



ROYAL COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION



2001-2003

Review of Activities

About the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution is an independent standing body established in 1970 to provide authoritative advice on environmental issues. Its terms of reference are:

To advise on matters, both national and international, concerning the pollution of the environment; on the adequacy of research in this field; and the future possibilities of danger to the environment.

Within this remit, the Commission is free to consider and advise on any matter it chooses. The UK government or the devolved administrations may also ask it to consider particular topics.

The primary function of the Commission is to contribute to policy development in the longer term by providing a factual basis for policy-making and debate, and setting new agendas and priorities. It considers the economic, ethical and social aspects of issues alongside the scientific and technological aspects. It sees its role as reviewing and anticipating trends and developments, identifying fields where insufficient attention is being given to environmental problems, and recommending actions that should be taken. The Commission has published twenty-three reports, and many of its recommendations have been accepted and implemented by successive governments.

The Members of the Commission have a wide range of expertise and experience in natural and social sciences, medicine, engineering, law, economics and business. They serve part-time and as individuals, not as representatives of organisations or professions.

A full-time Secretariat supports the Chairman and Members by arranging and recording meetings and visits, gathering and analysing information, handling finances and administration and drafting and publishing the Commission's reports.

In the course of its studies, the Commission canvasses a wide range of views by inviting written and oral evidence, holding seminars and public meetings, and establishing discussion fora on its web site.

Information on the Commission's work (including minutes of meetings, background papers by consultants and summaries of evidence submitted) is available via <http://www.rcep.org.uk>.

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Members of the Commission

Sir Tom Blundell (Chairman)

Sir William Dunn Professor and Head of Department of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge and Professorial Fellow of Sidney Sussex College

Professor Roland Clift

Professor of Environmental Technology and Director of the Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey

Professor Paul Ekins

Head of Environment Group, Policy Studies Institute and Professor of Sustainable Development, University of Westminster

Mr John Flemming

Warden, Wadham College, Oxford and Chairman of Management Committee, National Institute of Economic and Social Research

Sir Brian Follett

Professor, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford and Chair, Arts and Humanities Research Board

Dr Ian Graham-Bryce

President, Scottish Association of Marine Science

Professor Stephen Holgate

Medical Research Council Clinical Professor of Immunopharmacology at the University of Southampton

Professor Brian Hoskins

Professor of Meteorology, University of Reading

Professor Richard Macrory

Professor of Environmental Law, University College London and Board Member, Environment Agency

Dr Susan Owens

Reader in Environment and Policy, and Fellow of Newnham College, University of Cambridge

Professor Jane Plant

Chief Scientist, British Geological Survey and Professor of Geochemistry, Imperial College London

Mr John Speirs

President of the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection

Professor Janet Sprent

Emeritus Professor of Plant Biology at the University of Dundee

The following Members left the Commission in 2002 on completion of the Twenty-third Report:

Professor Michael Banner
Sir Martin Holdgate
Sir Michael Marmot
Mr John Roberts

The following Member left the Commission in January 2003

Mrs Cheryl Miller

Secretariat

Secretary

Dr Peter Hinchcliffe

Assistant Secretaries

Dr Georgina Burney

Mr Howard Morrison

Policy Analysts

Mr Andy Deacon

Dr Jonny Wentworth

Miss Anna Bradbury

Information Systems Manager

Cathy Garretty

Project Manager

Mr Alan Crockford

Office Manager

Mrs Rosemary Ferguson

Administrative Officers

Mrs Janice Downes

Miss Patrizia Bergonzi

Personal Secretary to Sir Tom Blundell and Dr Hinchcliffe

Mrs Dot Watson

Introduction by Chairman

This review of activities covers the work of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution between the Spring of 2001 and April 2003.

This has been a remarkably productive period for the Commission, during which we have worked on diverse themes – energy and climate change, environmental planning, aviation, chemicals and fisheries. As these have very different audiences, we have, for the first time, arranged a reception to coincide with the publication of this review. The event will give some of those with the keenest interest in our work an opportunity to discuss these different themes in the same forum, and to debate the recent activities and the future work of the Commission.

The Commission's report on the planning system and the ways in which it delivers safeguards for the environment was published in March 2002, coincident with a government consultation on a planning green paper. The paper and our report were far apart in their emphasis, especially with respect to environmental issues. However, with the publication of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill we are beginning to see some shift in the way the government is presenting its intentions for the planning system.

The Commission's first Special Report was published towards the end of 2002, addressing in a focused way the timely issue of the environmental impacts of civil aircraft in flight. Produced in less than six months, this report was launched alongside the Sustainable Development Commission's own paper on air transport and sustainable development. I am hopeful that the Special Report, together with our response to the government consultation, will inform the White Paper on The Future of Aviation due to be published at the end of 2003.

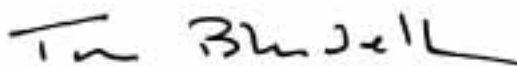
Another White Paper, published at the start of 2003, provided a particularly clear example of policy development being informed by the work of the Commission. Many of the recommendations of the Commission's Energy Report were accepted in the Energy White Paper, and the Prime Minister announced the adoption of a strategy towards reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050 – a key recommendation in the Commission's report.

There is much for the Commission to be proud of, but I recognise that we must also strive to ensure that we get our forward programme right. On page 24, there is a short summary of four possible topics for the Commission's Twenty-sixth Report and, possibly, for an additional short study. I very much look forward to engaging in a debate on where the Commission should next focus its attention.

