FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR FUTURE

DEFRA
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Foundations for our Future – DEFRA’s Sustainable Development Strategy
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Foreword by the Secretary of State

At its heart, sustainable development is a simple idea. But achieving it, at home and internationally, means facing up to some major challenges. DEFRA was created to take up these challenges, and to bring farming, the food chain, rural affairs and the environment together in a sustainable partnership and to achieve more across the piece because the elements are complementary. To make that partnership work, we need to ensure sustainable development becomes a reality, not just a concept – not only across DEFRA but also across Government.
In the past, it is clear that economic progress has not always taken account of its potential impact on our society and environment. Too many people have been excluded from the benefits of development, while natural resources have been depleted and our cities and countryside degraded.

But DEFRA is not just about the environment, food and rural affairs. We also have a role in championing sustainable development across the whole of the UK and across government – sharing experience, promoting better practice and driving change forward.

Internationally, a quarter of the world’s people have to survive on incomes of less than $1 a day, while still more have no access to such basic resources as clean water, health care and education. In the UK we do not face these problems on such a scale, but there is a growing realisation, here and worldwide, that we need to find a new way forward.

In *Working for the Essentials of Life*, I set out a vision of what DEFRA will do, working alongside stakeholders and partners in government and society, to build a sustainable future for the UK. That future includes a better environment and sustainable use of natural resources, economic prosperity for the industries we sponsor and impact upon, thriving rural communities, and a countryside for all to enjoy. And it includes leadership across government, within the EU and internationally, to address issues of sustainability on a global scale.

This sustainable development strategy sets out the principles and processes by which my Department will work to create that vision. It marks the start of a process by which we hope to embed the tenets of sustainable development deep within the culture of the Department and, by example, within government. And it sets out how we will measure and take account of our work to ensure that we are making real and sustainable progress in delivering our goals. This strategy, and our progress against it, will be kept under yearly review.

DEFRA is a relatively new Department – its formation is an opportunity to take a fresh approach to the future. Above all, it is a Department which deals with the essentials of life – food, air, land, water and people. Sustainable development gives us the tools and ways of working which can address all of these issues together. Already we have made a good start against many of our objectives. Through the policies and processes set out in this document, we will continue to work with our partners, in the UK and across the world, to build on that progress, to place sustainability at the heart of our actions, and to protect and ensure a better quality of life. I passionately believe this is the only way forward.

Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP
Secretary of State
Chapter 1

New department, new opportunity

1.1 DEFRA is a new department, created in June 2001. Our overall aim – agreed after wide ranging consultation – is achieving sustainable development. This strategy describes how we will meet that aim.

What is sustainable development?
The Government describes it as ‘a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come’1.

Achieving it requires four objectives to be met at the same time, in the UK and the world as a whole:

• social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
• effective protection of the environment;
• prudent use of natural resources; and
• maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The challenge is to find a new model of development that is far more efficient in its use of natural resources. In turn, that means thinking broadly about the impacts of decisions, looking ahead and harnessing the benefits of sustainability.

DEFRA’s leadership role
1.2 DEFRA policy responsibilities directly affect peoples’ lives. And DEFRA has lead responsibility for promoting sustainable development across government, within the UK and internationally. This includes:

• promoting sustainable development within Europe and international bodies such as the OECD, and spearheading the UK’s contribution to the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002; and
• promoting and tracking UK progress towards sustainable development across public, private, voluntary and research sectors; and
• chairing the Cabinet Sub-Committee of Green Ministers – ENV(G) – which considers the impacts of all Government policies on sustainable development.

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Chapter 1

Working in partnership

1.3 DEFRA works closely with partners throughout government, academia and the public, private and voluntary sectors to ensure that our sustainable development objectives are widely shared and understood, and that the necessary connections are made. For example, transport and land-use planning impact directly on climate change, air pollution, noise, biodiversity and rural development. Housing and local government are both critical to rural policy. We have a keen interest in the ‘liveability’ agenda launched by the Prime Minister in April 2001.

1.4 DEFRA has maintained and developed its close working links with DTLR, reinforced by a concordat. We work closely with DTI on resource productivity and corporate social responsibility, and with HM Treasury to ensure sustainable development is taken into account in departmental bids for the 2002 Spending Review. We also work with key public service delivery departments, both bilaterally and through Cabinet Committees, to enforce the need for policies to meet the Government’s sustainable development objectives.

1.5 We are building stronger links with local authorities to ensure national policy decisions reflect local needs. At the regional level, DEFRA now has a strong presence in the Government Offices, which work closely with organisations such as Regional Chambers and Regional Development Agencies to ensure sustainable development issues are embedded in their strategies and programmes.

1.6 DEFRA’s Executive Agencies and Associated Bodies (including several important science and regulatory agencies, the Environment Agency, the Countryside Agency and English Nature) are involved as statutory advisers in our decision making, and have a crucial role to play in the delivery of the Department’s policies.

Promoting sustainable development across Government

ENV(G) was formed following the creation of DEFRA, and has a higher status than the previously informal Green Ministers Committee. During 2002 targets will be set for all key operational areas of the Government Estate, including travel, energy and waste. And to reflect the broad nature of sustainable development objectives, a social impacts working group has been established.

DEFRA’s Sustainable Development Unit prepares an annual report monitoring the progress departments make on integrating sustainability into operations and policy-making. The approaches taken by departments will differ, but information which should help us assess progress include:

• the establishment of departmental sustainable development units;
• the production of sustainable development strategies; and
• public reporting on key sustainable development impacts.

DEFRA has also established a cross-government group of officials to consider how government procurement can support sustainable development. The group will report in July 2002.
1.7 DEFRA is strongly supported by a range of independent advisory bodies – the Sustainable Development Commission, the Sustainable Development Education Panel, the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment.

A departmental strategy for sustainable development

1.8 DEFRA’s Prospectus, *Working for the Essentials of Life* (published in March 2002), sets out our vision of the Department’s work for the environment, rural issues and the food chain. It has sustainable development at its heart.

