



House of Commons  
Environmental Audit  
Committee

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**Reaching an international  
agreement on climate  
change: Government  
Response to the  
Committee's Sixth Report  
of Session 2007–08**

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**Sixth Special Report of Session 2007–08**

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## The 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

Mr Tim Yeo, MP (*Conservative, South Suffolk*) (Chairman)  
Gregory Barker, MP (*Conservative, Bexhill and Battle*)  
Mr Martin Caton, MP (*Labour, Gower*)  
Mr Colin Challen, MP (*Labour, Morley and Rothwell*)  
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Mr Nick Hurd, MP (*Conservative, Ruislip Northwood*)  
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Joan Walley, MP (*Labour, Stoke-on-Trent North*)  
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### Powers

The constitution and powers are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally Standing Order No. 152A. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at:  
[www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/environmental\\_audit\\_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/environmental_audit_committee.cfm).

A list of Reports of the Committee from the present and prior Parliaments is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Gordon Clarke (Clerk); Anne Marie Griffiths (Second Clerk); Richard Douglas (Committee Specialist); Oliver Bennett (Committee Specialist); Susan Monaghan (Committee Assistant); Jennifer Steele (Secretary) and Charlotte Towerton (Sandwich Student)

### Contacts

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# Sixth Special Report

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1. The Environmental Audit Committee published its report on **Reaching an international agreement on climate change** on Tuesday 8 July 2008 as HC 355.
2. The Government's Response to the Committee's Report was received on Tuesday 30 September 2008 in the form of a memorandum to the Committee. It is reproduced as an Appendix to this Special Report.

## Government Response

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### Introduction

- i. The Government welcomes the Environmental Audit Committee's continuing interest in international climate change.
- ii. The Government is seeking to agree, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen in 2009, a comprehensive, global and long-term framework that will be up to the task of avoiding dangerous climate change. The Committee's 6th Report of Session 2007–08 makes an important contribution to the discussions on the role of the UK in securing an international climate change deal and the form of that agreement. We have taken careful note of the Report's conclusions and recommendations.
- iii. The Government agrees with the Committee that we also need to demonstrate international leadership by acting at home. The UK has made significant progress in reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Emissions from activity within our borders fell by around 15 per cent between 1990 and 2006, or by more than 20 per cent when allowances purchased through trading in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) are included. This is already below the level required for the UK to meet our target for the period 2008-12 under the Kyoto Protocol. We expect emissions to fall further in future years, to around 23 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010, including allowances purchased through the EU ETS. The UK is also the first country in the world to introduce a legally binding long term framework through the Climate Change Bill to cut carbon dioxide emissions, putting into statute the UK's targets to reduce emissions by at least 60% by 2050 and at least 26% by 2020.
- iv. Climate change is a cross-cutting issue and a number of Departments are working together to deliver the Government's domestic and foreign policy on climate change. The Government's response to the specific conclusions and recommendations of the Committee's Report is provided as follows.

## Conclusions and recommendations

**1. International negotiations must be guided by the best science we have available. This indicates that to give us a good chance of avoiding dangerous climate change, atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases should be stabilised at no more than 450 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. To make this happen developed countries, such as the UK, will be required to reduce emissions by some 25–40% by 2020 and 80–95% by 2050. Developing countries will have to limit their emission growth. Given that these reductions appear likely to only translate to a 50-50 chance of avoiding dangerous climate change the international community should aim for more stringent reductions. (Paragraph 7)**

The Government agrees that international negotiations must be guided by the best available science, the latest findings of which show us that climate change is a bigger and more urgent challenge than had been previously understood. The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report has provided an even stronger link between human activities and climate change, and clearly demonstrates the need for urgent action to cut GHG emissions and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The economics are also clear: the benefits of strong early action heavily outweigh the costs.

The Government believes that to keep the temperature increase to below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels global emissions need to peak by 2020 at the latest. This would mean binding emission reduction targets by the group of developed countries. It would also mean that developing countries take nationally appropriate mitigation action leading to a substantial deviation from business as usual emissions by 2020. Action by countries needs to recognise different national circumstances and respect the UNFCCC principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’. In the light of this we should not expect the poorest developing countries to take on the same sort of commitments as the more advanced developing countries.

In order to meet the 2 degrees C target, the Government considers that global emissions need to be reduced by at least 50% by 2050, compared to 1990.

The scientific evidence has moved rapidly, and as part of a new global climate deal, developed countries may have to cut their emissions by as much as 80 per cent by 2050. That is why the Government has asked the Committee on Climate Change<sup>1</sup> to consider whether the UK’s 2050 carbon dioxide reduction target should be tightened up to 80 per cent.

