

The Environmental Audit Committee



Gordon Clarke

Clerk of the Committee



Select Committee system

- Current system established in late 1970s
- Departmental committees mirror each government department and are re-organised following machinery of government changes
- Other select committees deal with internal House matters, or regional areas, or cover cross-cutting issues



- “We must make the process of government green. Environmental considerations must be integrated into all our decisions, regardless of sector. They must be in at the start, not bolted on later.”

Tony Blair at the UN, June 1997



‘I warmly welcome the new Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee ... This will be a terrier to bite our own ankles and ensure high standards across government’

Rt Hon John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister

‘Some of us believe that we have not been a terrier, but a rottweiler.’

Helen Brinton MP, Environmental Audit Committee

‘John Prescott likened us to terriers snapping at the heels of government. ...I prefer the idea of the sheepdog intelligently shepherding the Government towards appropriate goals on climate change and environmental topics’

John Horam MP, Chairman, Environmental Audit Committee





EAC reports

- Greening Government
- Budget – tax and spending
- Climate change
- Biofuels and sustainability
- Credit rating agency and sustainability
- Housing
- Biodiversity
- Trade and development
- Sustainable timber
- Regulatory impact assessments and policy appraisal
- Structure of Government and climate change
- Transport
- Environmental crime
- Environmental education
- GM foods
- Waste management



Examples of EAC's impact

- Greening government agenda
- Profile of environmental issues within the Budget process
- Specific policy changes – biofuels, biodiversity, carbon capture and storage
- Contribution to debate in the House and the media – personal carbon trading



EAC and mainstreaming sustainable development

- Focus on
 - cross-cutting policies and issues involving more than one government department
 - more than just environmental issues
 - decision making process, policy appraisal and structure of government issues
 - climate change
- But...
 - environmental issues can dominate
 - targets tend to be EU or domestic policy targets rather than overarching targets with a clear focus on sustainability



How does this relate to other processes, policies and strategies?

- Cross-cutting units
- Integrated policy appraisal
- Cabinet government
- ‘Independent’ bodies
- Scrutiny by Parliament
 - Cross-cutting questions
 - Cross-departmental committees plus House of Lords



Future challenges

- Climate change – reducing emissions and adapting to changes that are already inevitable
- Change of Government – will the approach change?
- Changing the culture and structure of government, building the capacity and political will within departments to make cross-departmental working work
- Engaging wider public service & perhaps the private sector
- Integrating sustainability into both policy & operations
- Creating a framework to deliver the information & data needed for proper scrutiny
- Lack of understanding of the issues and some confusion among senior decision makers about sustainable development
- Loss of impetus & lack of clarity about what to do next



Lessons for the governance of the EU SDS

- Strategic approach to mainstreaming and the development of a reporting and monitoring framework – what structures are needed? How will they interact?
- Crucial role for policy appraisal and policy review – but in a way that allows for proper scrutiny
- Development and integration of sustainability accounting
- Setting realistic enough goals that people want to try to meet them ... and then raising the bar to keep forcing improvements
- Balancing the carrot and the stick and finding a role for the critical friend