1.9 To take us further towards achieving our vision, we have produced this departmental Sustainable Development Strategy. This document sets out how we intend to make sustainable development fundamental to DEFRA and embed it in everything we do. It identifies a set of indicators by which we will measure our progress, together with a mechanism for regular review and reporting.

1.10 We have involved a wide range of people – stakeholders, the public and staff – in developing the strategy, and the outcome of these consultations has directly influenced its structure and scope. A summary report of the consultation processes and outcomes is available at http://www.defraweb/environment/sustainable/index.htm

Working in partnership with the Sustainable Development Commission

Chaired by Jonathon Porritt, the Sustainable Development Commission is an independent advisory body which reports to the Prime Minister and the heads of the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its 24 members are drawn from across the UK and from all sectors of society.

SDC’s mission is to inspire Government, the economy and society to embrace sustainable development as the central organising principle. It aims to act as a ‘critical friend’ of DEFRA, commenting on progress made both within the department and across Government.

DEFRA looks to the Commission to support its role as the Government’s sustainable development champion, to promote ‘joined up’ thinking, and to provide authoritative advice on securing real and lasting improvements in people’s quality of life.
Chapter 2

New thinking, better solutions

2.1 DEFRA is committed to ensuring sustainable development becomes embedded in its work. We will deliver sustainable solutions through:

• a set of principles to which DEFRA will adhere when developing or reviewing policies and decisions;
• a systematic approach to the assessment of economic, social and environmental impacts by DEFRA policy and decision makers; and
• activities for DEFRA staff to ensure they understand and implement this strategy.

A Ten guiding principles

2.2 A better quality of life commits the Government to take account of ten guiding principles and approaches. All of these are relevant to DEFRA, and all are necessary for delivering sustainable development.

Putting people at the centre

2.3 DEFRA’s responsibilities encompass the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe. So they affect us all.

• We will strive to be innovative and flexible in the methods we adopt to engage all sectors of society in our work. We are working to break down barriers to better communication within DEFRA.

“To be able to tackle the challenges facing the new Department effectively, DEFRA will need to speak to and learn from a much wider group of people and organisations than at present.”

(‘Views and ideas from stakeholder seminars’, Green Alliance, 2002)

• We will work with Government Offices to promote local and regional initiatives, and continue to support the development of Regional Sustainable Development
Chapter 2

Frameworks and local Community Strategies.

- We will support sustainable development in Europe and worldwide, with the aim of making globalisation work for the benefit of all, and especially for the poorest people.

Taking a long-term perspective

2.4 Responsibilities such as climate change, soil quality, resource efficiency, access to rural services and agriculture need a long-term perspective. Working for the Essentials of Life sets out our long-term vision.

- We will be forward-looking in our thinking, making use of methodologies which will help us to better understand and predict future trends.
- We will adopt indicators of progress for the priorities and themes in this strategy, and regularly review progress against them.
- We will encourage innovation within business and society through setting further far-sighted targets, and the use of economic instruments to encourage change.

Taking account of costs and benefits

2.5 The Modernising Government White Paper (1999) stressed that policy-making should be based on “careful appraisal of the benefits and measures it seeks to achieve, the costs it entails, and the burden on business.” Costs and benefits include impacts on the environment and different sectors of society.

- We will adopt a systematic approach to assessing the economic, environmental and social impacts of policies through use of the Integrated Policy Appraisal tool described later in this chapter.

Creating an open and supportive economic system

2.6 A strong and competitive economy is integral to sustainable development. It means providing goods and services which meet consumers’ needs and are produced and used efficiently.

- We will work in partnership with businesses, other departments and Government Offices to improve efficiency, through promoting better use of water, energy and materials, and through reductions in waste and polluting emissions.
- We will be an effective regulator, assessing costs and benefits, and streamlining regulatory burdens through our activities and those of our sponsored Agencies.
- We will be a modern sponsor of the food and farming, water and environmental protection industries for which we are responsible, assessing the impacts of policies and decisions, and working with DTI and others on trade.

Combating poverty and social exclusion

2.7 DEFRA’s policies help shape quality of life, through their influence in areas such as local environments, warm homes, affordable food, flooding, and jobs and services in rural areas.

- We will assess the impacts of our decisions on different areas and sectors of society, to help combat social exclusion.
- We will work with DTLR and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to improve local environments in urban and rural areas where there are problems of litter, noise and poor air quality. We will continue to work
with DTI on sustainable energy issues, particularly relating to fuel poverty.

Respecting environmental limits
2.8 DEFRA is committed to a world where climate change and environmental degradation are recognised and addressed. Defining some environmental limits is difficult, but can be vital to avoid irreversible loss of resources, such as the collapse of some fish stocks through overfishing.

- We will continue to identify and ensure compliance with environmental limits, such as those set by the EU on air and water quality, to prevent serious or irreversible damage to the environment or natural resources.

Using the precautionary principle
2.9 Many of DEFRA’s policies – such as those on chemicals, biotechnology and animal diseases – deal with risks in areas where our knowledge of potential impacts is sometimes limited.

- In such cases we will adopt a precautionary approach in line with the Nice European Council Resolution on the Precautionary Principle, and guidance to be issued by the Inter-departmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment (ILGRA).

Using scientific knowledge
2.10 For policies to be sustainable they must be based upon the best available scientific advice, information and evidence. We have a strong tradition of science-based policy-making but there is more we can do to improve the quality of our information and how we use it. How we deliver this will be set out in our forthcoming Science and Innovation Strategy.

- We are reviewing the way we obtain information and advice, to improve the quality and evidence base for our policies. We have launched a “horizon scanning” research programme, to identify future problems and areas of uncertainty that need further research.

- We sponsor the Sustainable Development Research Network, which contributes to sustainable development in the UK by facilitating the better use of research and evidence in policy making.

- We are looking at ways to improve our dialogue with the scientific community, the public and other stakeholders, and to ensure our science programmes take better account of public opinion and values.

Transparency, information, access to justice and participation
2.11 DEFRA is committed to openness and transparency. We are responsible for public access to environmental information, and delivering improved access to environmental justice in England.

- We are developing an “accessibility code” to help us improve the way we understand and respond to the needs of our stakeholders and the wider public, including how we involve and share information with them.