I am always keen to emphasise that the Commission is a UK body, with a duty to provide advice to all four governments. We have held regular meetings in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as England. At the same time we have been mindful of the strong and growing influence of the European Union in environmental policy, and our membership of the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils is a key tool, which we must continue to use as effectively as possible.

Dr David Lewis retired from his position as Secretary in March 2002 after nearly ten years with the Royal Commission. David had a huge influence on the proceedings of the Commission, drafting text with skill and imagination and bringing his extensive knowledge of environmental matters to bear on our deliberations. The Royal Commission gained much from a man who was on the one hand more of an academic than many university dons, but at the same time a skilled administrator and Secretary. We wish him well in his retirement.

Over the past thirty years, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution has moved its focus from the study of 'end-of-pipe' pollution to often more diffuse forms, for example greenhouse gases and chemicals in products, and to overarching themes such as setting environmental standards, and environmental planning. Our new study, on the environmental effects of marine fisheries, extends the definition of 'environmental pollution' in our title even further, but is entirely consistent with our mandate and with our responsibility to press forward the development of UK policy on matters concerning the environment.



Chairman



The world's first commercial-scale wave power station, Limpet 500.

Energy – the changing climate

In its previous review of activities, the Commission reported the publication of its Twenty-second Report, *Energy – the changing climate*. The report received widespread attention in the media and government. The key messages included:

The UK should play a prominent role in EU and international negotiations, pressing for controls on the emissions of developed nations and further reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions.

There should be increased investment in energy efficiency – in the home, in the workplace and in transport. A carbon tax should be introduced, the revenue of which should be used to reduce further fuel poverty.

The government should stimulate investment in renewable energy sources and combined heat and power. It should carry out a review of electricity networks to facilitate their expansion.

The fall in government spending on energy research should be reversed.

The aspect of the report that attracted most attention, however, is the Commission's recommendation that:

The government should now adopt a strategy that puts the UK on a path to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by some 60% from current levels by about 2050.

In June 2001, the Prime Minister announced that the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) would carry out a review of the strategic issues surrounding energy policy for the United Kingdom. Among the objectives of the review was that of informing the government's response to the Twenty-second Report.



The PIU review did not re-visit the scientific case for carbon reductions, acknowledging instead the work carried out by the Commission. Nor did it go as far as endorsing the Commission's key proposal – the 60% cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. It did recognise the need to move to a low carbon economy and also identified the major potential challenges that this would involve. In particular, it argued that it would be unwise for the UK now to take a

unilateral decision to meet the RCEP target, in advance of international negotiations on longer term targets, and instead recommended the creation of a range of future options by which low carbon energy could be delivered, as and when the time came.

The government launched its consultation on energy policy in May 2002. The consultation took into account the Commission's Twenty-second Report, as well as the PIU report and recent Parliamentary reports. The main themes for the consultation were security of supply, climate change, energy efficiency and the main energy sources, now and in the future. The objective was to deliver an Energy White Paper around the turn of the year.

As well as a consultation document aimed primarily at energy stakeholders, the consultation process sought the views of a broader range of opinion through specialist workshops, public meetings and innovative use of the Internet – very much in line with some of the recommendations of the Commission's Twentieth Report, *Setting environmental standards*. The Commission's Chairman, Members and Secretariat played significant roles in this process, for example by chairing workshops organised by the Department of Trade and Industry.

At the time that the consultation document was published, the Environment Minister wrote to the Chairman of the Commission to say that the government's response to the Twenty-second Report would be published alongside the Energy White Paper. The White Paper and the formal response were published in February 2003, and, on publication, the Prime Minister announced that the government had decided to accept the Commission's recommendation that it should adopt a strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050.

Several other key recommendations have been accepted by the government. For example, the government agreed that there is a need for a strategy to develop renewable energy sources off-shore and had published, in November 2002, a consultation document proposing a strategic planning framework to harness the significant potential of offshore wind power. Similarly, the government has accepted the case for more attention to be paid to energy crops.

Contraction and convergence

Under the contraction and convergence model, each nation's allocation gradually shifts from its current level of emissions towards a level set on a uniform *per capita* basis. The quotas of developed nations would fall, year by year, while those of the poorest developing nations would rise, until all nations had an entitlement to emit an equal quantity of greenhouse gases per head. From then on, the quotas of all nations would decline together at the same rate. The combined global total of emissions would follow a profile through the 21st and 22nd centuries that kept the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases below a specified limit.

Energy – the changing climate (paragraph 4.49)

On the other hand, the government has not accepted the case for a carbon tax. It is also less convinced than the Commission that 'contraction and convergence' is in the long term the most effective and equitable basis for a global agreement. It wishes to keep other options open.

The Commission will continue to play a role in the development of energy policy as it emerges, and will commission a review of the impact of its Twenty-second Report in 2004.



Our ambition is for the world's developed economies to cut emissions of greenhouse gases by 60% by around 2050. **We therefore accept the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's recommendation that the UK should put itself on a path towards a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of some 60% from current levels by about 2050.** Until now the UK's energy policy has not paid enough attention to environmental problems. Our new energy policy will ensure that energy, the environment and economic growth are properly and sustainably integrated.

