in an accurate and accessible way and we have seen a corresponding increase in extent and depth of the coverage of our inquiries. We are particularly grateful to BBC Radio Four’s Farming Today for the way in which it has communicated to farmers the work of the Committee in connection with its inquiries into the Rural Payments Agency and Bovine Tuberculosis: badger culling.

The Scrutiny Unit

51. We have derived a great deal of valuable assistance from resources of the Scrutiny Unit³² in 2005–06, particularly in relation to our scrutiny of Defra’s Departmental Reports.

32 The Scrutiny Unit forms part of the Committee Office in the House of Commons. It exists to strengthen the scrutiny function of the House. It provides specialist expertise to select committees, especially (but not exclusively) on financial matters and draft bills.

Our extended inquiry into Defra’s Departmental Report 2006 and Defra’s budget has drawn on the expertise of the Unit, which has helped to draft questions to Departments and NDPBs and briefed the Committee ahead of our second hearing with the Permanent Secretary in December 2006. The Scrutiny Unit also helped us to analyse the Regulatory Impact Assessment Defra provided for the Animal Welfare Bill, and the use of statistics in the UK Government’s “Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy” document.

National Audit Office

52. In conducting its own study of the delay in implementing the Single Payment Scheme, the National Audit office made use of our work, and that carried out by our predecessor Committee, on the Rural Payments Agency. The NAO also provided an informal briefing for members of the RPA Sub-committee, which has been a valuable source for our inquiries and which has helped the Committee and the NAO to avoid duplication of work.

Working with Defra

53. In 2005–06 we have addressed some highly sensitive issues. Our inquiry into the Rural Payments Agency provides the most vivid example. In tackling these issues on the whole we have enjoyed a good working relationship with Defra officials and Ministers, and we are grateful to them for the time they have taken to hold informal discussions with us.

Provision of papers and information

54. In what we hope is a useful precedent for other select committees, Defra acceded to our request to see Office of Government Commerce gateway reviews and Executive Review Group papers—which we deemed to be vital to our inquiry into the Rural Payments Agency—on the basis of an agreement to keep the documents confidential and an undertaking to limit references to them in the report on our inquiry.

55. In common with our predecessor Committee we are grateful to Defra for the information it provides, and for advance notice of statements and announcements. We also share with our predecessor Committee, however, the concern that the Department’s responses to our requests for written evidence or other information, can take some considerable time to reach us.

Evidence from former ministers and officials

56. In carrying out our work on the Rural Payments Agency, it has become evident to us that where Ministers and senior officials have left their posts it is difficult for Select Committees to establish lines of accountability in relation to policy decisions. We succeeded in securing the attendance of former Ministers and former officials at our Sub-committee hearings. We regard these meetings as essential to our inquiry, which set out to undertake a detailed examination of the causes of delays and mistakes in the delivery of the Single Farm Payment and to derive lessons for the future; we are grateful to the witnesses concerned and extend our thanks to Defra for its assistance.

Annex: Informal meetings with visitors to Westminster

Date	Meeting
October 2005	Delegation of Indian environmental management professionals
October 2005	Delegation from the Danish European Affairs Committee
November 2005	Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) [together with the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee]
February 2006	Mr Jim Anderton, Minister of Agriculture, New Zealand
March 2006	Senator the Hon Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Australia
May 2006	Ms Julia Kloeckner and Ms Elvira Drobinski-Weiss, Members of the Bundestag, Germany
July 2006	Dr Anne Loeber, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam
November 2006	UK200 Agricultural Group
November 2006	Review of Environmental Governance Panel, Northern Ireland

Formal minutes

Wednesday 10 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Michael Jack, in the Chair

Mr Geoffrey Cox
James Duddridge
Patrick Hall
Lynne Jones
David Lepper

Mrs Madeleine Moon
Sir Peter Soulsby
David Taylor
Mr Roger Williams

Draft Report [*Work of the Committee in 2005–06*], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 56 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

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

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

[Adjourned till Wednesday 24 January at 2.30 p.m.]

Reports from the Committee since 2003

(Government Responses to Committee Reports appear in brackets)

Session 2005–06

Eighth Report	Climate change: the role of bioenergy	HC 965-I (HC 131 06–07)
Seventh Report	The Environment Agency	HC 780-I (HC 1519)
Sixth Report	Bovine TB: badger culling	HC 905-I
Fifth Report	Rural Payments Agency: interim report	HC 840
Fourth Report	The Departmental Annual Report 2005	HC 693-I (HC 966)
Third Report	The Animal Welfare Bill	HC 683
Second Report	Reform of the EU Sugar Regime	HC 585-I (HC 927)
First Report	The future for UK fishing: Government Response	HC 532

Session 2004–05

Ninth Report	Climate Change: looking forward	HC 130-I (HC 533 05–06)
Eighth Report	Progress on the use of pesticides: the Voluntary Initiative	HC 258 (HC 534 05–06)
Seventh Report	Food information	HC 469 (HC 437 05–06)
Sixth Report	The future of UK fishing	HC 122 (HC 532 05–06)
Fifth Report	The Government's Rural Strategy and the draft Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill	HC 408-I (Cm 6574)
Fourth Report	Waste policy and the Landfill Directive	HC 102 (Cm 6618)
Third Report	The Work of the Committee in 2004	HC 281
Second Report	Dismantling Defunct Ships in the UK: Government Reply	HC 257
First Report	The draft Animal Welfare Bill	HC 52-I (HC 385)

Session 2003–04

Nineteenth Report	Water Pricing: follow-up	HC 1186 (HC 490 04–05)
Eighteenth Report	Dismantling of Defunct Ships in the UK	HC 834 (HC 257 04–05)
Seventeenth Report	Agriculture and EU Enlargement	HC 421 (HC 221 04–05)
Sixteenth Report	Climate Change, Water Security and Flooding	HC 558 (HC 101 04–05)
Fifteenth Report	The Departmental Annual Report 2004	HC 707 (HC 100 04–05)
Fourteenth Report	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	HC 475 (HC 1255)
Thirteenth Report	Bovine TB	HC 638 (HC 1130)
Twelfth Report	Reform of the Sugar Regime	HC 550-I (HC 1129)
Eleventh Report	GM Planting Regime	HC 607 (HC 1128)
Tenth Report	Marine Environment: Government reply	HC 706
Ninth Report	Milk Pricing in the United Kingdom	HC 335 (HC 1036)
Eighth Report	Gangmasters (follow up)	HC 455 (HC 1035)
Seventh Report	Implementation of CAP Reform in the UK	HC 226-I (HC 916)
Sixth Report	Marine Environment	HC 76 (HC 706)
Fifth Report	The Food Standards Agency and Shellfish	HC 248 (HC 601)
Fourth Report	Environmental Directives	HC 103 (HC 557)
Third Report	Caught in the net: Cetacean by-catch of dolphins	HC 88 (HC 540)

	and porpoises off the UK coast	
Second Report	Annual Report of the Committee 2003	HC 225
First Report	Water Pricing	HC 121 (HC 420)