- We will publicise rights to access environmental information and, with the Lord Chancellor’s Department and the Information Commissioner, advise public bodies on their responsibilities under the Environmental Information Regime. We will work to improve access to environmental justice across society, and counter ignorance of the remedies and penalties available.
• Internationally, we will promote the principles of Article 10 of the Rio Declaration, including implementation of the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

2.12 Many people feel decisions which affect them are made centrally without their having a say. Encouraging local action and participation is a theme that was raised by stakeholders, staff and the general public during our consultations.

“A number of participants stressed the need to allow local communities to develop solutions... from allowing farmers more flexibility to produce for a local market, to encouraging communities to develop campaigns to grow their own food or increase the amount of recycling.”

(“The public perspective on sustainable development, IPPR, 2002)

• We will support local sustainable solutions wherever possible, through our advice and grant services and research studies. For example, DEFRA is helping to support work by Transport 2000 to understand what a sustainable sourcing and distribution system would look like and how it would operate.

• Local schemes need to be sensitive to circumstances. Regions have Sustainable Development Frameworks based on local situations, knowledge and aspirations. DEFRA will encourage Local Strategic Partnerships to take account of these Frameworks so that they embody the principles of sustainable development and are based on community involvement at a very local level.

Making the polluter pay

2.13 Where possible, the polluter should pay for the costs of pollution, resource depletion and social disamenity. This provides an incentive to reduce harm, and avoids the costs falling on society at large.

• We will tackle environmental damage, developing tools for prevention and for remediation, ensuring that as far as possible, the polluter pays through the effective enforcement of laws and the imposition of appropriate penalties.

• We will identify opportunities to use economic instruments such as taxes, charges and trading to achieve social and environmental improvements in the most cost-effective way. Current examples include the first economy-wide greenhouse gas Emissions Trading Scheme and the climate change levy.

A framework for taking account of the environmental, social and economic impacts of policies and decisions

“DEFRA needs to develop more sophisticated accounting mechanisms which capture the real costs and benefits of projects – social and environmental as well as economic.”

(“Views and ideas from stakeholder seminars”, Green Alliance, 2002)

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2.14 Undertaking impact assessments should be part of the policy development process, not an add-on. The Modernising Government White Paper (1999) committed the Government to ensuring that “policy-making delivers creative, robust and flexible policies, focused on outcomes”. One of the promised actions to achieve this was production and delivery of:

“an integrated system of impact assessment and appraisal tools in support of sustainable development, covering impacts on business, the environment, health and the needs of particular groups in society”.

2.15 DEFRA and DTLR, together with a number of other departments, have designed an Integrated Policy Appraisal (IPA) framework. This brings together the economic, social and environmental impacts of policy options, and their distributional effects both in relation to different areas (for example rural, urban) and different groups of people (for example the elderly, those on low income). It does not remove or devalue the need for existing appraisal requirements such as Regulatory Impact Assessments. IPA was piloted in DEFRA during the latest Spending Review.

2.16 IPA will be used in DEFRA to help decision makers:

- consider the full range of effects that a policy or programme might have;
- assemble evidence systematically to provide a summary of the impacts of a policy or programme and the likely scale of those impacts; and
- find more detailed or specialist guidance where necessary.

2.17 IPA is intended to be applied to the widest possible range of activities, from high level strategies to measures designed to deliver a specific objective. The level of scrutiny should be proportionate to the scale of the policy and its significance.

2.18 We are also promoting the application of a similar approach in EU policy making, and expect an appraisal tool to be in place by the end of 2002.

**Embedding new thinking and approaches in DEFRA**

“DEFRA needs to ensure sufficient focus is placed on the education and awareness of its staff, who will have responsibility for delivering the strategy.”

(‘Views and ideas from stakeholder seminars’, Green Alliance, 2002)

2.19 This strategy puts sustainable development at the heart of DEFRA. But it cannot – and does not aim to – describe in detail how that will be reflected in every aspect of DEFRA’s work. Through a programme of activities for staff, we aim to create a better understanding of sustainable development within DEFRA, to embed the principles and commitments in this strategy in every part of the organisation.

2.20 This programme will comprise:

- better sources of information for staff; opportunities to hone the skills and practices needed to deliver sustainable development; and team discussions on the implications of a more sustainable approach; and
- monitoring and appraisal of staff performance in a way that reflects sustainable development, strengthening the links between DEFRA’s aim, business plans, and personal objectives.
Scrutiny of policy decisions and processes

“DEFRA needs to have in place an auditing framework to guide the development of policy, sound sustainability indicators and concrete statements about how this will be monitored.”

(‘Views and ideas from stakeholder seminars’, Green Alliance, 2002)

2.21 To be successful, this strategy must make a difference to the way decisions and policies are developed.

2.22 We will use the internal auditing system to examine the procedures and information used to make future policies, and check they comply with this strategy.

2.23 We are developing a programme of policy evaluation within a sustainable development framework, consistent with Integrated Policy Appraisal. This will assess whether policies are delivering economic, social and environmental objectives and if they have any unintended impacts – either good or bad.
3.2 Against these themes we have identified a series of 22 indicators which will help us see whether our policies and practices are having the required impact. They are made up of those UK headline indicators of sustainable development\(^3\) for which DEFRA has lead responsibility, plus a number of new and existing indicators from other sources. Some indicators are ‘under development’ since relevant national data are not yet available.

3.3 DEFRA’s new Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets are currently being finalised as part of the Government’s spending review and will be issued in the summer. We will need to look again at these indicators of progress in the light of the PSA targets as part of our review process.

3.4 We will report on the direction that these indicators are moving in as part of the yearly review of this strategy outlined in Chapter 5.

