Outcomes of the UN Rio+20 Earth Summit

House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

Outcomes of the UN Rio+20 Earth Summit


Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

Additional written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at www.parliament.uk/eacom

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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.

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Simon Wright MP (Liberal Democrat, Norwich South)

The following members were also members of the committee during the parliament:
Ian Murray MP (Labour, Edinburgh South)
Sheryll Murray MP (Conservative, South East Cornwall)

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.

Publications
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/eacom. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume.

Committee staff
The current staff of the Committee are Simon Fiander (Clerk), Nicholas Beech (Second Clerk), Lee Nicholson (Committee Specialist), Andrew Wallace (Senior Committee Assistant), Anna Browning (Committee Assistant), Yago Zayed, (Committee Support Assistant) and Nicholas Davies (Media Officer).

Contacts
All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environmental Audit Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6150; the Committee’s email address is eacom@parliament.uk
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Summary

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development—the ‘Rio+20’ Summit— took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. Having previously reported on the preparations for the Summit, this report highlights the commitments for the UK from the conclusions agreed in Rio. We would have reported sooner, had it not been for our attempts, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, to give the Deputy Prime Minister an opportunity to provide evidence to us on his role before and after the Summit. It is regrettable that he declined to do so.

It is also regrettable that the Prime Minister did not attend the Rio+20 Summit. His absence undermined the Government’s attempts to demonstrate its commitment to the sustainable development agenda, not just internationally but also at home in the UK.

The conclusions of the Summit itself disappointed many. There was a lack of concrete agreement on key areas of the agenda, notably on the green economy. The commitments from Rio+20 challenged the UK, like all countries, to do more to promote a green economy, but effectively left it to individual countries to decide how strongly to embrace green economy principles. While the Government says that it is committed to a green economy, it still has to demonstrate that by producing an overarching strategy that will actively drive its delivery.

On the other hand, many welcomed the firm commitment to develop new Sustainable Development Goals. The development of the SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Goals should, as the International Development Committee and the UN High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda have recommended, be carried out jointly. The Prime Minister should take advantage of his position as co-chair of that High Level Panel to continue to push for integration of sustainable development targets with poverty eradication and climate change targets. The Government should set out its strategy for formulating the UK contribution to the design of the SDGs and the roles of particular departments in that process. It should engage businesses, NGOs, civil society groups and the wider public in developing a UK perspective on the desired design of the SDGs, to form the basis for the Government’s engagement with the European Union and the UN in the lead up to 2015. The SDGs should ensure that development does not jeopardise ‘planetary boundaries’ by emphasising the importance of sustainable consumption and production.

Defra consulted with businesses and NGOs ahead of the Summit and brought some into the official delegation, but they were not an integral part of the process of formulating the Government’s approach to the Rio agenda. The Government now needs to establish permanent mechanisms to continue that engagement with a wider range of NGOs and businesses.

At the Summit, the Government announced its decision to introduce mandatory emissions reporting for large UK-listed companies. The Government should now examine the scope for introducing wider-ranging ‘sustainability reporting’ for the private sector, along the lines already applied to its own departments. New Sustainable Development Indicators,
which will complement such Government reporting, will reflect our call for emissions indicators to be on a consumption (rather than just a production) basis.

The Summit included commitments on education for sustainable development. That requires education and training that reflects an understanding of sustainable development at all stages, from primary schools through to apprentice colleges and universities, as well as providing the skills needed for a green economy. The Government should remind schools of the scope for addressing sustainable development in their learning plans and encourage them to set themselves up as ‘sustainable schools’ to promote such learning through practical activities.

The Government should update the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy, informed by the commitments and recommendations of Rio+20. It should also revisit its Aid Environment Strategy in light of the Rio+20 commitments, to include an explicit objective of promoting ‘GDP-plus’ metrics and natural capital accounting in aid-recipient countries, as well as private sector incentives to support a green economy. The Government should establish forums for engaging businesses, civil society, educators and the wider public in exploring the Rio+20 commitments for the UK and how the Government could take those forward. And the Government needs to set out a plan to bring its influence, and that of parliamentarians, to bear on the Rio commitments at the key staging-points towards agreeing the Post-2015 Development Goals.

We are producing another report, alongside this one, on our scrutiny of the Government’s progress in embedding sustainable development in its own policies and programmes. The actions needed on both the global and domestic front to drive sustainable development complement one another and should be taken forward together.

In the main body of this report, conclusions are printed in bold and recommendations are printed in bold italics.
1 Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development—the ‘Rio+20’ Summit—took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. It marked the 20th anniversary of the original Earth Summit, and was intended to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development. It focussed on two themes: “A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”, and “the institutional framework for sustainable development”. At the Summit, the UN published a conclusions document, *The Future We Want*, which was agreed by the states represented.

2. Previously, in October 2011, we had published a report on the *Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit* in which we highlighted the need for the Government to engage civil society and the private sector before and after the Summit and to help the Summit achieve an ambitious agreement. The Government’s Response to that report, published in January 2012, described the then forthcoming Summit “as an opportunity to make critical progress on our global growth agenda and to address the linked challenges of climate change, sustainable development, natural resources use, and poverty reduction” and noted the Government’s intention “internationally, to achieve environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth, together with food, water, climate and energy security”.

3. In the lead up to the Summit, we also published another two reports linked to the Rio agenda: A report on the *Green Economy* (which we discuss further below), and a report setting out the messages for Rio from participants at a public seminar that we convened at St Martin-in-the-Fields. Then, in June 2012, a few days before the Summit, we took oral evidence from Caroline Spelman MP, then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on the Governments preparations for the Summit and its expectations.

Our inquiry

4. Our earlier reports on the preparations for Rio+20 focused on the global actions needed on the sustainable development agenda. In this latest inquiry, we have examined the Government’s contribution to the conclusions of the Summit and the actions that the Government should be taking to implement those conclusions where the UK has particular commitments and responsibilities.
5. After the Summit, we took oral evidence from Aviva Investors and WWF, who had been part of the UK official delegation, as well as representatives of other NGOs who had attended the Summit (Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, International Institute for Environment and Development, Globe International, Hard Rain Project and the International Integrated Reporting Council).

6. We also sought, unsuccessfully, to take oral evidence from the Deputy Prime Minister as the leader of the UK delegation at Rio+20. He told us that he had given evidence on political and constitutional reform, for which he had special responsibility, and did not wish to set a precedent of giving evidence to committees on other areas. He agreed to meet us informally, accompanied by Defra and DfID ministers, but this proved difficult to arrange. Instead, we asked the Liaison Committee to take evidence from the Deputy Prime Minister. That session, in February 2013, inevitably covered a range of issues, however, which allowed only a brief examination of his role at Rio+20 and afterwards. We had hoped to report on the Rio+20 outcomes sooner, but wanted to provide every opportunity for the Deputy Prime Minister to engage with us, and provide evidence, on his role before and after the Summit. We can understand that the Deputy Prime Minister is reluctant to be expected to give evidence to all committees simply on account of his Government-wide representative role. But in this case, he not only led the delegation but also announced a new policy initiative at the Summit (on corporate emissions reporting (paragraph 42)). His perspectives would therefore have been particularly useful to our inquiry and it is regrettable that he declined to give oral evidence to us in that capacity.