Energy White Paper (paragraph 1.10)

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The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution provided the driving force for the process which led to the Energy White Paper and put Carbon reduction at the heart of it.

We have accepted the conclusions reached by the RCEP and committed ourselves to one of its fundamental recommendations, reducing CO₂ emissions by 60% by about 2050. This is the central objective which has inspired a whole range of policies and targets which must be delivered if we are to meet the challenge of Climate Change.

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BRIAN WILSON – DTI ENERGY MINISTER

Saving the planet means appealing to our self-interest

What has the future ever done for us? Let us advocate the devil's case in response to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. We are being asked to cut our energy use by half for the sake of our grandchildren. Surely our children's children will have better technologies than are available to us to deal with the problems we have left them. And the key point is that we are in no position to know which of the many problems we bequeath to them will be the most serious.

It is not so long since nuclear energy seemed to be the magical, clean answer to all environmental problems. What if the zealots for atom power had succeeded in converting all of Britain in the 1950s? We would now be in a similar position to France, paying for more expensive energy than everyone else for generations to come, with a larger problem of disposal and storage for even longer, and facing bigger risks of an environmental disaster all the while. What if we succeed in reducing energy use by 60% and then another generation finds that something we had not thought of will kill them all? Or that an asteroid is on its way?

Yes, but wait a minute, says the voice of prudence. It always makes sense to take precautions. But then, whispers Beelzebub, do we really want a world in

which we all have to live in insulated holes in the ground, allowed to own cars but not to drive them (except on special occasions)? A world in which every building has solar panels on one side, a windmill on top, and boiling the kettle on the biomass Aga takes half an hour?

The devil has all the best tunes, but we should pay more attention than we do to the green prophets. Everyone agrees with them, after all. We all know that we ought to pay more for our energy, but when petrol approaches £1 a litre we do not like it.

The gap between green awareness and the reality of radically changed lifestyles is only likely to be closed when a Royal Commission can steal some of the devil's music, and show how our interests can coincide with those of our grandchildren. That means better public transport rather than more expensive private motoring, for example, or saving people money on electricity and gas bills rather than asking them to conserve energy for the sake of the low-lying islands of the Indian Ocean.

Otherwise, everyone will welcome the Royal Commission's reports – and then ignore them.

The Independent – Leader 17 June 2000

Environmental planning

The Commission's study of the ways in which the planning system delivers safeguards for the environment proved more complex than expected. The Twenty-third Report, *Environmental Planning*, was published in March 2002 – later than planned, but at a time following closely on the publication of a government green paper proposing reforms to the planning regime.

In keeping with its commitment to provide advice that is relevant and of value to all four of the governments of the United Kingdom, the Commission consulted widely to ensure that its report on environmental planning was informed by the situation throughout the United Kingdom. The situations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were found to be evolving in different ways, and significant differences in practice were found even between counties.

The report sought answers to two key questions:

Do we have effective, accountable and transparent systems for protecting the environment?

Are there essential links in place between land use planning and environmental regimes, such as those for pollution control, air quality and waste?

The report concluded that, while we would almost certainly have a much worse environment *without* the town and country planning system, the answer to both of these questions was 'no'. Taken together, present regimes were inadequate for long-term protection and enhancement of the environment. There is particular concern that, in spite of rhetoric about sustainable development, insufficient weight is being given to the environment in decisions involving land use.

A major problem was the incredible complexity of the system. As part of the study, the Commission examined a real geographical area and identified more than thirty plans that related to it. Sometimes these plans were not connected to each other. For example, the report identified inadequate connections between local planning authorities, making decisions that will influence land use for decades to come, and the Environment Agency, with its key responsibilities for pollution control and flood defence. Nor could the Commission find joined up planning on important issues such as the provision of water, energy or drainage resources for new developments.

Moreover, in spite of the plethora of plans, there were serious gaps in the system. The most striking anomaly was that of agriculture, which covers about three quarters of the land surface in the UK. This sector had largely eluded planning controls, and its environmental impacts had not been adequately captured elsewhere.

The Commission's third major criticism was about the lack of available information. Information of all kinds was vital for good environmental planning. But the planning system was not tapping the considerable power of modern information systems, nor using them to encourage wider public engagement. There were also widespread barriers to access to information, even when a right of access already existed.

The Commission made seventy-three recommendations, including:

The town and country planning system should be given a statutory purpose, 'to facilitate the achievement of legitimate economic and social goals whilst ensuring that the quality of the environment is safeguarded and wherever appropriate enhanced'.

Integrated spatial strategies should be introduced which take account of all spatially related activities and all spatially related aspects of environmental capacity.

Environmental Tribunals should be established to handle appeals under environmental legislation other than the town and country planning system, including those now handled by planning inspectors.

Third parties should have a right of appeal against decisions on planning applications in certain circumstances, and similar rights of appeal for third parties should be introduced for other forms of environmental regulation.

Data that have been gathered in the public name and for the public good should be available electronically at no cost for public use.

There must continue to be open hearings at which local people and others can express their views about the local impacts of proposed major infrastructure projects and challenge claims by the developer.

Production subsidies to agriculture should be phased out as soon as possible. While they remain part of the CAP, farmers receiving such subsidies should be required to maintain a defined level of environmental protection on the land they manage.

There should be a withdrawal of permitted development rights that currently apply to building conversions and the construction of new building, roads and vehicle tracks when these activities are associated with agriculture and forestry.