\(^3\) From ‘Quality of life counts – Indicators for a strategy for sustainable development for the UK: a baseline assessment’, DETR, 1999. ISBN 1 85112 3431
DEFRA’s indicators of progress

1. Emissions of greenhouse gases (UK headline indicator)
2. Socio-economic impacts of climate change (under development)
3. Energy use per household (England)
4. UK resource use – total material requirement (under further development)
5. Populations of wild birds (UK headline indicator)
6. Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) habitats in England
7. Biodiversity action plans in the UK (to be further developed)
8. Waste arisings and management (UK headline indicator)
9. Household waste and recycling in England
10. UK marine inputs (metals, nutrients and organic substances)
11. Fish stocks around the UK fished within safe limits
12. Value of landings per tonne of fleet capacity in the UK
13. Productivity of the agricultural industry in the UK
14. Real retail food price index (UK)
15. River water quality (UK headline indicator)
16. Weekly consumption of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables (Great Britain)
17. Heath of farmed animals (under development)
18. Time taken to clear up cases of poor welfare in farm animals (under development)
19. Days when air pollution was moderate or higher (UK headline indicator)
20. Economic performance in the less well performing rural areas (under development)
21. Access to key services in rural areas in England
22. Change in countryside quality in Great Britain (under further development)
Cross Cutting Themes:

1. Climate change

Indicators of progress:

1. Emissions of greenhouse gases (UK headline indicator)
2. Socio-economic impacts of climate change (under development)

3.5 DEFRA has responsibility for tackling the causes of climate change and helping people adapt to its impacts. This means doing more to encourage a low carbon economy where natural resources are used efficiently. And it means identifying and successfully managing the risks posed by predicted increases in temperature, extreme weather events and flooding.

3.6 Indicator 1 shows that the UK is currently on target to meet the international Kyoto Protocol commitment of a 12.5 per cent reduction in emissions by 2012. We are also making good progress towards our higher domestic goal of a 20 per cent cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. But far greater cuts will be needed by the UK and other industrialised countries if we are really going to make a difference. The UK Climate Change programme\textsuperscript{4} has started to address this challenge.

3.7 DEFRA’s contribution to this programme includes leading on international climate change negotiations, promoting energy efficiency, reducing emissions from industry and business, developing alternatives to fossil fuels, and encouraging the protection and enhancement of carbon sinks such as forests.

Indicator 1: UK emissions of greenhouse gases:

Emissions of greenhouse gases: 1990-2012

\textsuperscript{4} Climate Change – The UK Programme, DETR 2000.
3.8 Whatever we do to reduce emissions, climate change will occur to some extent and we need to adapt to the impacts. In 1999 the Government identified a preliminary set of 34 socio-economic and environmental indicators of climate change and its impacts\(^5\). This set is due to be reviewed and we will aim to identify a suitable indicator for the socio-economic impacts of climate change from the revised set. We will aim for this indicator to be in place before the strategy is reviewed in June 2003.

3.9 DEFRA has set up the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) to encourage organisations to assess the likely impact of climate change and devise response strategies. DEFRA has also funded the production of the \textit{UKCIP Climate Change Scenarios 2002} which explain how our climate might change in the future. Regional studies across all of the UK are either underway or have been completed, and have highlighted that while many areas will face similar issues such as increased flood risk and pressure on water resources, there will also be regionally-specific challenges to, for example, local industries and valued natural habitats. In addition, the Government has recently begun an inter-departmental process to consider the implications of climate change. DEFRA is anticipating the need to adapt by considering climate change during mainstream policy making, for example in the management of water resources, and of flooding and coastal erosion.

3.10 Natural resources – including air and wind, freshwater and marine environments, fossil fuels, land, soils, forests and biodiversity – provide a fundamental building block of our economy and are at the heart of our quality of life. Not only do we exploit them for energy, agriculture, construction, industry, transport, tourism, recreation and wellbeing, but they also act as natural sinks for the pollution and waste we create.

Managing our natural resources productively

\begin{quote}
“We need to find new ways of producing energy and stop wasting the oil because it’s going to run out anyway.” (Marlow)
\end{quote}

\footnote{The public perspective on sustainable development, IPPR, 2002}

Indicators of progress:

1. Energy use per household (England)
2. UK resource use – total material requirement (under further development)
3. Populations of wild birds (UK headline indicator)
5. Biodiversity action plans in the UK (to be further developed)
6. Waste arisings and management (UK headline indicator)
7. Household waste and recycling in England

\(^5\) Indicators of Climate Change in the UK, DETR & NERC, 1999 ISBN 1 870393 46 5.
Indicator 3: Energy use per household (England)
Domestic energy consumption, number of households and their ratio: 1976–2002

Indicator 4: UK resource use (total material requirement)
Components of UK total material requirement
3.11 Improving our energy efficiency is a vital part of achieving sustainable resource management. Indicator 3 shows that domestic energy consumption has risen in line with household growth since the 1970s. Improving energy efficiency, particularly in the domestic sector, is a specific recommendation for DEFRA of the Government’s Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) Energy Review, published in February 2002. We will respond to this Review in the joint DEFRA/DTI White Paper on Energy, to be published later this year.

3.12 Indicator 4 shows that total resource use per capita in the UK has remained fairly stable over the past three decades, despite a steady increase in the output of the UK economy. We need to build on this and strive for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

3.13 In November 2001 the PIU published a report on resource productivity and its role in the achievement of sustainable development. The report makes a number of far-reaching recommendations with long-term implications for policy. The lead on individual recommendations falls to DEFRA, DTI or HM Treasury, while DEFRA has overall responsibility for taking the report forward. Discussions between these lead Departments are under way at official level.

Maintaining the quality of our natural resources

“I've really noticed the loss of all the wild flowers ... and I miss the birds, you never see a thrush now.” (Barnstaple)

(‘The public perspective on sustainable development’, IPPR, 2002)

3.14 Protecting wild and endangered species of animals, birds, plant and marine life will help to enhance biodiversity – a key environmental aim for DEFRA. But the benefits also extend to the economy, through tourism, and to society through the enjoyment and educational opportunities that biodiversity and wildlife offer.

3.15 Indicator 5 is a UK headline indicator and is a good indicator of biodiversity generally, due to the wide ranging habitat distribution of wild bird species. The overall population of British breeding birds has been relatively stable over the last two decades, but there have been significant declines in farmland and woodland species.