7. In this report we examine the Government’s role in the run up to the Summit (Part 2), and in taking forward the commitments that were produced (Part 3). Such commitments, if delivered, will help the UK play its part at a global level in more sustainable development. But that also requires embedding sustainable development structures and processes across Government, to ensure that departments produce policies and undertake operations in a genuinely sustainable way. We are producing another report, alongside this one, on our scrutiny of the Government’s progress in embedding sustainable development. There are some clear overlaps, such as on sustainability reporting by Government departments (an issue for that other report) and by the private sector (a commitment made at Rio+20). The actions needed on both the global and domestic front to drive sustainable development complement one another and should be taken forward together.

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2 The Government’s role at Rio+20

‘The Future we want’

8. Over 190 countries agreed the conclusions document of the Rio+20 Summit, *The Future We Want*. It emphasised the importance of making progress towards sustainable development globally and set out principles and processes to help achieve that goal. The 49-page document reaffirmed previous international commitments (the Rio Principles and Agenda 21 agreed at the original Earth Summit in 1992 and the Johannesburg Plan for Implementation agreed at the ‘Rio+10’ Summit in Johannesburg in 2002) and set out renewed global priorities.

9. An agreement that Sustainable Development Goals (paragraph 34) should be developed was seen as one of the major achievements of last year’s Summit, but there was less progress on the green economy (paragraph 28) than expected. Although it was one of the two planned main themes of the Summit, the conclusions document states only that a green economy is “an important tool” for achieving sustainable development, rather than setting firm requirements for it to be at the heart of sustainable development.9

10. The written evidence we received after the Summit was almost universal in its criticism of the conclusions document. WWF believed that the “Rio+20 conference … failed to deliver the systemic solutions needed to effectively address interlinked global social, environmental and economic problems”.10 Progressio thought that there were “few new or ambitious commitments and no targets or deadlines with which to hold governments to account: The agreement reached in Rio+20 is not likely to inspire the level of change required”.11 The Alliance for Future Generations was disappointed that the Summit did not agree new or innovative solutions and policies.12

11. The Chartered Institute of Environment Health believed that “the text imagines time that we do not have: Global issues are ‘recognised’, ‘acknowledged’ and ‘noted’, yet this recognition is not transformed into action”.13 On a more positive note, Stakeholder Forum concluded that although Rio+20 had not been the “coordinated leap to the future that was called for”, it had “given sustainable development new hooks from which to hang future work”.14

12. In November 2011, the originally scheduled date for the Summit was moved to avoid a clash with the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee that would have made it difficult for Commonwealth leaders to attend. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) believed the timing of the Summit was partly to blame for its failures: “Rio+20 was ‘anniversary driven’, and there was too much emphasis on the legacy from

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9  *The Future We Want*, op cit, para 56
10  Ev 33
11  Ev w25
12  Ev w3
13  Ev w31
14  Ev 26
1992 and not enough on articulating an agenda that responded to the key challenges of 2012”. A strong analytical framework to underpin deliberations was missing (the original Rio summit discussions were based on the results of the 1987 Brundtland Commission and the ‘green economy’ concept was “poorly explained and introduced and provoked suspicion and hostility where it could have generated enthusiasm and momentum”. The 2012 US presidential election campaign and the Eurozone crisis were seen as diverting attention from Rio. WWF believed that the “international political will to support [the shift to a green economy] is currently absent” and that a “major brake” on progress at the Rio+20 Summit was a view that the financial crisis should be solved first.

13. IIED judged that the “level of participation from heads of government and other leading figures was very low” and that “the Summit process failed to engage a wide audience around the world and significantly spur commitment and action ...”. Most governments sent environment or development ministers, but their ministerial counterparts from finance, planning and business were “few and far between”. Heads of large corporations, on the other hand, were “ubiquitous in Rio”.

14. Stakeholder Forum identified a perhaps more fundamental hurdle, in that “the balance of power both around and within the United Nations” had “changed very significantly with the great expansion of influence of China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies, and the relative decline of influence of Europe (and of the UK within it) and the USA”. This new balance of power in the UN “was not in general in favour of radical action on sustainable development”. The poorer countries of the ‘South’ were:

- on the whole interested above all in the traditional development agenda of poverty eradication and the help they need from the North to achieve development goals; while the emerging economies are very reluctant to contemplate any binding commitments on restraining unsustainable production and consumption while they regard themselves as having a lot of development still to do, and while for the most part the more fully developed countries have made such modest progress themselves.

15. The host nation’s approach to deliberations was also criticised. Greenpeace believed that the outcome document was “watered down and agreed before heads of state and government even got on their planes”. IIED concluded that “the Brazilian government’s rather cynical eleventh hour ‘take it or leave it’ text for the outcome document provided a short-term diplomatic solution but not a viable long term basis for shared action and
commitment”. Similarly, WWF believed that its role as part of the UK official delegation was a missed opportunity “in large part due to the unexpectedly early closure of the negotiating text, which meant that there was little of substance on which to engage during the [Summit itself]”. The Global Sustainability Institute believed that the conclusions document was “completely inaccessible to the public”.

16. The Deputy Prime Minister told the House shortly after returning from the Summit:

Was this summit an unqualified success on all ... fronts? No, it was not, but few would have expected it to be. But we did make progress on the key areas that the UK sees as the priority for sustainable development and green growth. ...

Later he told us that the conclusions document was “not as ambitious as we had hoped it would be” but that “the Conference took steps in the right direction—most saliently on agreement to develop SDGs, promotion of corporate sustainability reporting, GDP-plus and achieving global recognition of the green economy for the first time ever”. He told the Liaison Committee in February 2013 that:

The traditional social and economic development agenda should be properly married to issues of sustainability. ... The Rio+20 exercise, flawed though it was in many respects, is none the less an important step in trying to bring those two things together.

And he told us in April 2013 that:

Rio+20 set the direction and renewed commitments towards achieving more sustainable development. Progress is being driven forward by the whole of the Government on these.