Other recommendations related to planning guidance, the resources available to local authorities, remediation of contaminated land, provision for renewable energy, and the protection of sites of special scientific interest.

The report stated the Commission's belief that environmental protection and enhancement must be firmly and unambiguously accepted as a foundation for sustainable development. The Commission urged the UK government and the devolved administrations to commit themselves to environmental improvement, and recommended the UK government to modify the main aims of its sustainable development strategy accordingly.

There are indications that the report may already be influencing government policy. On its publication, the then Planning Minister, Lord Falconer, was keen to emphasise the extent of overlap between the Commission's conclusions and the Green Paper, and later announcements have shown a significant change in the way the government is presenting its intentions for the planning system. The strong emphasis on business efficiency in the Green Paper has since been moderated to recognise more explicitly the role of planning in protecting the environment.

The government is taking a new Planning Bill through Parliament. The main purpose still appears to be to speed up the planning process and there is less emphasis on proper integration of environmental issues into the planning system than the Commission would have liked. In April 2003 the Chairman of the Commission and two Members, Professor Richard Macrory and Dr Susan Owens, met with Tony McNulty, Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, who agreed that there was considerable scope for the Commission's report to inform the further development of planning policy, including the revision of planning guidance following the Bill. The Commission offered to work with the government in identifying ways in which environmental planning can be strengthened under the government's proposed Regional Spatial Strategies.

Members of the Commission have given evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions when it was examining the Planning Green Paper, and to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee's investigation into proposals for housing in the South East. Members have also spoken at a wide range of events on the themes of the report.

A free summary of the report was produced, following the new approach used to improve awareness of the Energy Report. Copies of this summary were sent to thousands of secondary schools, as well as public libraries and colleges throughout the UK.

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The Commission's Environmental Planning report has already been influential in shaping the direction of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. But its main value will be to inform the rest of the planning reform agenda, encouraging debate about how best to put environmental protection at the heart of spatial strategies.

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TONY MCNULTY, MINISTER FOR HOUSING, PLANNING AND REGENERATION.



The environmental effects of civil aircraft in flight

During the spring of 2002, the Commission consulted on and debated the choice of topic for the Twenty-fifth Report. In the course of this period it became apparent that a study on the environmental effects of air transport would be both valuable and timely in the light of the government's impending White Paper on The Future of Aviation in the UK. There was concern that, should this subject be chosen as the topic for the main study, it would be published too late to have any influence on policy making. Members agreed that the Commission should produce its first Special Report – a shorter, more narrowly focussed study, designed to inform thinking on a topical issue.

The process of writing the report was considerably contracted in order to publish the findings within six months. The Commission announced the study in July 2002 along with an open invitation to submit information. This was placed on the Commission's website and sent directly to many relevant groups and individuals. Over twenty-five individuals and organisations contributed to the study, and the Commission also attended meetings with several stakeholders to pursue particularly interesting aspects of its research.

This report has entirely changed the airport debate. The problem of where to put some whopping new airport is suddenly reduced to a secondary and consequent question. The question is not where to have it, but whether to have it all.

It is a pivotal moment, perhaps equivalent to that point 10 or 15 years ago when people first started to think that building motorways was perhaps not an unqualified good, or that the marvelous shopping experience provided by supermarkets and out-of-town malls might have side effects that were less than welcome on all town centres.

Daily Telegraph
3 December 2002

The impact of aviation on local air quality and general quality of life in the region of airports is an important problem. However, the Commission felt that this was receiving attention in the discussion on airport expansion but that the large-scale effects of aviation were not. Consequently the Commission restricted itself to the effects of aircraft in flight. In particular it highlighted the increasing climatic impact air travel is likely to have because of its rapid growth. There are still many uncertainties in the science. However, it is currently believed that the total impact of air transport emissions on the greenhouse effect and consequent global warming is almost three times that of the carbon dioxide it emits.

The Commission concluded that, if demand for air travel was met and allowed to grow without restraints, the industry would become one of the major contributors to human-induced climatic change. This would be especially important in consideration of the government's aim to reduce total carbon dioxide emissions, for which all sectors are facing the necessity of cuts in the amount of climate changing emissions permitted. The Commission recognised that technological developments were very important. However, such improvements had been assumed in the global warming calculations, and there appeared to be no possibility in the near future of a technological breakthrough that would solve the problem. It concluded that other actions are required if the industry is to limit its environmental impacts.



In its report *The environment effects of civil aircraft in flight*, the Commission expressed particular concern about the rapid growth in air freight, including the trend towards cargo-only aircraft and airports. The report also drew attention to the particular problems associated with short-haul flights (800km or less) which have a much higher proportional fuel use per passenger-kilometre than medium-haul flight distances (for example London to New York). The growth in 'no frills' carriers operating over such short-haul routes has contributed considerably to the growth in the industry in recent years and consequently to the emissions.

The Commission recommended several possible measures, including:

Optimising the use of existing airport capacity within the UK without further expansion.

Encouraging best use of the existing slots for long distance flights for which there is no viable alternative.

Facilitating a shift to rail wherever feasible.

Incorporating aviation within a worldwide emissions trading scheme (although it recognised that achieving international consensus on this issue will be difficult).

Introducing a Europe-wide emissions charge, as an interim measure whilst negotiating for a worldwide trading scheme.

