



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

**EU and UK
Environmental Policy:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Third Report of Session
2015–16**

**First Special Report of Session
2016–17**

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

Current membership

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Powers

The constitution and powers are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152A. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/eacom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Slater (Clerk), Carl Baker (Second Clerk), Tom Leveridge (Senior Committee Specialist), Stanley Kwong (Committee Specialist), Ameet Chudasama (Senior Committee Assistant), Baris Tufekci (Committee Assistant), and Nicholas Davies (Media Officer).

Contacts

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First Special Report

The Environmental Audit Committee published its Third Report of Session 2015–16, on the *EU and UK Environmental Policy*, HC 537 on 19 April 2016. The Government's response was received on 25 August 2016 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government response

1. The Government welcomes the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) for its consideration of, and Report on, EU and UK environmental policy. The EAC's report was a significant contribution to the debate surrounding the referendum on UK's membership of the EU. We agree with the Committee's conclusion that the UK's membership of the EU has had a significant impact on the UK's natural environment while providing a platform for the UK to pursue its own environmental objectives, including through international leadership on climate change and biodiversity.
2. Following the decision of the British people on 23 June to vote to leave the EU, the Government recognises that there will be a significant opportunity to substantively rethink our approach to how the UK conducts environmental policy making both domestically and internationally.
3. The UK is now preparing to negotiate our exit. Defra will be working with the Department for Exiting the EU on the UK's withdrawal and future relationship, liaising closely with other key departments on environmental policy. The Government will work with industry and the public to develop these new arrangements.
4. In the meantime, the UK remains a full member of the European Union until exit negotiations are concluded. All the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU environmental law. Defra and BEIS ministers will continue to attend Environment Council and informal meetings of environment and climate ministers; and UK officials will continue to attend working groups and standing committees along with the other Member States. We also remain Party to numerous international treaties protecting our natural environment.
5. Looking ahead, there will be significant opportunities available to the UK outside of the EU. It will allow us to develop innovative British solutions to enhancing our environment, consistent with our own domestic priorities and international commitments. For example, using catchment areas and landscapes as the building blocks of more integrated decision-making at the local level on how the environment is managed.
6. The Government remains committed to its manifesto commitment on being the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than that in which we found it, developing a 25 year plan for the environment, and to work with the Natural Capital Committee on delivering this. We want to design an effective approach to driving environmental improvement, tailored to the needs of our country that has a powerful and permanent impact - making England a cleaner, greener and healthier place to live and

work; not just today, but for the generations to come. Development of the plan will need to be informed by significant input from interested parties across many sectors. Further information on the next steps and timings will be provided in due course.

7. We can point to a number of recent high-profile successes where the UK has achieved real benefits for the environment through its own domestic policies. The introduction of single-use plastic carrier bag charge in England in 2015 is set to lead to six billion fewer such plastic bags in circulation in the first year, reducing a serious threat to our natural and marine environment. We have extended the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks by nearly 200 square miles, protecting our natural assets and supporting the rural economy. The Adaptation Sub-Committee, which provides independent advice to us on climate change adaptation, has published its evidence report that will form the basis of the second UK Climate Change Risk Assessment in 2017 required by the UK Climate Change Act.

8. We will continue to play a leading role on international environmental issues, working closely with our European neighbours, as well as our close friends in North America, the Commonwealth and important partners like India and China to tackle some of the greatest challenges facing our global environment.

9. The UK will continue to lead the way in tackling illegal wildlife trade, including through the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), to which the UK is a Party in its own right. The UK has been a leading player in global efforts to date, hosting the ground-breaking London Conference in 2014 and supporting follow up conferences in Botswana in 2015 and Vietnam in 2016. The UK has already committed £13 million to a wide range of projects tackling the illegal wildlife trade on the ground in developing countries. Defra will be spending over £300 million on Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the next 4 years, and this will include continued funding for the UK's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.

10. The UK's commitment to tackling climate change, internationally and domestically, remains as strong as ever. We have recently set the UK's fifth domestic carbon budget (which passed into law on 21 July 2016) and we are fully committed to implementing the Paris Agreement. This includes seeking to ratify the Paris Agreement as soon as possible and continuing to play a leading role in the United Nations climate change negotiations in Marrakesh in November.

11. The Government will be providing evidence to the forthcoming oral session along with the Department for Exiting the EU on the approach to the environment during our negotiations to exit the EU and the Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum Inquiry. We will outline in more detail our current thinking about our approach as part of our evidence to these sessions.