**Government preparations for the Summit**

17. In its response to our *Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit* report, the Government stated that it saw “Rio+20 as an opportunity to make critical progress” on the “global growth agenda, and to address the linked challenges of climate change, sustainable development, natural resources use and poverty reduction”. Defra told us that the Government had actively taken part in European meetings coordinating a common position within the EU, and had participated in the preparatory meetings and informal negotiations that took place at the United Nations. Caroline Spelman, then the Environment Secretary of State, had a personal as well as ministerial commitment to the

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24 Ev 31
25 Ev 33
26 Ev w1
27 HC Deb, 26 June 2012, col 161
28 Deputy Prime Minister’s letter to Committee Chair, 15 November 2012 (not published)
29 Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958i, Q3 (http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmliaisn/uc958-i/uc95801.htm).
30 Ev 48
31 Fifth Special Report, HC 1737, op cit
Rio process. She told us just before the Summit that the UK was “seen as a leading country in the world in terms of preparations for the Rio+20 Summit” and perceived as a “bridging country” due to its willingness to surmount the gap between developing and developed countries’ positions.32

18. Some of our witnesses, on the other hand, considered that the UK had put forward proposals for the Summit’s initial text (‘zero draft’) of the conclusions document that reflected a low level of expectation for the Summit, and which the International Institute for Environment and Development judged had “no innovative ideas or ambitious proposals”33. Tom Bigg from IIED noted that the UK contribution to the zero draft was essentially a re-presentation of the Government’s earlier submission to our Green economy inquiry,34 and therefore had a “primarily domestic focus” rather than addressing the wider Rio+20 agenda.35 IIED believed that the Government had had “an unusually low profile” during the Summit preparations and at the event itself.36 Christian Aid thought that the UK delegation “played a low-key role” in the UN negotiations in the run up to the Summit, particularly when compared to previous Summits where the UK had played a much more instrumental role in developing the conference agenda.37 Derek Osborn from Stakeholder Forum told us that:

the UK limited its objectives too narrowly, too early. It could have been more ambitious in trying to tackle the whole sustainable economy agenda in the international scene, and trying to demonstrate more about how it is pushing that agenda forward ... We did not really have a powerful enough argument about what the UK and Europe are doing in practice, and across the board on sustainable development, to take it to the international agenda.38

19. In our report on Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit we recommended that a ‘special envoy’ should be appointed, to be “charged with bringing together Government thinking on the Rio+20 agenda from across departments but also acting as a focal point for discussion with and between civil society groups, schools, businesses and individuals”.39 Defra told us in January 2012 that they had been working with ministers from several departments on the Rio agenda,40 and in February 2013 the Deputy Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee that in preparation for the Summit he had worked “very closely” with the DfID and Defra secretaries of state.41 Such cross-cutting working was apparently not externally evident. Owen Gibbon from WWF argued that the UK “didn’t have a strategy for Rio that was cross-governmental” and that “one of the reasons we were not as effective is because we did not have a cross-departmental strategy, which would involve the likes of

32 Q 3
33 Ev 31
34 A Green Economy, HC 1025, op cit, Ev 109-118
35 Q 55
36 Ev 31
37 Ev w11
38 Q 52
39 Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit, HC 1026, op cit, para 59
40 Ev 44
41 Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958-i, Qq 1 and 4
the FCO, DECC, and DfID, but also crucially the Treasury and BIS”. Stakeholder Forum believed that the machinery of cross-Whitehall cooperation had not been transparent and that Defra had been “largely left on its own to handle the process”. WWF highlighted a “lack of integration” in Government between its approach to Rio+20 and the G20 Summit held in Mexico a few days beforehand.

20. As part of its engagement with civil society and business, Defra organised two discussions in October 2011 and invited Aviva Investors, Unilever, Oxfam and WWF to be part of the official UK delegation to the Summit. Progressio praised the Government’s engagement with UK NGOs before the Summit. Defra had engaged with Aviva Investors from September 2011 to discuss corporate sustainability reporting (paragraph 41), and Aviva told us that the work it had been doing as part of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Coalition “was pushed forwards by [Caroline Spelman] and she continued to do that at Rio”. WWF told us that they too had had good engagement with Defra and DfID, although the organisation’s role was not defined “until quite late in the day, and even then it was quite vague”.

21. Defra, which took the lead in coordinating the Government’s preparations for the Rio+20 Summit, consulted businesses and NGOs and brought some into the official delegation. It allowed the Government at the Summit to demonstrate a better understanding of the agenda than it would otherwise have been able to do, but the businesses and NGOs were not an integral part of the process of formulating the Government’s approach to the Rio agenda. With the Rio+20 Summit now behind us, the Government should establish permanent mechanisms to continue its engagement on the sustainable development agenda and post-Rio commitments with a wider range of NGOs and businesses. That continuing engagement should also bring in civil society groups and the public, particularly to help shape the UK’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals over the next two years (paragraph 34).

**Leadership of the UK official delegation**

22. The UK’s official delegation to the Summit was led by the Deputy Prime Minister and included the then Defra Secretary of State, officials from five departments, Scottish and Welsh Government environment ministers, and business and NGO representatives. Over a hundred heads of state and government attended Rio+20. In our Report on the Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit we had recommended that the Prime Minister attend, but he did not.

23. Sha Zukang, the UN Secretary-General for Rio+20, said a week before the Summit that he did not think the absence of the US President, the German Chancellor and the UK Prime Minister would affect the final document because those countries would be “well represented at a high level”. Caroline Spelman denied that the Prime Minister’s absence
would show any lack of commitment on the part of the Government and pointed to the
difficult timing of the Rio meeting as one of the reasons why the Prime Minister would not
attend.\textsuperscript{47} Many of our witnesses nevertheless criticised the Prime Minister’s absence.\textsuperscript{48} Globe International argued that the relatively late decision that the Deputy Prime Minister
would attend the Summit meant “it was very hard for him, given the time before Rio, to
stamp a clear direction that he may have wished to take. By not having the Prime Minister
go, that meant that the preparatory phase was not as clear as it could be.”\textsuperscript{49} We wanted to
ask the Deputy Prime Minister about his role as head of the delegation in Rio, and it is
regrettable that he declined to give formal oral evidence to us (paragraph 6).

24. On the other hand, by the time of the Summit there was little for prime ministers or
heads of state to do. The Global Sustainability Institute thought that “the clear signal from
the Summit was that there is no real commitment from governments”,\textsuperscript{50} and IIED believed
that the Summit “had potential to be much more significant if leadership and ambition
from key governments had been evident from the outset” but that lack of commitment
from international leaders had then become “a self-fulfilling prophecy”.\textsuperscript{51} The Deputy
Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee that he “certainly found in Rio that the
Brazilian chair at the time was quite keen to push to a pre-arranged agreement—
reasonably enough from their point of view—prior to delegates even arriving in Rio”.\textsuperscript{52}
Globe raised the question: “if [the Prime Minister] had gone, how satisfied would he have
been in going and turning up to a deal that had been put to [the leaders] three days
before?”\textsuperscript{53}

25. It is regrettable that the Prime Minister did not attend the Rio+20 Summit. There
might have been a case for the Deputy Prime Minister attending in his place on the
grounds that no treaty or other firm legal commitments were in prospect, and it is
arguable whether the Brazilian diplomacy or the outcomes of the Summit would have
been any different had the Prime Minister gone. However, the Prime Minister’s absence
meant that the Government failed to take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate
its commitment to the sustainable development agenda not just internationally but also
at home in the UK.

