Leading across government
Sustainable development – from concept to reality

Defra’s aim is sustainable development, which means a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come, including:

- a better environment at home and internationally, and sustainable use of natural resources;
- economic prosperity through sustainable farming, fishing, food, water and other industries that meet consumers’ requirements; and
- thriving economies and communities in rural areas and a countryside for all to enjoy.

Defra’s objective 5 is to promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources domestically and internationally.

Our target is to promote sustainable development across government and the country as a whole as measured by achieving positive trends in the Government’s headline indicators of sustainable development.

The goal of sustainable development is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To achieve this government and other sectors of society in the UK and in the world as a whole need to meet the following objectives at the same time:

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

Priority 1.
Action to raise awareness of the principles and practices of sustainable development across government.

We will:

- promote government action throughout 2003–06, including at regional and local level, to follow up commitments made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in autumn 2002, by working to incorporate actions to meet headline indicator targets in other Departments;
● help Government departments deliver more sustainable ways of operating and reducing their own impacts and promote more sustainable products and policies in purchasing decisions by government and public bodies;

● embed sustainable development appraisal tools and approaches in Defra and beyond by supporting sustainable development in key Defra beacon policy areas, including new strategies for sustainable farming and food, the food industry, and for animal health as well as in rural affairs, conservation and environmental policy areas and trialling appraisal tools in other departments;

● harness external knowledge and expertise in promoting sustainable development by sponsoring the Sustainable Development Commission and Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution;

● launch and implement a review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy during 2004;

● produce a new strategy for sustainable production and consumption in the UK, following up some of the key themes agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development;

● improve the contribution of the Environment Agency – as the Government’s single largest environmental regulator – to sustainable development objectives; and

● improve the consistency with which all organisations linked to Defra focus on sustainable development objectives – not least through the National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Countryside Agency, English Nature and Defra’s science and industry bodies.

**Priority 2.**

To develop and promote tools to ensure government decisions and policies are sustainable.

We will work with other Government departments to promote integrated policy appraisal in government and securing inter-departmental agreement by the end of 2004 on a strategy for the use of integrated policy appraisal tools in policy-making by:

● assessing the use of the Integrated Policy Appraisal tool in a pilot study involving 10 projects in five departments including Defra;

● achieving consensus of the value of integrated policy appraisal across Departments; and

● embedding rural proofing, a way in which we encourage others to think about the impacts of policies on people in rural areas, across Government by 2004.
We will develop and launch by May 2003 a process for reviewing the UK Sustainable Development Strategy by 2005 including: a mechanism for interdepartmental discussion of areas where the headline sustainable development indicators are not moving in the right direction; action to follow up the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development and a strategy for stakeholder consultation and engagement. The strategy review will involve:

- reviewing the underlying principles of sustainable development, their application and effectiveness and the techniques for embedding sustainable development in decision-making;

- agreeing new priorities for the UK on sustainable development for the next 10–15 years, reviewing progress with the existing headline indicators and adapting these in the light of emerging new priorities and themes; and

- engaging the devolved administrations on the scope and content of the new strategy and engaging a wide variety of stakeholder interests in the elements of the review.

Priority 3.
To ensure that the UK’s approach to sustainable development and the headline indicators are still the right ones.

Priority 4.
Sustainable development: In Defra, in practice.

By bringing together responsibilities for the environment, food and farming and rural affairs, Defra is uniquely placed to promote this agenda and, in doing so, the management of our natural resources in a way that meets immediate and future needs. The steps we are taking to safeguard these assets include:

- delivering the biodiversity commitments set out in *Working with the Grain of Nature – a biodiversity strategy for England* – the World Summit at Johannesburg set a target to significantly reduce the rate of loss in the world’s biodiversity by 2010 – we are well placed to play a key role in achieving this through our prominent roles in the major biodiversity conventions, our funding for initiatives such as the Great Ape Survival Project (GrASP), and tough action against wildlife criminals;

- promoting the care of special wildlife sites, for example through working closely with English Nature and others including landowners to ensure that best use is made of relevant funding streams, legislation and delivery agencies for management and improvement of the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
Chapter 1

- reversing the decline of farmland birds through the projects set out in the Delivery Plan for our farmland birds PSA Target. Central to this will be increasing significantly the area covered by agri-environment schemes under the England Rural Development Programme, including by piloting and implementing an entry-level agri-environment scheme which will be available to the majority of farmers in England.

- delivering an increase in Government funding for flood and coastal defence which, by 2005/06, will rise to £564 million, an increase of £150 million on current levels; working with the Environment Agency – who will be made responsible for all rivers presenting the greatest flood risk – and others to ensure that this investment is properly used to further reduce flood risk across the country;

- introducing a Water Bill in the 2002/03 Parliamentary session which will contribute to our objectives by reforming water abstraction licensing to provide new powers to protect the environment and manage water resources more effectively, and improving the position of consumers through a new independent Consumer Council for Water;

- implementing the EU water framework directive and hence improving the ecological quality of water, and tackling the problem of diffuse pollution of water, especially from agriculture; and

- addressing the excess of fishing capacity in relation to the sustainable opportunities that are available, for example through promoting the return of EU stocks to within safe biological limits and keeping them there, by reducing fishing activity through management over several years, reinforced by recovery plans and effective enforcement and control.

Priority 5. Looking outside.

Defra’s agenda cannot be achieved without a high profile in EU and international negotiation. Some issues – like climate change – are inherently global and must be pursued at a global level.

Many of the policies which affect our strategic priorities – like Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, or environmental measures – depend on EU decisions; we need to ensure that our interests – like our concerns about better regulation – are energetically pursued when these are negotiated. We need partnerships with other countries, for example to promote environmental technologies. And we need to build alliances in Council negotiations to secure particular objectives – on CAP reform.

For example we must work for greater coherence between the EU’s internal and external policies, notably seeking changes in the CAP and trade policies to support our World Summit on Sustainable Development and World Trade
Organisation commitments. And we have to ensure that we work effectively alongside new EU partners and in the EU’s developing institutional framework.

Three milestones in 2003–06 will be: the completion of the current CAP reform negotiations; the final stages of the current round of WTO negotiations; and the UK’s Presidency of the EU in 2005. These affect the whole range of Defra’s interests and reflect the importance of an effective, unified approach to EU and international affairs.