The Special Report was launched on 29 November 2002 with a lively and well attended press launch. The Sustainable Development Commission launched their own paper, 'Air transport & sustainable development' at the same event. Members of the Royal Commission gave presentations setting out the key messages of the

report and Charles Secrett introduced the Sustainable Development Commission's paper. Following the presentations the panel of speakers engaged in a stimulating debate with members of the audience.

Subsequently, Commission Members have participated in many interviews, notably with Radio 4's PM programme, and press coverage has been widespread and in depth. There were substantive pieces in many publications, including The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Guardian and The Independent. Since publication of the report, the debate has continued and the Commission's findings have been widely cited. A recent article in The Times, including a reaction to the report from the Secretary of State for Transport and a response by Professor Ekins, has reignited the debate.

Demand for copies of the report and for Members to give presentations at events has been high. Members have been active in promoting the message of the report. In March 2003, the Chairman of the Commission, together with two Members,

Professor Hoskins and Professor Elkins, met with Alistair Darling and John Spellar, respectively Secretary of State and Minister of State for Transport. The dialogue was positive and there was considerable consensus on the scale of the problems faced, although there was more divergence of opinion on specific measures to address them. Members of the Commission have also given written and oral evidence at the invitation of the Transport Select Committee, contributing to their investigation into aviation.



On 14 March 2003, HM Treasury and the Department for Transport launched a consultation with stakeholders on 'Aviation and the Environment: Using Economic Instruments'. A background document has been published that makes reference to the Commission's work and highlights the global impacts of the industry. It includes both a statement recognising the climate impact of aviation being 2.7 times that of the carbon dioxide emitted alone and figures that show that the sector may be responsible for a quarter of UK's contribution to global warming by 2020. The consultation will inform the White Paper on The Future of Aviation which is expected by the end of 2003. The Commission has accepted the invitation to attend the discussion sessions that will form part of the process.

'The environmental impacts of aircraft have been assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and more recently by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.

The total impact of all aviation emissions on climate change is attained by multiplying the volume of carbon dioxide released by 2.7. This is known as the 'radiative forcing index', and is the ratio of total radiative forcing to that from carbon dioxide emissions alone and is a measure of the importance of aircraft induced climate change other than from the release of carbon dioxide.'

Department for Transport / HM Treasury paper 'Aviation and the Environment: Using Economic Instruments'

“ From different standpoints and to different detail, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Sustainable Development Commission came to very similar conclusions and recommendations to government. We welcomed the quality and presentation of the Commission's work and hope that there will be further opportunities for joint approaches in the future. ”

UK SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Sustainable food and farming

In June 2002 the Commission responded to the government's consultation paper 'Sustainable Food And Farming: Working Together'.

The Commission pointed out that agricultural intensification, encouraged by subsidy and permitted by technology, has broken the link assumed in the Scott Report of 1947 between 'producing food' and 'producing countryside'. For several decades, the overwhelmingly dominant theme of farming and its financial support systems has been production – output of agricultural produce. Environmental considerations have been neglected, resulting in significant adverse environmental effects. Farmers are no longer 'unconsciously the nation's landscape gardeners', as envisaged by the Scott Report.

The Commission's response drew on several of its previous reports including the Seventh Report, *Agriculture and pollution*, the Nineteenth Report, *The sustainable use of soil*, and the Twenty-third Report, *Environmental planning*. The Environmental Planning report saw maintaining or enhancing urban and rural environments among the priority objectives for environmental policy.

The response argued that the relationship between environmental protection and production must be revised. Substantial public subsidies have been allocated, mainly on the basis that the principal activity in the countryside is agriculture, and the principal purpose of agriculture is food production. There is no justification for continuing to give such primacy to production. The benefits of the countryside are diverse and derive from many different sources. Agriculture is only one such source, and no longer necessarily the most significant.

Public policy on the countryside as a whole, and not just on agriculture, needs to be rethought. The Commission recommended that the starting point for such a reappraisal should be the countryside's natural environment. The natural and semi-natural environment is central to the creation of employment and well being both for those who live in the countryside and for those who come into contact with it.

Natural processes in the countryside provide the most important of all resources for humans: potable water. In addition, the countryside can produce not just food but also crops for energy and other non-food uses. The Commission's Twenty-second Report, *Energy – the changing climate*, emphasized the potential of the countryside to assist in tackling climate change through the production of energy crops and through the use of land for wind farms.

The nature of public policy support for the countryside, and subsidies for some of the activities that take place there, needs to proceed on the basis of three underlying principles that presuppose that receipt of public subsidy carries certain obligations:

Such support should maintain or enhance the biodiversity and ecological integrity and essential functions of countryside habitats and ecosystems.

Such support should have regard to the full range of possible activities in the countryside, and to the full range of possible crops, and uses of crops, from the land.

Stewardship of the rural environment should not be regarded as the sole prerogative or responsibility of farmers, given the many other relevant interests, including those of town dwellers.

The response concluded that farmers should maintain a basic level of environmental protection on the land they manage in return for receiving production subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy, so long as production subsidies of various kinds remain part of the CAP. But, production subsidies should be phased out entirely as soon as possible. While agri-environment schemes can bring about valuable improvements, there is also a need for a strategic view of trends and the options for change.

Later in 2002, the Commission contributed to a paper on sustainable agriculture policies which was produced by the European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC). More detail on the EEAC is contained in the Activities in Europe section on page 26.