\textsuperscript{47} Qq 1-2
\textsuperscript{48} Ev w6 [Earth Community Trust]; Ev w31 [Chartered Institute of Environmental Heath]; Ev 31 [IIED]
\textsuperscript{49} Q 54 [Adam Matthews]
\textsuperscript{50} Ev w1
\textsuperscript{51} Ev 31
\textsuperscript{52} Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958-i, Q 16
\textsuperscript{53} Q 54 [Adam Matthews]
Taking forward the Rio+20 commitments

26. The Rio+20 Summit in June 2012 produced a wide-ranging set of commitments, set out in *The Future we want*. This document was then reaffirmed at a UN General Assembly meeting in December 2012, along with commitments to:

- strengthen the role of the UN Economic & Social Council and UN Environment Programme, and create a new ‘High Level Political Forum’ on sustainable development to replace the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (meeting from September 2013);
- develop a 10-year sustainable consumption and production programme, with a trust fund to be established to pay for such initiatives;
- establish an ‘open working group’ to develop Sustainable Development Goals, to complement the High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (paragraph 36);
- establish an inter-governmental committee to develop a financing strategy for work on sustainable development; and
- hold UN workshops on how to transfer ‘clean technologies’.

Since then, some staging-points on the way to agreeing Post-2015 Development Goals have become clearer. In May 2013, the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda reported (paragraph 36). A UN event to consider the Millennium Development Goals will take place in September 2013, and the Sustainable Development Goals Open Working Group will report its initial conclusions in September 2014.

27. The UK will of course need to play a full and active role in taking these, and the wider Rio commitments, forward. From a domestic UK perspective, however, the Government now has a clear responsibility for action on four fronts which were singled out by the Deputy Prime Minister—the green economy, ‘GDP-plus’ measures of sustainable development and natural capital accounting, Sustainable Development Goals, and corporate sustainability reporting. Such follow-up work is now being taken forward within what the Deputy Prime Minister called “departmental silos, which I do not interfere with, in a day-in day-out fashion”.

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55 A ‘high level political forum’ was envisaged in *The Future We Want*, op cit, paras 84-86
56 SDGs were covered in paras 245-251 of *The Future We Want*, op cit.
57 Covered in paras 255-257 of *The Future We Want*, op cit.
59 HC Deb, 26 June 2012, col 161
60 Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958-i, Q 8
Green economy

28. In our report on the Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit we highlighted the need for a green economy to address issues of fairness, getting the price mechanisms right (incorporating environmental externalities in market values) and strengthening private sector participation in and incentives for sustainability. And we concluded in our subsequent report on the Green economy that the Government has more to do to “set out a clear definition of a green economy that addresses all three interdependent pillars of sustainable development, including ‘social’ considerations, well-being and environmental limits”. The Government’s focus on seeing the green economy as a means of ‘green growth’, we concluded, risked overlooking the importance of ensuring that development did not breach environmental ‘planetary boundaries’ and the need to fully consider the social pillar of sustainable development. We criticised the Government strategy for suggesting “things that businesses could, rather than should, do” and recommended that the Government set firm milestones for delivering aspects of a green economy.61

29. The Summit conclusions document positioned the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, but fell some way short of identifying it as the only course to follow:

We affirm that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions which is our overarching goal. In this regard, we consider ... the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and that it could provide options for policy making but should not be a rigid set of rules. We emphasise that it should contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth’s ecosystems.62

IIED argued that two factors, related to the green economy, contributed to a “failure” of the Summit:

First, the agenda was framed primarily to focus on the concept of the green economy and on the institutional framework for sustainable development. Both aroused a huge amount of suspicion among countries. One reason was that there was no authoritative baseline assessment on which discussion could then build, so it became intensely political, precisely because we were arguing over basic concepts. Inevitably, in a negotiation between diplomats, that becomes politicised and there are hidden agendas being sought even when they are not there. That was a key factor. Secondly—this is perhaps more positive—the Summit really saw the emergence of strong, articulate voices on this agenda from a diversity of Southern countries. ... Although in some instances that entailed saying “no” to the agenda, which was

61 A Green Economy, HC 1025, op cit
62 The Future We Want, op cit, para 56
particularly the case from Latin American countries on the green economy and the commodification of nature, I think in the long run that is positive because there was an engagement that went beyond a knee-jerk pushback. It was saying, “We are interested in this agenda, but not in the terms in which we understand it is being presented to us”. Those are two additional factors that I think contributed to the failure.63

30. The Deputy Prime Minister, shortly after the Summit, nevertheless saw the Rio conclusions on the green economy in a positive light:

... While the Rio declaration was not all that we would have wanted, this is the first time that a multilateral document expressing such strong support for the green economy has been agreed. That in itself is a major achievement recognising that, in the long term, greening our economies should not conflict with growing them.64

31. **The commitments from Rio+20 challenged the UK, like all countries, to do more to promote a green economy, but effectively left it to individual countries to decide how strongly to embrace the principles of a green economy. While the Government says that it is committed to a green economy, it still has to demonstrate that commitment by producing an overarching strategy that will actively drive its delivery.**

**GDP-plus and natural capital**

32. **The Future We Want** highlighted the need for new measures of progress on sustainable development to complement Gross Domestic Product—‘GDP-plus’—and commissioned the UN Statistical Commission to take work forward, building on existing initiatives.65 It identified a need for better data for decision-making:

... for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels, ... we recognise that integrated social, economic, and environmental data and information, as well as effective analysis and assessment of implementation, is important to decision-making processes.66

This was an area that the Government was able to showcase at Rio. Christian Aid thought that the Government had been able to make a “positive input” on natural capital accounting, with the UK team at Rio seen to have been “actively engaged” on this area.67 The Deputy Prime Minister reported soon after the Summit that:

Rio+20 recognised that we need to develop broader measures of progress to complement GDP in order to take account of the natural assets that will contribute to future prosperity—so-called GDP-plus. In the UK we have already committed to including natural capital within our system of national accounts by 2020. We worked
hard at the summit to ensure that all nations present recognised the importance of broader measures of environmental and social wealth to complement GDP.68

And he elaborated further when he gave evidence to the Liaison Committee in February 2013:

... we will be one of the first developed economies in the world to [assess the consumption of natural capital in national accounts], and we got into the Rio summit conclusions a commitment that other countries would try to follow suit. We are leading the way on that, doing a lot of work at home which will hopefully set an example abroad.69

33. As we noted in our November 2012 report on Sustainable Development Indicators, the Government is developing measures of sustainable development on two fronts which predate the Rio+20 Summit. Defra is revising the Sustainable Development Indicators which, importantly, will reflect our recommendation from 2011 to account for emissions on a consumption (rather than production) basis.70 Separately, the Office for National Statistics is running a ‘Measuring National Well-being’ initiative, following an announcement by the Prime Minister in November 2010 to develop measures of “national well-being and progress” to supplement existing measures of economic development such as GDP.71 The UK is a leader in measuring progress on sustainable development through its initiatives on GDP-plus, Sustainable Development Indicators and the planned inclusion of natural capital in the National Accounts. These are important initiatives, but the test of their effectiveness will be in how such metrics are used to drive policy-making. We are currently undertaking an inquiry into how well-being measures could be used in decision-making.