3.16 Indicator 6 shows the condition of SSSIs in England in 1998 and 2001. English Nature has a programme of monitoring SSSIs which started in 1997. By March 2001, 66 per cent of sites had been inspected and assessed against a common standard; thus figures for 2001 are more accurate than earlier estimates and do not necessarily show that actual deterioration has taken place.

DEFRA is working to reverse the decline in farmland and woodland bird species and to enhance biodiversity through:

• more sustainable agricultural practices (see theme 4);
• greater protection of special places for wildlife – including two new national parks and working with English Nature and other Departments and public bodies to bring SSSIs into favourable or improving condition;

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Indicator 5: Populations of wild birds (UK)


All species (105)
Woodland species (33)
Farmland species (19)

Source: RSPB, BTO, DEFRA

Figures in brackets denote the number of species

Indicator 6: Condition of all Sites of Special Scientific Interest habitats in England


Source: English Nature
• ensuring that all 436 Biodiversity Action Plans are implemented (Indicator 7 shows the number that have been published) and launching a new England Biodiversity Strategy in summer 2002; and
• reducing wildlife crime by launching a new national intelligence unit to combat national and international crime against wildlife.

Leading on waste management

“We ought to be doing more work about producing less waste in the first place, on things like packaging. We make the problem and then we make another problem in having to get rid of it. We should also do more about re-using things. There’s an awful lot of hype about having to have something new.” (Barnstaple)

(‘The public perspective on sustainable development’, IPPR, 2002)

3.17 In the UK over 400 million tons of waste is produced every year. About 170–210 million tonnes of this comes from households, commerce and industry – including construction and demolition waste – and 58 per cent of this is landfilled (see Indicator 8). Producing and disposing of this waste involves heavy exploitation of (mostly finite) resources and it can pose risks to human health and the environment.

3.18 Indicator 9 shows that household recycling in England has slowly increased over the past two decades – but against a backdrop of rising domestic waste. We need to radically change our practices and behaviours so we produce far less waste in the first place, and make a dramatic shift from disposal to re-use and recovery through recycling and composting. DEFRA is responsible for the Government’s Waste Strategy 20001 which includes targets and outlines what needs to be done to achieve the goal of sustainable waste management.

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Businesses, households, the voluntary sector and local authorities must all play their part.

3.19 DEFRA has also negotiated a range of measures with EU partners to increase recycling, and will be helping to develop European strategies for recycling and sustainable use of resources. In the UK, we will continue to work with stakeholders to strengthen producer responsibility, building on efforts to minimise waste and maximise recovery. The development of markets for recycled materials will be crucial, and in November 2000 we set up the Waste and Resources Action Programme to address this demand.

3.20 Last year DEFRA sponsored a Waste Summit where key stakeholders discussed future action on delivering the waste strategy. The recommendations are being taken forward by a PIU review, expected to be completed in summer 2002. The Government will consider carefully the outcomes of this review.

Indicator 8: Waste arisings and management in the UK (from households, commerce and industry)

Waste arisings and management: 1997/98

Indicator 9: Household waste and recycling in England

The marine environment

Indicators of progress:
10. UK marine inputs (metals, nutrients and organic substances)
11. Fish stocks around the UK fished within safe limits
12. Value of landings per tonne of fleet capacity in the UK

3.21 Past management of our marine environment has often been fragmented, sectorally based and driven by short-term economic gain. Stakeholders were not always fully involved, and action only taken when scientific evidence proved beyond reasonable doubt that there was a problem – which meant it was often too late to devise and implement a solution.


3.23 Indicator 10 shows that good progress has been made in reducing inputs of some heavy metals. But it also shows there is more to do – we cannot afford to be complacent about the levels of heavy metals, nutrients and organic substances that enter our seas.

3.24 We want to build on progress made in recent years in protecting the seas around our coasts. Within Europe, we will be among the first countries to fully apply the Habitats and Birds Directives to offshore waters. We continue to work through the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic, including working towards the target for cessation of discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous and radioactive substances of most concern into the marine environment by 2020.

3.25 Indicator 11 shows that in 2001 only 24 per cent of fish stocks around the UK were within safe biological limits. This indicator in particular demonstrates that the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has failed to meet its objectives. The review of the CFP, due to be completed by the end of this year, will provide the opportunity to address these failings and to work for a sustainable future for the fishing industry. Our major priorities are:

- to tackle the mismatch between fishing capacity and fish stocks;
- to seek an end to counterproductive subsidies; and
- to increase integration of environmental concerns into fisheries management.

3.26 Alongside the CFP review, the UK continues to play a key role in the development of recovery plans for fish stocks at the risk of collapse, such as North Sea and Irish Sea cod. We believe sustainable development must be the fundamental principle in fisheries policy if the decline is to be addressed effectively.

3.27 Greater sustainability in fish stocks would permit larger catches and thus increased income for fishermen. To achieve this the current level of fishing needs to be reduced in order to allow their recovery. Indicator 12 is an index of the average value (in real terms) of landings per unit capacity (gross tonne) of the UK fleet.

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6 These stocks had spawning levels which were sufficient to allow a good probability of stock replenishment.
Indicator 10a: UK marine inputs – metals

Indicator 10b: UK marine inputs – nutrients and organic substances
Indicator 11: Fish stocks around the UK fished within safe limits
Percentage of fish stocks around the UK within safe biological limits

Note: Figures relate to finfish stocks only and are derived from ICES ACFM stock assessment reports.

Source: CEFAS, ICES

Indicator 12: Value of landings per tonne of fleet capacity in the UK
Index of average value landings per tonne of fleet capacity, UK (1997=100)

Source: DEFRA
3.28 DEFRA is responsible for the chain of activities involved in getting food on our plates – from agriculture and fishing through to food processing, distribution, sale and catering. The challenge is to work with the whole of that chain to meet consumers’ needs in a way that improves economic efficiency, safeguards the environment and brings social benefits.

3.29 The independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food reported in January 2002\(^1\), making a wide range of recommendations on how to create a sustainable farming and food sector in England. In response, DEFRA will deliver a new strategy for sustainable farming and food in autumn 2002. Together with other developmental work on indicators, this may allow the selection of more appropriate sustainability indicators in future years.