Chemicals in products

The Commission first looked at issues related to the impact of synthetic chemicals on the environment in its Second Report, *Three issues in industrial pollution*, published in 1972. At that time, the Commission flagged up the need for an early warning system for the assessment of possible adverse effects on the environment of new substances intended for commercial use. The report also proposed that the industry that initiated the marketing of these chemicals should monitor their impact on the environment and should publish the results. In addition, the setting up of a databank on known correlations between chemical structure and environmental effects was recommended.

The Twenty-fourth Study, *Chemicals in products*, is revisiting these issues thirty years on. It was initiated with a seminar 'Fresh Approaches to Chemical Use and Control' in London on 19 July 2001. Speakers included representatives from government Departments, regulators, environmental NGOs, the chemicals industry and academics. The seminar sought to address some of the larger questions for the chemicals study, such as the effectiveness of the risk assessment paradigm, the role of various stakeholders in the process, and more generally how society could gain from the benefits of chemicals while reassuring itself that the associated hazards to the environment were adequately identified and controlled.

The conclusions from the event noted that there had been a significant convergence in views on these issues in recent years, but that there was still disagreement, even polarisation, on the degree of change required to ensure that chemical use did not cause unacceptable adverse effects to the environment, or, via the environment did not damage human health.

Fifty-one responses, from a wide range of interested parties, were received to the invitation to submit written evidence on key issues for the chemicals study. This invitation, issued in October 2001, sought evidence on the guiding principles for the control of chemicals, risk assessment and current chemicals policy and roles and responsibilities in chemicals control.

Three decades on, the concerns raised in the Second Report persist, despite the widely acknowledged contribution of many products of the chemicals industry to improvements in life expectancy, human health and living standards for most people in Western-style civilisations. Such concerns have been reinforced by growing awareness of the environmental effects of synthetic chemicals, and the discovery – as the technological ability to measure trace amounts of chemicals has improved – that synthetic chemicals are widespread in the biosphere, including in human tissues. This has contributed to a loss of public confidence in the chemicals industry and in its regulators – an issue dealt with in the Commission's Twenty-first Report, *Setting environmental standards*, and investigated by the Scottish Universities Policy and Advice Network for the Commission as part of the chemicals study.

There are currently around 30,000 chemicals on the market for which there is little or no information about their potential effects on the environment or human health. Under European proposals, companies will have to submit basic information on substances exceeding certain production volumes for inclusion in a central database. However, the deadlines for submission of registration dossiers could take another decade to come into force. It remains possible that some of these chemicals are having serious long-term effects – effects that are not being tested for, indeed effects for which tests have not yet been developed. Regulators may not be asking the right questions about the impacts of chemicals on the physical and biological environment, including people. In the Twenty-fourth Report, the Commission will address these concerns and propose a new way forward.

At an early stage, the Commission came to suspect that chemicals risk management and environmental monitoring, both of which are major and expensive activities, did not seem to be interacting effectively. To explore this further, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology were asked to investigate options for integrating environmental monitoring with chemical risk assessment methods. Their report has proved a valuable input into the study and it is likely that there will be much to discuss about the use of environmental monitoring.

There was a notable discrepancy in the evidence from those who thought that stricter regulation of chemicals hazards would threaten innovation in the chemicals industry, and others who thought that it would stimulate innovation. The Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, was asked to investigate the evidence, and the chemicals report will describe the outcome.

Other activities have included a programme of visits by Members to chemicals companies, to government Departments in other countries and to relevant international bodies. The Commission has taken oral evidence from environmental groups, animal rights interests organisations, industry, chemicals producers, chemicals users and retailers, and government Departments and agencies. Commission Members responded to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union enquiry into the EC White Paper on chemicals and submitted evidence in May 2001.

At the end of the period covered by this review, the Commission is in the very final stages of drafting the chemicals report. It is expected that the Twenty-fourth Report will be launched in June 2003.

The environmental effects of marine fisheries

Following consultation on the selection of a topic for the Twenty-fifth Report, the Commission announced in June 2002 its intention to study the environmental effects of marine fisheries.

In the announcement, the Commission noted that there has been much concern about the ocean's continuing ability to provide the resources upon which we have come to rely. Action to protect and conserve these resources – and remedy damage – is not keeping pace with ubiquitous threats.

There have been some notable successes in the past decade but degradation of the ocean has continued and, in many places, intensified. The picture that is emerging from shared observations throughout the world includes pollution, exhausted fishing stocks, disappearing and degraded coastlines, and other widespread environmental damage.

The Commission believes that this is an opportune time to consider the wide environmental consequences of both capture fisheries and aquaculture, with a focus on the state of the marine environment rather than simply on depleted fish stocks.

A number of bodies have provided thoughtful and helpful responses to the announcement of the study, which the Commission considered at its October 2002 meeting. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration noted that the study was timely. Other respondees included Defra, the Scottish Association for Marine Science, the Scottish Parliament, the Centre for Environment, Aquaculture and Fisheries Science and the Scottish White Fish Producers Association.

The Commission convened a seminar in Edinburgh on 4 November 2002. This was a stimulating event at which speakers from a wide range of backgrounds debated issues with an audience of people involved in the topics likely to be covered by the study. It confirmed the Commission's view that there is important work to be done and suggested the following inter-connected lines on which the study might usefully focus:

The state of science

How can we better define and determine the key scientific considerations, so that we can describe, measure and characterise the situation effectively. There is the question of whether there are particular scientific approaches or insights that would be most effective. This must not be just a plea for more research.