Sustainable Development Goals

34. An agreement to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was one of the main outcomes of the Summit.72 The SDGs will help underpin and measure progress on sustainable development when the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015. The Future we want stated that the SDGs will “address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages”. They should be “action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries”, while “taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”.73
35. Ahead of the Summit, agreement on the process to develop SDGs was an important objective for the Government. As the Deputy Prime Minister reported soon after the Summit:

We agreed to set up the Sustainable Development Goals—a concept proposed by Colombia. I was one of the first to welcome this idea when President Santos visited London in November. The UK has been pushing hard to secure agreement ever since, and achieving it, even at this high outline level, was no mean feat. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said that the SDGs should draw on the success of the Millennium Development Goals and should be an integral part of the post-2015 development framework. We would have liked to see specific themes agreed, focusing on ensuring that everyone can access enough food, energy and water, but getting such agreement was always going to be a huge undertaking. The UK Government will continue to keep up the pressure for rapid agreement. From now on, the process must be coherent and co-ordinated with the work of Secretary-General Ban’s high-level panel on the post-2015 framework, which the Prime Minister will co-chair along with the leaders of Liberia and Indonesia.74

36. The Summit agreed a process to develop a set of SDGs through an inter-governmental ‘open working-group’ of 70 countries, including the UK. Its work was to be coordinated with that of the UN High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was co-chaired by the Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee that there was suspicion on the part of some countries about the two processes merging:

There was a strong feeling among some countries in the developing world, in particular, that they did not want the sustainable development goal initiative to somehow be swamped or subsumed in the Millennium Development Goal process. ... We must ensure that we do not let what is a fairly pronounced level of institutional rivalry creep into the process. Do not underestimate the resistance that still exists in some other countries, largely but not exclusively developing countries, which are suspicious about the SDG process being married to the post-2015 Millennium Development Goal process altogether.75

37. Nevertheless, the International Development Committee in their recent report on the Post-2015 Development Goals recommended that issues of sustainability be incorporated into the post-2015 framework, and noted that the close connection between poverty reduction and environmental sustainability supported the merging of the SDG process and the work of the High-level Panel.76 The High-level Panel’s May 2013 report set out 12 illustrative Goals for 2030, including one on ‘managing natural resource assets sustainably’.77 It recommended that in place of separate work on post-MDGs, climate change and the SDGs, “developing a single sustainable development agenda is critical”.78

74 HC Deb, 26 June 2012, col 161
75 Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958-i, Qq 4, 12
78 Ibid, page 5
38. We concur with the International Development Committee’s conclusion that the SDG and post-2015 Development goals processes should be carried out jointly, and welcome the recommendation from the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, co-chaired by the Prime Minister, to integrate sustainable development targets with poverty eradication and climate change targets. It is vital that the Sustainable Development Goals introduce a shift from the developing country focus of the Millennium Development Goals towards a more universal approach which will also be relevant to developed countries. Goals also embracing developed countries should ensure that development does not jeopardise environmental ‘planetary boundaries’ by emphasising the importance of sustainable consumption and production. The High Level Panel’s conclusion that Post-2015 Development Agenda targets should equally address developed countries is therefore welcome. As with other Rio+20 commitments, the UK’s input on the SDGs (whether they are eventually separate from or combined with the Post-2015 Development Goals) needs to reflect a departmentally cross-cutting view of the sustainable development challenges we face.

39. The Government should take full advantage of the Prime Minister’s position at the heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda to provide international leadership in this area. It should set out its strategy for formulating the UK contribution to the design of the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Goals, and the roles of particular departments in that process. The Government should also engage businesses, NGOs, civil society groups and the wider public in developing a UK perspective on the desired design of those Goals, to form the basis for the Government’s engagement with the European Union and the UN in the lead up to 2015.

40. In our recent report on the Government’s Sustainable Development Indicators we recommended that once the UN Statistical Commission’s work on well-being and the post-Rio draft Sustainable Development Goals take shape, the ONS and Defra should consider how a single framework to measure sustainable development and well-being might be produced for the UK, taking into account our agreed commitments.

Corporate sustainability reporting

41. In our report on Preparations for the Rio+20 Summit, we concluded that while many companies had identified that sustainable development was in their own interests, others needed to be incentivised to fully address the environmental and social aspects of sustainable development, and we recommended that the Government should push for Rio+20 to agree a mandatory regime for sustainability reporting. Corporate sustainability reporting featured in the Rio conclusions document, though as an optional strategy for companies rather than as a mandatory requirement that some had hoped for:

We acknowledge the importance of corporate sustainability reporting and encourage companies, where appropriate, especially publicly listed and large companies, to consider integrating sustainability information into their reporting cycle. We encourage industry, interested governments as well as relevant stakeholders with the support of the UN system, as appropriate, to develop models for best practice and
facilitate action for the integration of sustainability reporting, taking into account the experiences of already existing frameworks, and paying particular attention to the needs of developing countries, including for capacity building.\(^\text{80}\)

The May 2013 report from the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda also recommended corporate sustainability reporting:

A further aspect of accountability and information is how government and businesses account for their impact on sustainable development. Only a few progressive, large businesses try to account for their social and environmental footprint. The Panel proposes that, in future—at latest by 2030—all large businesses should be reporting on their environmental and social impact, or explain why if they are not doing so.\(^\text{81}\)

42. While at Rio, the Deputy Prime Minister announced the Government’s decision to require companies listed on the London Stock Exchange to report annually on their greenhouse gas emissions. He reported soon after the Summit that:

At Rio, national governments recognised the importance of working alongside businesses. Thanks in no small part to the leadership of UK firms, Rio recognised the role of corporate sustainability reporting to their shareholders and to prospective investors—something that would have been inconceivable even a year ago. I also announced in Rio that we will be the first country anywhere to mandate large companies to report on their greenhouse gas emissions. A growing number of companies and investors are realising that their own success is directly linked to sustainable, green growth. We hope that the call from all nations for businesses to report their sustainability performance will usher in a new era of transparency and consistency in the global business community.\(^\text{82}\)