**Economic growth and efficiency**

3.30 Productivity shows how efficiently inputs are converted into outputs. Indicator 13 shows that since 1973 agricultural productivity in the UK has increased by 36 per cent. The measure used – total factor productivity – shows the volume of output leaving the industry per unit of all inputs, including fixed capital and paid labour. The key factor driving this growth has been labour productivity, which has more than doubled since 1973.

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\(^1\) Farming and food – A Sustainable future, Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002
Associated with this, labour inputs into farming have declined by broadly a third since 1973 (although the decline in the numbers of people working in farming has been slightly less, with a shift towards more part-time working). However, this indicator only covers the economic output and resources used by agriculture. It needs to be considered in the context of other social and environmental issues such as the impacts of agriculture on biodiversity (see Indicator 5).

3.31 DEFRA is committed to working with the food and farming industry to make food production in this country more sustainable, through measures which include moving away from production subsidy towards forms of support which benefit land management and rural development. This will require significant reform to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which DEFRA is pursuing in Europe through the Mid-Term Review. And DEFRA will also help farmers reconnect with markets through skills development, business advice, and rationalising bureaucracy. Part of restoring economic sustainability will be making farm diversification easier, in terms of alternative crops and enterprises such as rural tourism, and activities further down the food chain such as processing and marketing.

3.32 Indicator 14 shows that the real cost of food to the consumer relative to other goods and services has been declining steadily over the last two decades. One reason for this is greater efficiency in the food chain. The challenge is to keep food affordable while keeping production sustainable. This starts with the agricultural industries but also means that DEFRA must continue to encourage the food chain industries to develop sustainability strategies which build upon the steps they have already taken to become more sustainable. The Food Chain Centre launched
Indicator 15a: Chemical river water quality
Rivers of good or fair chemical quality: 1990–2000

Source: Environment Agency of England and Wales, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Environment and Heritage Service (NI) (EHS)

Indicator 15b: Biological river water quality
Biological river quality: 1990–2000

Source: Environment Agency of England and Wales, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Environment and Heritage Service (NI) (EHS)
in March 2002 will have an important role to play in achieving increased efficiency within the food chain.

Environmental protection

3.33 Farming is responsible for the management of some 70 per cent of our land, but some aspects of the quality of this landscape and the ecosystems it supports have been degraded over time. Improving farmers’ environmental performance is a key challenge for DEFRA and its forthcoming strategies on sustainable farming and food, and on the water environment.

3.34 The water quality in England’s rivers is currently better than at any time in the last decade. Indicator 15 shows that since 1990, general water quality in England has improved significantly – 94 per cent of river lengths were of good or fair chemical quality in 2000 compared with 83 per cent in 1990; and 94 per cent were of good or fair biological quality in 2000, compared with 86 per cent in 1990.

3.35 However, water pollution from agricultural land poses the biggest environmental threat to UK rivers, affecting their recreational and ecological quality, as well as drinking water quality. This is why DEFRA has set up a cross-departmental project involving farmers, regulatory agencies and other stakeholders in assessing the best ways to minimise diffuse water pollution within sustainable farming.

3.36 Indicator 5 (see theme 2) shows that populations of farmland bird species have declined dramatically in recent years. DEFRA is working to reverse this trend by encouraging more sustainable agricultural practice through measures such as:

Indicator 16: Weekly consumption per head of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables* (Great Britain)

![Graph showing weekly consumption per head of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables from 1976 to 2000.](https://i.imgur.com/5Q5Q5Q.png)

*Excludes potatoes but includes consumption of fruit juices.

Source: National Food Survey
• the improvement and expansion of agri-environment and other schemes based on the regional delivery of the England Rural Development Programme;
• an organic food and farming action plan; and
• a pilot network of demonstration farms to disseminate best practice in profitable and environmentally friendly farming.

3.37 We also need an environmental indicator in relation to food chain activities beyond the farm gate and will explore how this might best be achieved by the time of the next review.

Social benefits

“...you’ve got to be prepared to take a bit of cost to get better healthier food.... you can’t say ‘I want cheap and best quality’ because it doesn’t always go together.”

Barnstaple

3.38 Indicator 16 provides a measure of the extent to which individuals consume fruit and vegetables – which can help reduce diet-related diseases including cancer and heart disease. It shows that consumption has increased only slightly in the last seven years for which data is available, but that there is still much room for improvement.

3.39 We will continue to work alongside the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency and the food industry to tackle the underlying causes of a poor diet. This means:
• encouraging healthy eating, for instance through the Five a Day campaign and free fruit in schools scheme;
• working with the food industry to improve the nutritional quality of processed foods;
• carrying out an assessment of programmes to improve diet and nutrition across government, to see where work can be joined up and focused more effectively on improving health and reducing inequalities.

11 Animal health and welfare

Indicators of progress:

17. Health of farmed animals
   (under development)

18. Time taken to clear up cases of poor welfare in farm animals
   (under development)

3.40 The creation of DEFRA has brought together Government responsibility for major policies on animals. High standards are vital if we are to achieve sustainable and humane livestock and dairy industries that produce safe, high quality food products. We shall ensure that our policies and decisions with regard to animals are clearly assessed for their economic, social and environmental implications.

Animal health

3.41 Recent animal health problems such as BSE and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) have damaged the economic viability of the UK livestock industry, undermined public confidence in the safety of food, and have caused long-lasting social and economic impacts on some rural communities.

3.42 The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food has recommended that DEFRA devise and implement a comprehensive animal health strategy, which will be finalised once the ongoing inquiries into the FMD epidemic have reported. This will set out our
actions to improve the health of farmed animals through the reduction and eradication of disease, better risk management strategies, greater involvement of stakeholders in our work, and improved and expanded veterinary surveillance. An indicator of farm animal health will be developed as part of this surveillance strategy.

Animal welfare

3.43 The way in which we treat the animals we keep for food, sport and companionship is a reflection of the care and respect we show to all the creatures with which we share our environment. The creation of DEFRA has brought together most animal welfare interests for the first time and has provided an opportunity to review, modernise and simplify current legislation. That is why we have recently carried out a major consultation exercise on how animal welfare law might be improved and we are now considering the possibility of a new animal welfare bill, pulling together current legislation and closing loopholes.