Regulatory and management practices

How can we best develop regulatory or management practices and regimes in a way which will work and command respect?

The institutional questions

What are the local, national and international arrangements which would genuinely involve the relevant parties, recognising their aspirations and ensuring that the environment is safeguarded in the long term?

The Commission has recently issued an invitation to over one hundred bodies to provide evidence by the end of May 2003 on issues covered by the study. The questions cover areas including the current situation in the marine environment and possible futures, marine science in relation to the issues covered by the study, regulatory or management practices and regimes and the institutional/legal framework.

The report is due to be published in the second half of 2004.



This is exactly the right time to consider the environmental consequences of fisheries. From all over the world, observers are reporting serious and continuing degradation of the oceans. We are now moving from the hunter-gatherer stage of exploiting the ocean's resources towards farming the oceans. Technological advances and economic pressures are leading to an intensification, which has the potential to wreak as much damage on the oceans as intensive agriculture has on land over recent decades.

With agriculture we have been asking the wrong question – how to maximise the production of food, instead of looking at the wider functions of the rural environment, with their rich inter-dependencies. We must try to ensure that the problems that could arise with intensive fisheries are foreseen, so that they can be avoided. The Royal Commission believes it should now stimulate this debate.

SIR TOM BLUNDELL,
CHAIRMAN OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION.

Next Commission study

The Commission is currently engaged in the process of choosing the topic for its Twenty-sixth Study. The Commission expects a topic to meet its five main criteria (see box opposite) although any one study will not necessarily meet all of the criteria.

The Commission generally undertakes complex and challenging studies covering broad cross-disciplinary issues. In choosing topics, the Commission also seeks to take into account trends in environmental policy at European and global levels which seem likely to have significant implications for the UK.

The Twenty-sixth Study would be expected to enter its main phase following the publication of the report on the environmental effects of marine fisheries and to be published in 2005. The Commission has selected a short list of four topics and sent out a consultation document on them to some seventy organisations in March 2003. The consultation asks for comments on the appropriateness of the subjects identified and initial thoughts about their treatment as well as information about relevant work being conducted by other organisations.

The four topics under consideration are:

The environmental aspects of food production

Food Production is perhaps the most essential human activity but the processes by which food moves from farm to plate can have damaging consequences. The Commission might consider such aspects as; energy balances within the industry, food miles, the UK's dependency on imports, the impact of food production for the UK in less developed countries, packaging and waste, local produce and the impact of supermarket buying policies, and the potential for food labelling schemes.

Waste recycling and recovery policy

The UK produces enough waste to fill the Royal Albert Hall every hour of every day. A study could look at; whether targets for recycling and incineration represent the best practicable environmental option, national planning and investment in recycling and recovery infrastructure, the acceptability of energy from waste plants, the potential uses for life cycle analysis of waste streams and public attitudes towards waste management.

Tourism and the environment

Tourism is a great contributor to prosperity and well-being, but it needs to be managed sustainably to avoid damaging the very assets on which it depends. Issues that might be included could be; resource use, the effects on ecosystems, changes to local environment, the effects of transport use, the implications of climate change for the industry, and the growth in ecotourism and its benefits.

The urban environment

The environment is often thought of in terms of green open countryside, but eighty per-cent of the UK population live in cities or towns. Issues that could be covered in the study could include; noise, light, water and odour pollution, urban air quality, biodiversity, soil contamination and local environmental quality.

If you would like to know more about the Commission's consultation on the next study or would like an opportunity to submit information please refer to the Commission's website for further details (www.rcep.org.uk).

Criteria for choosing the topic of a Commission study:

- The topics chosen should be what the Commission's First Report called 'priorities for enquiry': issues which require detailed and rigorous analysis before satisfactory policies can be adopted.
- They should raise wide issues, both intellectually (in the sense of spanning several disciplines) and organisationally (in the sense of not falling within the terms of reference of any other single body).
- They are likely to involve general issues of principle.
- They should not normally duplicate other studies already in progress or planned in the near future.
- There should be a reasonable prospect that worthwhile conclusions can be produced within two years with the resources likely to be available to the Commission.

Activities in Europe

European Environmental Advisory Councils

The Royal Commission has continued to play an active role in the network of European Environmental Advisory Councils (EEAC). The core membership of the network comprises more than twenty Councils that have been established by but are independent of European governments, with a remit to advise their governments on environmental issues. Another thirteen Councils with different but related mandates, for example advisory bodies on sustainable development, are associated with the network. The network has a website at www.eeac-network.org. Membership includes Councils from both European Union members and an increasing number of accession states.

The main purpose of the network is to facilitate the sharing of information about the activities of its member Councils. There are often common themes in work programmes of Councils in different European countries, and sharing evidence, experiences and reports adds value to the advice that member Councils can give to their governments. In addition, the network organises a number of co-operative activities, including an annual conference and the organisation of working groups on topics of particular common interest. The network is managed by a focal point hosted by one of the members Councils – currently the Dutch Council RMNO.

The Commission has long been supportive of the EEAC, and its involvement was heightened in 2001 when Professor Richard Macrory, a Member of the Commission, was unanimously elected by the member Councils to the chair of the EEAC Steering Group for a two-year period. The Steering Group is responsible for day to day activities of the network acting under mandates of the Annual Plenary Session of EEAC member Councils. Professor Macrory served in his personal capacity. He was succeeded in 2003 by Professor Frank Lobnik, chair of the Council for Environmental protection of the Republic of Slovenia.