43. Section 85 of the Climate Change Act 2008 required the Environment Secretary by 6 April 2012 to make regulations\(^\text{83}\) requiring the directors’ report in a company’s annual accounts to contain information about greenhouse gas emissions from activities for which the company is responsible, or else lay before Parliament a report explaining why no such regulations would be made. Before the Summit, in March 2012, Defra deferred its decision on whether to introduce mandatory reporting for the private sector, and instead laid a report setting out its reasons, stating that ministers were still considering responses to a 2011 public consultation.\(^\text{84}\) The Deputy Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee in February 2013 that:

This is a big, new step so it took us some time to work that through; to allay some of the doubts about the knock-on effects of whether that would create undue burdens

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80 The Future We Want, op cit, para 47
81 A new Global Partnership, op cit, page 24
82 HC Deb, 26 June 2012, col 161
83 Under section 416(4) of the Companies Act 2006
84 Measuring and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions by UK companies: a consultation on options, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, May 2011.
44. Defra’s proposal envisages companies reporting their direct emissions (i.e. from their operations, transport, manufacturing processes and purchase of electricity), although the methodology for calculating emissions is not prescribed. Companies will have to set out their emissions also in terms of an ‘intensity ratio’ (based on financial or activity metrics), but again how this is formulated will be left to companies’ discretion. Ministers suggested to us in March 2013 that the emissions data would be audited, but they subsequently confirmed that the proposals do not entail introducing a statutory requirement for the emissions data to be independently verified.

45. Carbon Tracker favoured a wider interpretation of company emissions, to include indirect emissions—the emissions implicit in the coal, oil and gas that energy companies use to produce energy—and even the potential emissions implicit in such companies’ untapped reserves of coal, oil and gas. Owen Paterson MP, the current Environment Secretary of State, thought such a reporting requirement would be less definable and auditable, and would be “a step too far”. Oliver Letwin MP, Minister for Government Policy, saw the greater transparency built into the proposals “nudg[ing] them in the right direction without creating vast new bureaucracies”.

46. Separately, the Government had already introduced requirements for sustainability reporting by government departments for 2011–12 onwards, which covered use of water and energy and procurement practices, as well as emissions. We examine progress on such sustainability reporting in Government in our separate complementary report on embedding sustainable development.

47. We welcome the Government’s decision to introduce mandatory emissions reporting for large UK-listed companies. Rio+20 challenged countries to go further, however, to introduce ‘sustainability reporting’ which would include a wider set of information in companies’ annual accounts. The information already required to be included in Government departments’ reports demonstrates what might be possible. The Government should examine the scope for introducing mandatory sustainability

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85 Uncorrected oral evidence before the Liaison Committee, 5 February 2013, HC 958-i, Q 10
86 ie. Reflecting ‘scope 1’ and ‘scope 2’ emissions as determined by the World Resources Institute/ World Business Council for Sustainable Development’s greenhouse gas protocol.
87 Consultation on Greenhouse Gas reporting draft regulations, Defra, July 2012 (http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/07/25/ghg-reporting-draft-regds/).
89 Embedding sustainable development: an update, op cit, Q 91
90 ie. ‘scope 3’ emissions under the World Resources Institute/ World Business Council for Sustainable Development’s greenhouse gas protocol
92 Embedding sustainable development: an update, op cit, Q 89
93 Embedding sustainable development: an update, op cit, Q 91
94 Embedding sustainable development: an update, op cit
reporting for the private sector, going beyond the current emissions reporting requirement, along the lines already applied to its own departments.

Other commitments

48. The Rio conclusions document included 26 thematic and cross-sectoral issues where further action is needed, including: poverty eradication, food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation, energy, sustainable transport, sustainable cities and human settlements, health and population, oceans and seas and marine biodiversity, climate change, biodiversity, forests, sustainable consumption and production, and education. These could all benefit from the UK Government’s active participation. We have, nevertheless, identified three areas—which we discuss below—where recent policy development offers a particular opportunity for the Government to demonstrate its commitment to the Rio agenda more immediately: in education for sustainable development, in eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and in supporting sustainable development through the aid programme.

49. The Rio conclusions document also included a re-commitment to the 1992 Rio Principles, including the ‘precautionary principle’, which remain as important today as twenty years ago. Our recent report on Pollinators and pesticides, which recommended a moratorium on the use of neonicitinoid chemicals on particular crops, was founded on the application of the precautionary principle.

Education for sustainable development

50. The Rio+20 conclusions document included a clear commitment to build sustainable development into education:

   We recognise that the younger generations are the custodians of the future, as well as the need for better quality and access to education beyond the primary level. We therefore resolve to improve the capacity of our education systems to prepare people to pursue sustainable development, including through enhanced teacher training, the development of curricula around sustainability, the development of training programmes that prepare students for careers in fields related to sustainability, and more effective use of information and communication technologies to enhance learning outcomes. We call for enhanced cooperation among schools, communities and authorities in efforts to promote access to quality education at all levels.95

   ...\n
   We resolve to promote Education for Sustainable Development and to integrate sustainable development more actively into education beyond the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014).96

51. Our predecessor Committee examined this area in 200397 and 2005,98 focussing on the profile of sustainable development in the school curriculum. Their 2005 report criticised

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95 The Future We Want, op cit, para 230
96 The Future We Want, op cit, para 233
the fact that the then recent national curriculum review had not included education for sustainable development despite an earlier official working group having identified it as a key requirement. The Government is now in the process of setting a new national curriculum. It has received input from an expert panel which recommended that the school curriculum should contribute strongly to environmental stewardship, and that in addition to four existing ‘Aims’ of the school curriculum (around economic, cultural, social and personal education) a fifth should be added: “To promote understanding of sustainability in the stewardship of resources locally, nationally and globally”.99 And the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) has discussed how sustainable development should be taken toward in those education sectors.

52. A Government submission to an EAUC education conference in November 2012 suggested, however, that explicitly adding sustainability requirements would be contrary to its current approach to education reform:

> The Government is fully committed to sustainable development and the importance of preparing young people for the future. Our approach to reform is based on the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement. We want schools to make their own judgments on how sustainable development should be reflected in their ethos, day to day operations and through education for sustainable development. Those judgments should be based on sound knowledge and local needs…100

And when the Government published for consultation101 its proposals for a draft framework for a new national curriculum for primary and secondary schools in February 2013,102 it stated simply that the aim of the curriculum was to “provide pupils with an introduction to the core knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.”103

53. The draft curriculum framework applies only to mainstream schools, not to academies or free schools. The framework outlined programmes of study for the ‘core subjects’ of English, maths and science, as well for nine ‘foundation subjects’. These include ‘citizenship’, which in “prep[ar]ing pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens” could have provided a platform for study of sustainable development issues. Instead, however, it deals only with democracy, government structures, the rule of law,
volunteering and “providing [pupils] with the skills and knowledge to manage their money well and make sound financial decisions”.104

54. The curriculum leaves individual schools able to formulate their own learning programmes which could include sustainable development. Academies and free schools will have even greater latitude to make their own learning plans. On the other hand, all schools are able to set themselves up as ‘sustainable schools’ which, as the Department for Education notes, “engage young people in their learning, thereby improving motivation and behaviour and also promote healthy school environments and lifestyles”.105

55. Education for sustainable development is vital in developing countries faced with the effects of climate change and natural resource constraints. But it is also important that here in the UK future generations, including future leaders, fully understand the necessity of sustainable development, to put us on a sustainable footing and to provide the skills needed for a green economy. That requires a foundation of education and training that reflects an understanding of sustainable development at all stages, from primary schools through to apprentice colleges and universities. The proposed new national curriculum allows schools to set their own priorities for study, and we hope that all schools will wish to develop sustainable development learning. The Government should remind schools of the scope for addressing sustainable development in their learning plans and encourage them to set themselves up as ‘sustainable schools’ to promote such learning through the practical activities that that entails. The Government should also encourage schools to impart an understanding of the UN and other international bodies that are charged with setting out a sustainable development path.