3.44 In the meantime, an important priority continues to be the reduction of incidences of poor farm animal welfare and the time taken to deal with them. An indicator of time taken to clear up cases of poor welfare in farm animals is under development. Between 1 January and 31 December 2001, 92 per cent of animal welfare complaints that had a target date for investigation were visited within one working day. This figure will be the baseline for measuring progress. DEFRA will work with the food industry to ensure that producers who operate low animal welfare standards are forced to change their practices.

Indicator 19: Days when air pollution was moderate or higher

Days when air pollution was moderate or higher: 1987–2001 (United Kingdom)
3.48 In assessing and reviewing environmental risks, we must understand their distribution across different sectors of society. We are working with the Department of Health on the distribution of health impacts of sources of pollution such as landfill sites and industrial incinerators. We have also commissioned research into the health impacts of air quality in low income areas. There is no obvious indicator for measuring progress in this area, but we may be able to develop one in future when more research is completed.

Wellbeing and recreation

3.49 DEFRA has an important part to play in encouraging better mental and physical health through countryside recreation. We are responsible for maintaining and enhancing National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, waterways and wildlife.

3.50 Our countryside is an enormous recreational asset with high quality landscapes, fresh air, open space and tranquillity. The numbers of people using the countryside for recreation have been increasing and our policies on improving countryside access and the rights of way network should help maintain this trend. Countryside recreation provides revenue for rural areas, can bring employment and community benefits, and can also lead to improved land and conservation management.

3.51 But increased numbers of people using the countryside can have negative environmental effects, particularly through associated traffic. Wherever possible, countryside recreation should not be at the expense of the quality of the countryside or its ability to support wildlife and biodiversity.

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\[\text{Indicators of progress:}
\begin{align*}
19. & \text{Days when air pollution is moderate or higher (UK headline indicator) (Indicators 5, 6, 7 and 22 are also relevant)}
\end{align*}\]
(see Indicators 5, 6, 7 and 22). The challenge is to ensure these indicators go in the right direction.

3.52 Noise can have a major effect on quality of life. Noise nuisance is a problem affecting both rural and urban areas and the Government announced in 2000 that it would develop a national ambient noise strategy. As a first step, our public consultation was issued in December 2001.

7 Rural economies, communities, and countryside character

Indicators of progress:
20. Economic performance in the less well-performing rural areas (under development)
21. Access to key services in rural areas in England
22. Change in countryside quality in Great Britain (under further development)

Rural economies and communities

“If you got small businesses back in the countryside you’d get more tourists because they’re getting something that they’re not getting in the cities.” (Barnstaple)

(‘The public perspective on sustainable development’, IPPR, 2002)

3.53 We want rural areas to have a diversity of strong economic enterprises and are funding projects to help achieve this – in market towns and their hinterlands – and in rural areas generally. The England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) is helping farmers and other businesses diversity while conserving and enhancing the countryside, and we are looking at how to deliver the programme more effectively. Local Strategic Partnerships in rural areas, and their Community Strategies, will help integrate environmental, social and economic improvements in regeneration initiatives.

3.54 We aim to monitor the economic performance of rural areas, probably at local authority district level, with a particular focus on the areas most in need of development. Our current preference is to focus on an indicator based on income. We also plan to ensure consistency with indicators used for other purposes, notably DEFRA’s Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. Following this, we hope to agree on the best way of forming this indicator.

3.55 We want rural communities to thrive and be inclusive. This means access to key services – such as schools, healthcare, childcare, post offices, shops, banks and transport – for all the community, including those with disabilities and the elderly. But it also means flexibility over how they are delivered. Within Government, rural proofing is the mechanism by which we ensure rural areas are taken into account by policy makers. We will also rural proof our own policies to ensure all aspects of rural life are considered.

Evidence over the last decade shows a decline in the availability of many services, but we are beginning to reverse this trend. For example, since 1997 there has been increased public and community transport, increased primary school provision, and a rise in the number of settlements with village halls and meeting places.
Indicator 21a: Access to key services in rural areas in England (2000):
Health, education, social, employment and Post Office

Indicator 21b: Access to key services in rural areas in England (2000):
Shops, banking, community halls and public houses

* An additional 20% of settlements have a bus service, but of less frequency.
3.56 The Rural White Paper (November 2000) sets out a new standard for delivery of public services in rural areas. Following the White Paper, a more comprehensive data set was developed to measure access to rural services. However, only data from 2000 has been acquired so far (see Indicator 21). At present we are unable to capture more innovative ways of delivering services – such as electronic banking – but this may change in the future. A PSA is being developed for rural services, which will reaffirm commitments and provide a basis for measuring their impact. Indicator 21 will be further developed to ensure consistency with the PSA target.

Countryside character

3.57 DEFRA is working with the Countryside Agency, English Nature and English Heritage to develop an overall indicator of countryside quality which reflects changes in agriculture, development and rural tranquility. Until this indicator is developed, the existing Quality of life indicator on landscape features – hedgerows, stone walls and ponds – provides a measure of how some important components of the British countryside have changed in the last two decades. The indicator shows that losses of hedges and ponds in the 1980s were halted or reversed during the 1990s. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are now in place over most of the country and, with their targets and action programmes, there are opportunities for land managers and enterprise to couple rural regeneration with biodiversity recovery to produce vibrant landscapes.

3.58 Incentives for farmers and land managers to improve the quality and diversity of the countryside exist through schemes

Indicator 22: Change in countryside quality (under further development)
Change in characteristic landscape features in Great Britain

Source: Countryside Survey 2000

based on the ERDP. The synergies created by DEFRA allow us to take a more holistic view of land management, improve and expand these schemes, and improve the knowledge and skills of land managers. Designations such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Beauty also help conserve high quality areas and the habitats they support, and we are looking at how we can further develop these.

3.59 We are working with DTLR on a wide-ranging review of the planning system, which delivers many key DEFRA policies. It is essential that reforms to make the system faster, and outcomes more certain, are not at the expense of high quality decision-making with sustainability at its heart.