**2. We agree with the Government that it would not be right exclusively to press for contraction and convergence<sup>2</sup> in current international negotiations, given the political difficulties that could be created. However, contraction and convergence should be used as a guide to the level of effort required by each country to avoid dangerous climate change. We are encouraged that the Government is modelling the impact of probable domestic commitments in other countries and that it is seeking to identify**

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee on Climate Change is currently operating in shadow form ahead of the Climate Change Bill obtaining Royal Assent.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer 2000; Global Commons Institute 2005

**where further action might be achieved. It must find a way of ensuring this information is used to shape negotiations. (Paragraph 12)**

The Bali Action Plan, through which the Copenhagen deal is being negotiated, makes a clear distinction between commitments or actions for developed countries, including Quantified Emissions Limitation and Reduction Obligations, and actions by developing countries. The Government considers therefore that a key issue to explore as part of the current negotiations is what the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ means for national appropriate mitigation action between and within groupings.

Within the negotiations some Parties have already put forward their ideas on what the criteria for further differentiation could be. The views of Brazil and India, for example, have been well-known for some time and some Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States have now come forward with their proposals. For example:

- Brazil: formula based on historical contribution to global warming
- India: The Indian Prime Minister has publicly stated that ‘Long term convergence of per capita emissions is the only equitable basis for a global compact on climate change’. and pledged that India’s ‘per capita GHG emissions will not exceed the per capita GHG emissions of the developed industrialized countries.’
- Alliance of Small Island States: supports the proposal developed by the South-North Dialogue, which combines capability (defined as human development index and GDP per capita), responsibility (defined as cumulative emissions per capita emissions of fossil CO<sub>2</sub> over the 1990–2000 period) and potential (defined as intensity of emissions and emissions per capita)

In addition, other proposals have been put forward in other fora by Non-Governmental Organisations, think-tanks and private organisations.

The Government has not come to a final decision on which allocation methodology would prove the most appropriate. However, it has become very clear that countries have different ideas about what constitutes an equitable approach. It will therefore be a challenge to find an approach that would be acceptable to all Parties, and as such it is likely that an acceptable allocation methodology may need to take into account more than one factor in order to satisfy the UNFCCC principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’.

The government is conducting extensive modelling on the impact of possible commitments in other countries (for example, please see: [http://defraweb/science/Project\\_Data/DocumentLibrary/GA01093/GA01093\\_4191\\_FRP.pdf](http://defraweb/science/Project_Data/DocumentLibrary/GA01093/GA01093_4191_FRP.pdf)), though as a party to the negotiations there are strict limits on what the UK can publish without pre-empting the negotiations. The UNFCCC has done modelling of innovative finance mechanisms and will be doing an update of this work for Poznan. Other modelling groups such as Ecofys ([www.ecofys.de](http://www.ecofys.de)) and the Dutch Environmental Assessment Agency ([www.mnp.nl](http://www.mnp.nl)) have also done extensive modelling of different burden sharing schemes. However, it is important to bear in mind that there are always limitations to such modelling, including the fact that it relies on data (e.g. abatement cost and emissions projections),

approximations, and methodologies which are highly uncertain or may be challenged or refined in the future.

**3. The post-2012 agreement will have to be nuanced in its approach. Absolute emission reduction targets, based on the IPCC scenario that leads to atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases not exceeding 450 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, will have to be adopted by developed countries. Developing countries will also have to play their role by adopting actions that will reduce their future emission trajectories. (Paragraph 13)**

The Government agrees that commitments for developed countries should be in the form of deeper absolute binding emission reduction targets. Only targets of this type can provide certainty to business on the direction of travel and ensure developed countries continue to show leadership. However, we know action by developed countries alone will not be enough to avoid dangerous climate change. We also need developing countries to reduce their emissions intensity and deviate from a business as usual scenario as they develop.

We should not expect the same level of action by all developing countries; instead the Government is seeking a Copenhagen deal that recognises national circumstances and the UNFCCC principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. We would want to see an agreement to differentiation of actions among developing countries. For advanced developing countries, this should result in ambitious deviations from a business as usual scenario, as outlined in the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report. Least Developed Countries will need special treatment and should receive additional assistance to deal with the impacts of climate change.

Commitments for most developing countries are unlikely to take the form of economy-wide emission reduction targets in the near future, but other forms of commitments provide incentives for action. For example: national plans outlining comprehensive mitigation actions; sectoral approaches, including cap and trade; standards and no-lose targets; and Sustainable Development Policies and Measures.

**4. During these complicated negotiations it is critically important that our negotiators do not lose sight of the science of climate change. The 450 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>-eq IPCC scenario, or the EU's two degree target, can not be traded-off. They represent the minimum that we can accept. (Paragraph 14)**

The Government is determined to achieve a comprehensive, global and long-term framework for addressing climate change that is up to the task of stabilising GHGs in the atmosphere at a level which avoids dangerous climate change. We agree that the Copenhagen deal should put us on the right pathway of meeting the EU's 2 degrees goal.

**5. Parallel processes such as the Major Economies Meeting and the G8 can be invaluable in moving forward the UN process for securing climate change mitigation measures. But the UN negotiations are key and any agreements or conclusions reached in parallel processes will only be helpful if they support the UN process. They should not prescribe a way forward for countries excluded from participating in them. (Paragraph 17)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion. Climate change is a global problem that can only be solved through collective international action. The existing





