Eliminating harmful fossil fuel subsidies

56. The Rio+20 conclusions included a commitment to eliminate harmful fossil fuel subsidies:

Countries reaffirm the commitments they have made to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption and undermine sustainable development. We invite others to consider rationalising inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by removing market distortions, including restructuring taxation and phasing out harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts ... 106

57. This particular Rio commitment is an issue in the UK because of the ongoing development of energy policy, along with the prospect of a Government review of the Fourth Carbon Budget commitment in 2014.107 There is of course a wider issue about the subsidies that should or should not be available for different types of energy generation as we seek to balance meeting our future energy needs and delivering our emissions reduction obligations. In our recent report on Autumn Statement 2012, we called on the Government

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104 ibid, pp 149-151
105 http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/policiesandprocedures/a0070736/id
106 The Future We Want, op cit, para 225
107 Environmental Audit Committee, Carbon budgets, Seventh Report of Session 2010–12, HC 1080, Part 3
to set out how it would implement this Rio commitment in the UK, in view of North Sea tax allowances announced during 2012 which might be regarded as subsidies.\textsuperscript{108} We recently began an inquiry on energy subsidies which will examine the extent to which subsidies can be defined as ‘harmful’, the extent to which environmental cost ‘externalities’ are reflected in prices, and whether the Government has plans for meeting the Rio commitment to elimination harmful subsidies.

**Supporting sustainable development through the aid programme**

58. The Rio+20 conclusions document recognised “the crucial importance of enhancing financial support from all sources for sustainable development for all countries, in particular developing countries”.\textsuperscript{109} Specifically, it noted the role of “international cooperation in the transfer of environmentally sound technologies”,\textsuperscript{110} the importance of “international cooperation to promote investment in science, innovation, and technology for sustainable development”\textsuperscript{111} and “enhanced capacity building”,\textsuperscript{112} as well as the mobilisation of funding “to support nationally appropriate mitigation actions” and “adaptation measures” for climate change.\textsuperscript{113} An intergovernmental committee would develop a framework for sustainable development by 2014.\textsuperscript{114} In addition, Rio+20 recognised that “the fulfilment of all Official Development Assistance commitments is crucial”, including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Income for ODA to developing countries by 2015.\textsuperscript{115}

59. In our June 2011 report on the *Impact of UK overseas aid*, we examined how well DfID designed and assessed its aid programmes to ensure that they helped to address climate change and protect the environment.\textsuperscript{116} In response to one of our recommendations, DfID published an ‘environmental strategy’ in June 2012 to shape its aid programme.\textsuperscript{117} The Government should revisit its Aid Environment Strategy in light of the Rio+20 commitments. It should set out a commitment to play a full role in developing new sources of international sustainable development finance, and build in an explicit objective of promoting ‘GDP-plus’ metrics and natural capital accounting (paragraph 32) in aid-recipient countries, as well as private sector incentives to support a green economy.

\textsuperscript{109} *The Future We Want*, op cit, para 253
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, para 271
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid
\textsuperscript{112} *The Future We Want*, op cit, para 277
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, para 191
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, paras 255-256,
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, para 258
\textsuperscript{116} Environmental Audit Committee, *The impact of overseas aid*, Fifth Report, Session 2010–12, HC 710
A new commitment to sustainable development

60. On returning from the Rio+20 Summit, the Deputy Prime Minister spoke in terms of a reinvigorated drive for sustainable development:

Although Rio+20 did not go as far as we would have liked, it revived a global commitment to an agenda that has come gravely under threat. Progress was made in the areas where progress needed to be made. The declaration agreed by over 190 countries\textsuperscript{118} should not be seen as the upper end of our ambition; it should be our baseline and we should all strive to surpass its expectation. We must build on the steps that were taken to reinvigorate the drive for sustainable development and lasting growth.

... We will remain committed to working with our partners and will be ambitious for the future. The summit is over but the work continues, and the UK will continue to lead from the front.\textsuperscript{119}

61. In some parts of Government, however, there are signs of a less than fulsome commitment to sustainable development, at least in terms of domestic UK policy. As we have previously reported, while the Government needs to strengthen its commitment to a green economy, the Treasury appears to view the environment as a block to economic development. We noted in our reports on the \textit{green economy}\textsuperscript{120} and \textit{Autumn Statement 2012}\textsuperscript{121} that the Chancellor has made statements which appear to signal that the Treasury sees environmental and economic policies as competing rather than complementary. The Government is failing to provide for industry the environmental and energy policy certainty it needs to make investments, and has sometimes sent mixed signals.\textsuperscript{122}

62. In January 2013, in a speech on a possible future referendum on the UK’s relationship with Europe, the Prime Minister singled out the environment as an area where regulation need not be applied uniformly:

Let us not be misled by the fallacy that a deep and workable single market requires everything to be harmonised, to hanker after some unattainable and infinitely level playing field. Countries are different. They make different choices. We cannot harmonise everything. For example, it is neither right nor necessary to claim that the integrity of the single market, or full membership of the European Union requires the working hours of British hospital doctors to be set in Brussels irrespective of the views of British parliamentarians and practitioners. In the same way we need to examine whether the balance is right in so many areas where the European Union has legislated including on the environment, social affairs and crime. Nothing should be off the table.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{118} As subsequently corrected at HC Deb 3 July 2012, col 7-8MC
\textsuperscript{119} HC Deb, 26 June 2012, col 161
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{A Green Economy}, HC 1025, op cit, para 48
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Autumn Statement 2012: environmental issues}, HC 328, op cit, paras 3-10
\textsuperscript{122} ibid, para 10
\textsuperscript{123} Speech by the Prime Minister at Bloomberg, 23 January 2013 (version as written not as spoken)
The Prime Minister may not envisage less stringent environmental regulation in a renegotiated relationship with the EU, but until that is clarified there will inevitably be a doubt about the Government’s commitment to protecting the environment.