3.60 DEFRA already seeks to ensure policies throughout the planning system reflect the Departmental aim of sustainable development. Specific examples include policies to minimise loss to development of the best and most versatile agricultural land – a vital natural resource, particularly when the farming industry needs to become more sustainable and competitive.
Chapter 4

DEFRA’s own impacts

4.1 Chapter 3 focused on DEFRA’s policies. This chapter looks at the contribution DEFRA can make to sustainable development through its own operations. Because we lead on sustainable development across the Government estate (see Chapter 1), our efforts in this area should be exemplary.

4.2 Departments are significant employers, property managers and consumers of goods and resources. They have long been committed to reporting their economic impacts. More recently, they have begun to publish collective ‘greening government’ reports on the environmental impacts of their activities. These cover impacts such as energy and water use, waste production, and related issues such as staff travel policies.

4.3 The social impacts of departments’ own operations are equally significant. The Government recognises the importance of developing socially responsible policies for its own operations, and reporting social impacts. A cross-government working group is currently considering how relevant social impacts should be accommodated in the framework of targets for sustainable development on the Government Estate.

DEFRA’s own impacts

4.4 DEFRA is a large organisation, employing around 8,000 people with an additional 6,000 people employed by its Executive Agencies, operating from many buildings throughout the country. The policies and practices it adopts in managing these staff and buildings, and in its business relations with others, have potentially large social, environmental and economic impacts.

4.5 We are preparing a revised Strategy for Sustainable Development in DEFRA’s Operations. This is intended to be a living document which will incorporate the targets emerging from the new framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate. It will also set out new operational targets of its own for environmental and social performance and measure progress (generally annually) against these targets.

Social impacts

4.6 Our people are vital to the success of DEFRA. The Department brings together staff from the former MAFF, the former DETR and a small number of staff from the Home Office. DEFRA is putting in place a range of new personnel and management policies. It is also about to undertake its first staff survey, which
will provide baseline information on many personnel issues: this will be used to set targets for progress, many of which will be assessed through future staff surveys.

4.7 We will use DEFRA’s operational strategy and other appropriate public documents to report annually upon DEFRA’s social policies and set indicators and/or targets for:

- overall terms and conditions (including pay);
- interchange with other organisations;
- staff satisfaction and morale;
- equal opportunities and diversity;
- better work-life balance, including improved flexible working;
- misconduct and grievance procedures; and
- health and safety.

4.8 We will also use DEFRA’s operational strategy to report upon its business relations with others. The strategy will set targets for the prompt payment of invoices and report progress. It will also report on propriety policies and progress in achieving greater diversity in appointments for the non-departmental bodies which DEFRA sponsors.

Environmental impacts

4.9 The Strategy for Sustainable Development in DEFRA’s Operations will build upon the Greening Operations Strategies of former MAFF and DETR, which aimed to improve these Departments’ environmental performance. This new strategy will set indicators for:

- minimising the use of resources (such as energy, water, wood and paper);
- reducing waste;
- reducing pollution (through green transport policies and reducing the use of ozone depleting substances);
- using our purchasing powers to reduce the environmental impacts of the goods and services it buys and to support innovation and resource efficiency.

4.10 DEFRA is committed to developing a systematic, audited approach to managing the significant environmental impacts of its estate. An Environmental Management System for the operational activities in London HQ offices achieved ISO 14001 accredited status in April 2002. This will be rolled out across the DEFRA estate by March 2006.

Economic impacts

4.11 DEFRA is committed to working with others in government, with NGOs and trade bodies and with our European partners to secure benefits for health, wellbeing and the environment whilst minimising costs to the consumer and industry, and promoting national competitiveness. DEFRA’s Departmental Report (May 2002) sets out how we have organised ourselves to deliver against our aim, objectives and targets. It also looks closely at how we spend our money together with how we have performed against our high-level PSA targets.

4.12 We are focused on delivering efficient, high quality services to our customers. Therefore, we are working to improve our business planning and to strengthen the links between planning and delivery mechanisms through a range of processes aimed at monitoring progress and targeting outcomes more effectively. We will also continue to promote value for money and efficiency in everything we do. Efficiency targets have been
developed across the Department and a programme of Better Quality Services reviews has continued with around £200 million of services and activities across the Department and its agencies reviewed to date.

4.13 Equally, we are focused on developing well-planned, evidence-based policies and we will continue to use the expertise of our specialists to ensure that economic and statistical analysis and advice forms part of this evidence base.

4.14 We are also committed to exploring how the Government can use its purchasing power more effectively to promote sustainable development and encourage innovation and the supply of environmentally preferable goods and services. We need to work within the current legal framework for public procurement, but we will maximise the opportunities it provides. Procurement also needs to be fair and transparent: DEFRA has policies to ensure that most purchasing is by tender, with fully open competitions in the case of the largest exercises, and single tender action only where fully justified.
Chapter 5

Reviewing progress

A living strategy
5.1 The purpose of this strategy is to initiate change in the way DEFRA approaches its responsibilities, to ensure better, more sustainable outcomes. Its publication marks the launch of a range of activities for staff to embed this new thinking within the Department (see Chapter 2, section C). As such, it is the beginning of a process – that of moving towards sustainable development – rather than an end.

5.2 We want this strategy to be a living document, and welcome your views on it. Please e-mail or send comments to:
DEFRA's Sustainable Development Strategy
Sustainable Development Unit 5
DEFRA
5/C1 Ashdown House
Victoria Street
London SW1E 6DE
E-mail: sdstrategy@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Yearly review
5.3 These reactions will feed into a yearly review of the strategy, with the first review taking place in June 2003. This review will look at whether the principles, commitments and priorities contained in this document are the right ones, and how successful we have been in meeting them. This review will be open and participative, involving our staff and stakeholders.

5.4 As part of this review, we will report annually on progress against the commitments and indicators in this strategy. In line with best practice on sustainable development reporting by the public and private sector, the information will be subject to external scrutiny by independent auditors.

5.5 We will use electronic systems as far as possible to report and disseminate information and to engage others in the review process.