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10.1 This chapter summarises the results from the 1996/7 Survey of Public Attitudes to the Environment for England & Wales. This survey was the fourth commissioned by the Department to investigate people's environmental concerns, awareness and behaviour. The previous surveys were carried out in 1986 [\[1\]](#), 1989 [\[2\]](#) and 1993 [\[3\]](#), [\[4\]](#). The next survey in this series is planned to be run in 2000/01.

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Survey Method

Sampling and Fieldwork

10.2 The 1996/7 survey was carried out by Market and Opinion Research Limited (MORI). A pilot survey was conducted between 9-11 November and minor amendments were subsequently made to the wording of the questions and the showcards.

10.3 The final survey was based on a national sample of 3,822 adults (aged 18 or over) drawn from the Post Office's Postal Address File (PAF), of which 3,236 were valid addresses. A total of 1,782 people were interviewed face to face in their homes resulting in an adjusted survey response rate of 55 per cent. Despite efforts to maximise the response rate, it was lower than for the previous three surveys ([see Table 10.1](#)).

10.4 The sampling frame for the 1996/7 survey was changed from previous surveys to introduce greater control and accuracy whilst also reflecting the basic parameters of previous studies. The Electoral Register as used in the 1986, 1989 and 1993 surveys is subject to a number of well documented deficiencies. In addition, it has a tendency to under-represent certain households possibly due to the introduction of the Community Charge/Poll Tax and peoples subsequent reluctance to register. The PAF which is based on households rather than people was therefore used as the basis of the sampling frame for the 1996/7 survey. This is a reliable and up to date source which is better able to reflect changes in tenure and property uses than the electoral register.

10.5 All constituencies in England and Wales were stratified by region and a sample of 120 were selected, with the probability of selection proportionate to population size. Within each of the constituencies selected, the ward which most closely matched the overall constituency profile in terms of gender, age, work status, housing tenure, ethnicity and urbanity was identified. Using the PAF, a cluster sample of addresses were then selected from within each ward.

10.6 In order to make the 1996/7 results comparable to those of previous surveys, the data have been weighted according to the size of households from which respondents are drawn. This is because for the 1996/7 survey people living at an address with more than one eligible person had a lower chance of selection than those living alone whereas in previous surveys every individual had an equal chance of being selected. The data have also been weighted to the known population sample to give a weighted sample of 1,785. The weighted sample is used as the base for deriving the 1996/7 results presented in Tables [10.4](#) to [10.23](#).

Sampling errors

10.7 The responses to the questions are subject to varying degrees of statistical reliability as they are only given by samples of the total population of England and Wales. The variations between the sample results and the true results can, however, be predicted from the size of the samples on which the results are based and the responses obtained. [Table 10.2](#) illustrates, for different sample sizes and percentage results, the predicted 95 per cent confidence interval. For example, with a sample of 600 where 10 per cent give a particular answer the chances are 19 in 20 (at the 95 per cent confidence level) that the true value

(which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range 10 ± 2.4 per cent (ie 7.6 to 12.4 per cent).

10.8 Comparisons between separate groups within a sample may result in a difference that is real or that has occurred by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). At the 95 per cent confidence level, for the difference between the results to be statistically significant, it must be greater than the values given in [Table 10.3](#). For example, if 10 per cent of 18-24 year olds (base size 500) and 12 per cent of 25-44 year olds (base size 1000) claim to agree strongly with a given statement, then there is no significant difference between these two proportions as their difference lies within the confidence interval of 3.2 percentage points.

Bias

10.9 As explained above, the survey estimates are subject to sampling errors and are also probably subject to other systematic errors and biases. For example, as non respondents may have been generally less concerned about the environment this may have introduced a bias into the results. Introducing the survey to people as a study of public attitudes to the environment and citing the Department of the Environment as the client may also have influence the results and encouraged respondents to give answers they thought were expected of them.

10.10 Efforts were made to limit the effects of poor questionnaire design. For example, the 1996/7 questionnaire was largely based on previous tried and tested surveys of 1986, 1989 and 1993 and most of the new questions were based on those included in other surveys. For the actions and reactions section, respondents were asked to report what they had done in the last 12 months (as in the 1993 survey) rather than what actions they were prepared to take in the future, thereby limiting over claiming by respondents. Responses can also be effected by media coverage around the time of a survey.

Socio-economic classifications

10.11 The survey included a suite of questions which obtained social, economic and demographic details from each respondent. This enabled the sample to be divided into groups according to sex, age, social, class, educational attainment, access to use of car, the type of urban/rural area where respondents lived, whether the respondent had any dependent children and the region in which the respondent lived.

Interview techniques

Overview

10.12 A major part of the survey was to assess people attitudes to 32 environmental issues which were each illustrated by individual picture cards (see [Figure 10.1](#)). Five issues were additional to those used in 1993. The picture cards remained unchanged for the 27 issues used in the 1993 survey.

10.13 Respondents answered a series of questions by sorting the cards into piles depending on their responses. For example, the cards were sorted into piles according to respondent's level of concern for each of the issues. The respondents was then asked to indicate how much they felt could be done about each issue and who should act on it. To help respondents sort the cards, basecards were used with the options marked on them.