The Royal Commission has been co-opted on the Steering Group for a further year. Professor Janet Sprent will take a special interest in EEAC on behalf of the Commission, and will be the Commission's representative on the Steering Group.

Annual conference

Each year the network convenes a plenary meeting for member Councils and a conference to which a wider audience is invited. The ninth annual conference of the network was held in November 2001 in Ghent. The main theme of the conference was *Indicators for Sustainability*, which dealt with environmental indicators and sustainable development trends. It pointed to a number of areas where EU proposals were inadequate, particularly in the field of nature protection, and social psychological dimensions of environmental problems.

The tenth annual conference was held in Kilkenny in the Republic of Ireland in October 2002. The title was *Agriculture and nature in an expanding Europe – can a greener CAP fit all?* At this conference, the network endorsed a report that emerged from an EEAC Working Group, and was largely drafted by the former Secretary of the Royal Commission, Dr David Lewis. The report outlined a vision for sustainable agriculture and the sustainable use of nature in Europe, and identified links to EU legal and administrative mechanisms for its implementation. Its purpose was to emphasise the importance of environmental protection and enhancement in agricultural policies and practice, in order to influence the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. The key messages of the report were adopted by the EEAC network as representing its common position on policies for agriculture and rural development. It set out ten basic principles for sustainable rural areas. The Commission used the paper as the basis for its formal response to the government's consultation on agriculture and the environment (see page 18).

The theme for the next annual conference will be environmental governance.

Working groups

There are currently five EEAC working groups:

- **Agriculture:** following the production of the EEAC statement the group will broaden its work towards rural development.
- **Coastal zones and the marine environment:** the working group has prepared a statement 'Towards the Sustainable Development of the European Coastal Zone', and, with this as a basis, will undertake analyses of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the EU Strategy to Protect and Conserve the Marine Environment. This work is likely to be a valuable input to the Commission's next study.
- **Transition to a sustainable energy future:** this group will assess energy sources and technologies for the future, land use for energy production, liberalisation and measures for reaching Kyoto targets.
- **Environmental governance:** the group which will be working on the background to the EEAC annual conference 2003.
- **Sustainable development strategies:** the working group has delivered a statement on 'Strengthening Sustainable Development in the EU' to the European Union President Romano Prodi.

Other activities

The network has engaged in several other activities during the period of the review, either through the Steering Group or through its member Councils. In particular:

- EEAC published a statement 'Greening Sustainable Development' based on the outcome of the eighth annual conference. Its message, addressed to the European Union, was that if the peoples of Europe, including the candidate countries, were to move towards sustainability, the procedures and policies of the European Union urgently needed to change towards a new and more sustainable concept of development. The statement provided a substantial input to the European Commission's proposed strategy on sustainable development leading up to the Gothenburg Council meeting.
- The network has agreed a set of principles and rules to govern its operation, reflecting the recent growth in the size and range of the network. The fundamental principle underlying the EEAC network was agreed to be "the common understanding that present trends in production, consumption, trade, and economic development as a whole are rooted in unsustainable uses of natural resources."
- The network was represented at the Johannesburg summit by a number of its member Councils.

The development of a constitutional treaty for the European Union is being kept under review. The current draft appears inadequate in terms of the emphasis placed on the protection and enhancement of the environment, and the EEAC Steering Committee has endorsed a letter to be sent to the members of the Convention Presidium.

Administration

Budget

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided funding for the Commission since June 2001. The Commission's budgeted and actual expenditure for 2000/01 and 2001/02, together with its budget for 2002/03 and 2003/04, are shown below.

£ thousands	budget 2000/01	outturn 2000/01	budget 2001/02	outturn 2001/02	budget 2002/03	forecast outturn 2002/03	provisional budget 2003/04
Members' fees	59	44	54	54	58	63	64
Staff costs	426	429	433	425	452	454	465
Travel & subsistence	48	54	56	48	64	82	70
Consultancies	40	39	183	137	142	86	102
Rent	88	90	94	79	112	114	116
Rates	36	22	35	24	30	30	25
Other office costs	88	106	291	265	91	120	118
Capital	0	0	0	0	50	21	0
Total	785	784	1146	1032	999	970	960

Office relocation

The Commission moved offices in December 2001, which accounts for the increased 'other office costs' in 2001/02. This move was necessary because previous offices at Steel House were not available on a long-term basis.

The search to identify a suitable property from the government estate was unsuccessful. An estate agent was appointed through Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (now part of the Office of Government Commerce) to arrange a search of the open market. The property chosen was considered the most suitable in terms of location, accommodation and cost. It was also more environmentally sustainable than the other options. The ten-year lease ensures maximum value from the investment that was put into the relocation.

Retirement of Secretary

Dr David Lewis retired from his position as Secretary in March 2002 after nearly ten years with the Royal Commission. A dinner was held in his honour at the Royal College of Pathologists. The new Secretary, Dr Peter Hinchcliffe, took up post in February 2002.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution is an independent body, appointed by the Queen and funded by the government, which publishes in-depth reports on what it identifies as the crucial environmental issues facing the UK and the world.

Information on the Commission's work can be found at www.rcep.org.uk

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