



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

**Climate change and
local, regional and
devolved government:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Eighth Report of
Session 2007–08**

Ninth 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.

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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.

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 (Senior Committee Assistant); Jennifer Steele (Committee Assistant); and Charlotte Towerton (Sandwich Student)

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Ninth Special Report

1. The Environmental Audit Committee published its report on **Climate change and local, regional and devolved Government** on Monday 28 July 2008 as HC 225.
2. The Government's Response to the Committee's Report was received on Tuesday 28 October 2008 in the form of a memorandum to the Committee. It is reproduced as an Appendix to this Special Report.

Appendix: Government response

Government response to Environmental Audit Committee report on climate change and local, regional and devolved government

Summary

1. The Government welcomes the EAC's Eighth Report of Session 2007–08 on climate change and local, regional and devolved (herein referred to as 'sub-national') government, for its observations and recommendations and its contribution to the evidence base on this crucial area. This UK Government response to the Committee's findings is mostly concerned with English and UK-wide reserved policy as the devolved administrations, which presented separate memorandums to the Committee earlier in this enquiry, have their own climate change strategies.
2. The Government shares the Committee's view that action at a sub-national level is essential in enabling us to meet our ambitious but very necessary commitments to mitigating and adapting to climate change. While notable progress has been made we agree with the Committee that the momentum must be sustained. The carbon cuts demanded by the Climate Change Bill will require major effort from sub-national government alongside other sectors. This response to the EAC's report describes the measures which the Government is putting in place to ensure continuing progress.
3. Each level of government, as observed by the EAC, has a distinctive role to play in its contribution to addressing climate change. The Government agrees that coordination of approach is important in maximising the effectiveness of action but also places emphasis on the need to encourage devolved action as opposed to over-reliance on a centrally managed policy framework. While sub-national government is expected to help achieve nationally agreed objectives, we believe that it should also be permitted and encouraged to adopt approaches which reflect varying conditions, opportunities and constraints.
4. Local government has a pivotal role in tackling climate change particularly through its community leadership role and the range of services that it provides. While many local authorities have already made headway in action to help realise this potential, we believe that the introduction of climate change indicators in the new local authority performance framework will serve to raise the game of all local authorities in this crucial area. Mitigating

and adapting to climate change cannot be regarded as an optional extra for local government; it has been designated a core activity on which action is required.

5. The popularity of target setting against climate change indicators in LAAs is testimony to the appetite and commitment in the local government sector to playing a leading part in combating climate change. Through the coordinating role of the regional Government Office network, the Government has agreed targets on climate change in 98% of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). We would draw particular attention to the high take up of targets against national indicator 186 on reducing per capita emissions of carbon dioxide in local authority areas: two-thirds of all LAAs have set targets against this indicator. Regardless of whether targets are set on climate change, progress on addressing it will be measured for all local authorities. The introduction of the Carbon Reduction Commitment will also provide an added incentive to address climate change mitigation in larger councils, leading to large gains in energy efficiency and corresponding reductions in carbon emissions.

6. At a regional level, Government Offices, Regional Assemblies and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have worked in close partnership to develop coherent climate change policies. Following its review of sub-national economic development and regeneration (SNR), the Government has consulted on producing single regional strategies that build on, and replace, the existing regional spatial strategies (RSSs) and regional economic strategies (RESs). The Government has suggested that single regional strategies would set out the regions' objectives for sustainable economic growth in ways that support the move to a low carbon economy, and deliver the objectives of the Climate Change Bill. The Government is due to respond to the consultation in due course.

7. As the EAC's report notes, the shared commitment of the UK Government and the devolved administrations in responding to climate change as a matter of priority has engendered a positive and constructive working relationship in this area. Under the Climate Change Bill, the Government must take into account any representations made by devolved administrations before setting carbon budgets.

8. Adaptation to climate change must be improved in all levels of government. The Government's Adapting to Climate Change Programme, which brings together the work already being led by Government and the wider public sector on adapting to climate change, will co-ordinate and develop an integrated adaptation response. The development of the Government's programme will be overseen by the Cross Whitehall Domestic Adaptation Programme Board, incorporating all key Whitehall departments involved. Furthermore, the Climate Change Bill will give the Government a power to require public bodies to produce adaptation reports and to provide statutory guidance on how they should report, specifically on assessing the risks to their organisation, and develop their programmes for climate change adaptation.

9. The Government is committed to providing local and regional government with the support it needs to strengthen its capability to tackle climate change. In addition to the support that is already provided by the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust, the Government has launched a £4m Climate Change Best Practice Programme which will develop local government capacity to perform well against the new climate change indicators in the new local government performance framework. Climate change will also

form an important focus within the Government's wider National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy.

10. The Government accepts the need to review and monitor the impact of its policies for tackling climate change at a sub-national level. We believe that recently introduced measures, especially the new climate change indicators, will make a substantial difference but will consider additional measures where we believe there is a need.

11. The creation of the new Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) on 3 October 2008 will be beneficial to sub-national government's ability to respond to the challenge of climate change. By bringing together the closely related policy areas of climate change and energy into the same department, the national policy framework in which sub-regional government operates will be considerably strengthened.

RESPONSES TO THE EAC'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The Government has responded to individual conclusions/ recommendations made by the Committee but in some cases has grouped these together where they are closely related and addressed them in a single response.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION 1

It is vital that local, regional and devolved government have a clear understanding of their role in tackling climate change. We commend the work the Government has done in collaboration with the devolved administrations. We recognise that the Local Government Association's Commission on Climate Change has helped to raise the profile of climate change and has made some important recommendations. However, central Government has a duty to co-ordinate how the different spheres of government in the UK interact and to integrate, within the context of devolution and localism, action on the issue of climate change. (Paragraph 5)

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION 19

Regional co-ordination is important and the Government must ensure that the different players are all clear about their respective roles. We believe that as well as co-ordinating action on climate change between the different spheres of government in the UK, it is important that there is a joined up approach between local, regional and devolved government and other public service provision. (Paragraph 66)

13. The Government agrees that effective co-ordination between all levels of government is important in responding to climate change. We will continue to develop what is already a significant programme of work in this area including developing the framework—statutory or otherwise—for delivery at the sub-national level on mitigation and adaptation.

14. At the local authority level, the new performance framework plays a key role in coordinating action, with the respective roles of Government Departments, regional Government Offices, local government and related partners, including the Audit Commission and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs), clearly defined.