10.14 For most questions respondents were prompted with a list of possible options. These were given on showcards, or respondents used the 32 picture cards mentioned above. The issues or options which were available are listed in tables where relevant. In some cases, the respondents were allowed to pick more than one option and therefore the percentages can sum to more than 100.

10.15 Three questions were unprompted. Respondents were, therefore, required to reply to these question in their own words rather than by selecting a choice of answers or options. The results for the most popular answers are presented in Tables [10.4](#), [10.12](#) and [10.18](#).

Comparisons with Previous Surveys

10.16 Many questions were repeated from previous surveys to enable comparisons of attitudes to be made over time. Results for all four surveys are given for three questions in [Table 10.6](#) [Table 10.4](#), [Table 10.6](#) and [Table 10.11](#). For most other questions, comparisons with the 1993 survey are only available and are given in the relevant tables. In some cases, it was necessary to change slightly the wording of a question (see footnotes to these tables). Some comparisons, therefore, must be treated with a degree of caution.

Action in the European Community

10.17 Three questions were included to assess views relating to actions taken by the UK Government and the European Community (EC) to protect the environment (see [Table 10.10](#)). The results indicate respondents' broad views which in many cases will not be based on a detailed awareness of the UK and EC's respective powers nor the degree to which the environment is an area of mixed competence. Some decisions will therefore be taken at Community level and others at national level. While these questions dealt with the environment, the answers may also partly reflect respondents' more general views about the Government and the EC.

Knowledge and Awareness

10.18 Respondents were asked several questions to assess their knowledge and awareness of global warming. Initially they were asked to select, from eight options, those which they thought were major contributors to global warming (see [Table 10.13](#)). Six options were correct and two were incorrect. Respondents

were allowed to select as many options as they wished and therefore the percentages add to more than 100. The table also presents the individual results grouped into four broad categories of 'best', 'reasonable', 'confused' and 'wrong'. The groups have been formed according to combinations of respondents' answers and are mutually exclusive. In a second question, respondents were asked to select, from a list of options, the effects that they thought may result from global warming (see [Table 10.14](#)). The final question in this section asked respondents to select one of the three statements that most accurately reflected their views on global warming (see [Table 10.15](#)).

Sustainable Development Issues

10.19 [Table 10.17](#) shows the proportion of respondents who claimed they had heard of a number of different environmental issues. Those respondents who claimed to have heard of sustainable development were then asked to define it (see [Table 10.18](#)). The question was unprompted and more than one answer was permitted. 14 per cent then admitted that they did not know the meaning of sustainable development although they had previously claimed to have heard of the term. Respondents were also asked to select one of four statements that they most agreed with about the balance between environmental and economic considerations (see [Table 10.19](#)). Nearly half the respondents thought that a balance should be struck between the environment and the economy. This shows that despite people's obvious confusion about the actual meaning of sustainable development they tended to agree with its underlying principle. [Table 10.20](#) illustrates the issues that individuals considered to be most important to themselves personally. They were asked to select two or three factors from a list of 14 and therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

Environmental Actions

10.20 Three sets of questions were asked about environmental actions. The first concerned actions in the home, the second those taken as a consumer, and the third those taken to avoid, or as a result of, environmental problems. For each of a range of possible actions, respondents were asked whether they had taken that action 'on a regular basis', 'once or a few times', or not at all in the last 12 months. Respondents could also indicate whether the question was not applicable to them (see [Table 10.21](#)).

10.21 [Table 10.22](#) shows the proportions of respondents claiming to have taken different personal actions 'on a regular basis' for environmental reasons. For each action respondents, who claimed that action was not applicable to them, have been excluded from the calculations. For example, people without access to a bicycle were excluded from the calculation of the percentage of people who claimed to use a filtering mask for protection against traffic fumes.

Information Associated:

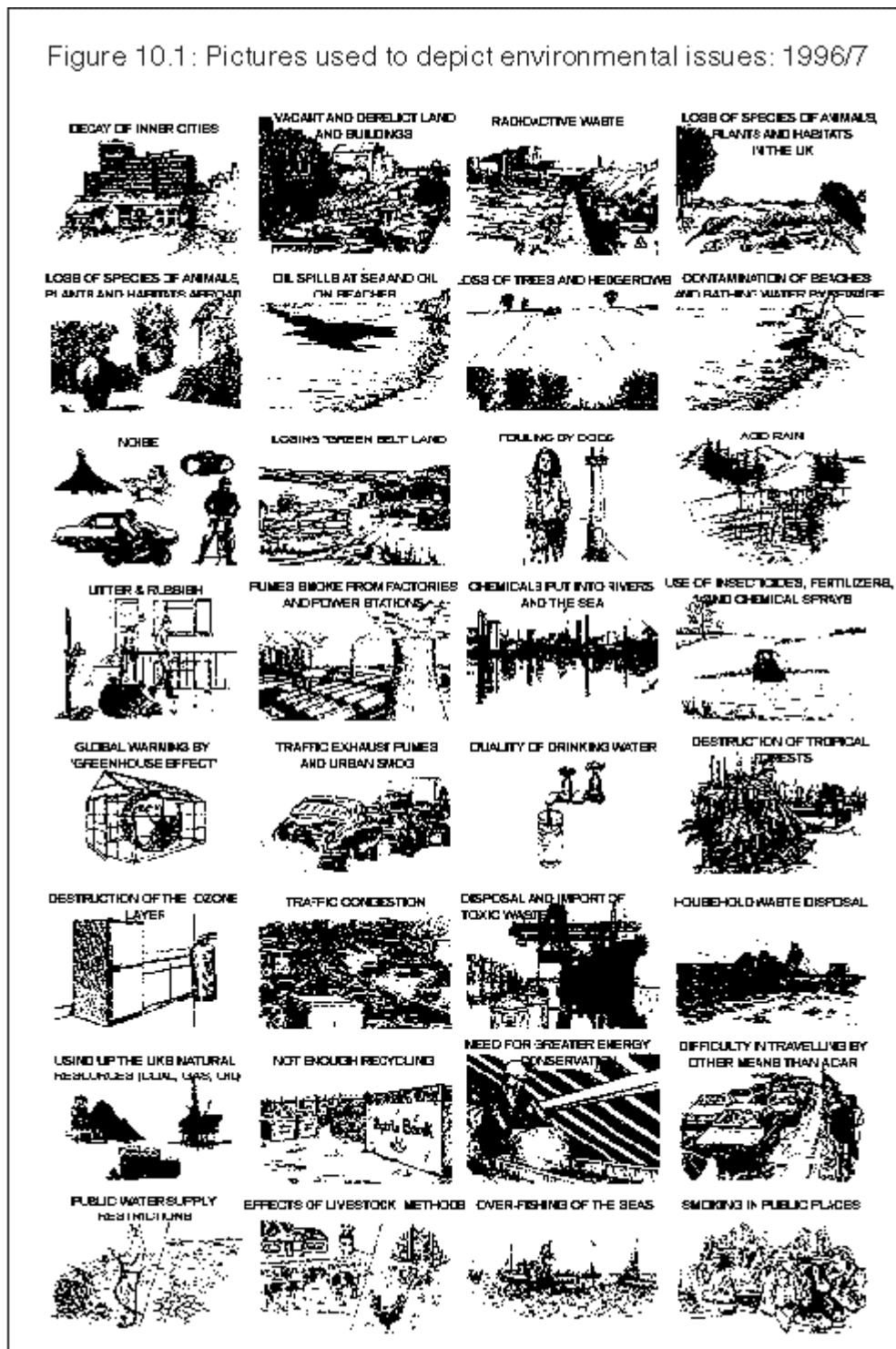
Data Tables:

- The following data are available in Microsoft Excel97© format for downloading.

Table No.	Title
10.1	Public attitudes to the environment survey sampling: 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996/7
10.2	Approximate sample tolerances: 1996/7
10.3	Differences required between two sub-groups for a result to be statistically significant: 1996/7
10.4	Public concern about the environment and pollution relative to other issues: 1986, 1989, 1993 and 1996/7
10.5	Public concern about the environment in general: 1996/7
10.6	Percentage "very worried" about each environmental issue: 1986, 1989, 1993 and 1996/7
10.7	Percentage of respondents "very worried" about each issue by sex, age, educational attainment, social class and area: 1996/7
10.8	Optimism about environmental issues by sex and age: 1996/7
10.9	Allocation of responsibility for environmental issues: 1996/7
10.10	British Government and EC actions to protect the environment: 1996/7
10.11	Fairest way of finding money needed to solve environmental problems: 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996/7
10.12	Future environmental concerns: 1996/7
10.13	Knowledge of major factors contributing to global warming: 1996/7
10.14	Knowledge of the effects of global warming: 1996/7
10.15	Concern about global warming: 1996/7
10.16	Need for environmental information: 1996/7
10.17	Knowledge of environmental issues: 1996/7
10.18	Understanding of the term sustainable development of those who had heard of this term: 1996/7
10.19	Balance between environmental and economic considerations: 1996/7
10.20	Issues important to people in their lives: 1996/7
10.21	Personal actions taken for environmental reasons: 1993, 1996/7
10.22	Personal actions taken "on a regular basis" for environmental reasons: 1996/7
10.23	Support for various environmental policy options: 1996/7

Figures 10.1:

Figure 10.1: Pictures used to depict environmental issues: 1996/7



Internet Links:

UK Sustainable Development Strategy

<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/indicators/index.htm>

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References and further reading:

1 Department of the Environment, (1987). *Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics, No. 9 1986*. HMSO

2 Department of the Environment, (1990). *Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics, No. 12 1989*. HMSO.

3 Department of the Environment, (1994). *1993 Survey of Public Attitudes to the Environment, England and Wales; Statistical Bulletin*. DOE.

4 Department of the Environment, (1994). *Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics, No. 16 1994*. HMSO

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