63. Such uncertainty could be countered by producing a new sustainable development strategy, to update the now eight years old *Securing the future* and demonstrate the Government’s unambiguous commitment to UK development which is sustainable in terms of the environment as well as the economy. We called for such a new strategy in our 2011 report on *embedding sustainable development* but instead the Government produced a short ‘Vision for sustainable development’ in February 2011. Owen Paterson told us in March 2013 that he did not see a need for a new Sustainable Development Strategy:

I think we have a very clear position on where we are going, and I think these reports are the first ones to show significant progress. I think the discussion we have had for the last hour and a half or so shows there are all sorts of ways we can improve but we are on the right course. I am not sure we need to tear the whole thing up and make another great change and enlist a whole lot more people, I think we have to make this work.

64. The Government is in a pivotal position to make progress on the globally-focussed commitments flowing from the Rio+20 Summit, by virtue of the Prime Minister’s co-chairmanship of the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on post-2015 development and as one of the working group countries developing the Sustainable Development Goals (paragraph 36). Consistent and effective action is also needed in the UK, but recent policy development suggests that the Government has not resolved its attitude and approach to sustainable development at home.

65. The results of Rio+20 should be regarded by the Government as a starting point for sustainable development in policy-making within the UK, as much as for global initiatives. The Government should update the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy, informed by the commitments and recommendations of Rio+20 as well as including targets linked to the Sustainable Development Indicators (paragraph 33). In the meantime, the Government should establish forums for engaging businesses, civil society, educators and the wider public in exploring the Rio+20 commitments for the UK and how the Government could take those forward. And the Government needs to set out a plan to bring its influence, and that of parliamentarians across Europe (including through the regular meetings of environmental committee members under the rotating EU presidency), to bear on the Rio commitments at the key staging-points (paragraph 26) towards agreeing the Post-2015 Development Goals.

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125 Environmental Audit Committee, *Embedding sustainable development across Government after the Secretary of State’s announcement on the future of the Sustainable Development Commission*, First Report of Session 2010–12, HC 504, para 78


127 Q 113
Conclusions

The Government’s role at Rio+20

1. We had hoped to report on the Rio+20 outcomes sooner, but wanted to provide every opportunity for the Deputy Prime Minister to engage with us, and provide evidence, on his role before and after the Summit. We can understand that the Deputy Prime Minister is reluctant to be expected to give evidence to all committees simply on account of his Government-wide representative role. But in this case, he not only led the delegation but also announced a new policy initiative at the Summit (on corporate emissions reporting). His perspectives would therefore have been particularly useful to our inquiry and it is regrettable that he declined to give oral evidence to us in that capacity. (Paragraph 6)

2. Defra, which took the lead in coordinating the Government’s preparations for the Rio+20 Summit, consulted businesses and NGOs and brought some into the official delegation. It allowed the Government at the Summit to demonstrate a better understanding of the agenda than it would otherwise have been able to do, but the businesses and NGOs were not an integral part of the process of formulating the Government’s approach to the Rio agenda. (Paragraph 21)

3. It is regrettable that the Prime Minister did not attend the Rio+20 Summit. There might have been a case for the Deputy Prime Minister attending in his place on the grounds that no treaty or other firm legal commitments were in prospect, and it is arguable whether the Brazilian diplomacy or the outcomes of the Summit would have been any different had the Prime Minister gone. However, the Prime Minister’s absence meant that the Government failed to take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the sustainable development agenda not just internationally but also at home in the UK. (Paragraph 25)

Taking forward the Rio+20 commitments

4. The commitments from Rio+20 challenged the UK, like all countries, to do more to promote a green economy, but effectively left it to individual countries to decide how strongly to embrace the principles of a green economy. While the Government says that it is committed to a green economy, it still has to demonstrate that commitment by producing an overarching strategy that will actively drive its delivery. (Paragraph 31)

5. The UK is a leader in measuring progress on sustainable development through its initiatives on GDP-plus, Sustainable Development Indicators and the planned inclusion of natural capital in the National Accounts. These are important initiatives, but the test of their effectiveness will be in how such metrics are used to drive policy-making. (Paragraph 33)

6. We concur with the International Development Committee’s conclusion that the SDG and post-2015 Development goals processes should be carried out jointly, and welcome the recommendation from the High Level Panel on the Post-2015
Development Agenda, co-chaired by the Prime Minister, to integrate sustainable development targets with poverty eradication and climate change targets. It is vital that the Sustainable Development Goals introduce a shift from the developing country focus of the Millennium Development Goals towards a more universal approach which will also be relevant to developed countries. Goals also embracing developed countries should ensure that development does not jeopardise environmental ‘planetary boundaries’ by emphasising the importance of sustainable consumption and production. The High Level Panel’s conclusion that Post-2015 Development Agenda targets should equally address developed countries is therefore welcome. As with other Rio+20 commitments, the UK’s input on the SDGs (whether they are eventually separate from or combined with the Post-2015 Development Goals) needs to reflect a departmentally cross-cutting view of the sustainable development challenges we face. (Paragraph 38)

7. We welcome the Government’s decision to introduce mandatory emissions reporting for large UK-listed companies. Rio+20 challenged countries to go further, however, to introduce ‘sustainability reporting’ which would include a wider set of information in companies’ annual accounts. The information already required to be included in Government departments’ reports demonstrates what might be possible. (Paragraph 47)

8. Education for sustainable development is vital in developing countries faced with the effects of climate change and natural resource constraints. But it is also important that here in the UK future generations, including future leaders, fully understand the necessity of sustainable development, to put us on a sustainable footing and to provide the skills needed for a green economy. That requires a foundation of education and training that reflects an understanding of sustainable development at all stages, from primary schools through to apprentice colleges and universities. The proposed new national curriculum allows schools to set their own priorities for study, and we hope that all schools will wish to develop sustainable development learning. (Paragraph 55)

9. The Government is in a pivotal position to make progress on the globally-focussed commitments flowing from the Rio+20 Summit, by virtue of the Prime Minister’s co-chairmanship of the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on post-2015 development and as one of the working group countries developing the Sustainable Development Goals. Consistent and effective action is also needed in the UK, but recent policy development suggests that the Government has not resolved its attitude and approach to sustainable development at home. (Paragraph 64)

Recommendations

10. With the Rio+20 Summit now behind us, the Government should establish permanent mechanisms to continue its engagement on the sustainable development agenda and post-Rio commitments with a wider range of NGOs and businesses. That continuing engagement should also bring in civil society groups and the public,
particularly to help shape the UK’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals over the next two years. (paragraph 21)

11. The Government should take full advantage of the Prime Minister’s position at the heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda to provide international leadership in this area. It should set out its strategy for formulating the UK contribution to the design of the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Goals, and the roles of particular departments in that process. The Government should also engage businesses, NGOs, civil society groups and the wider public in developing a UK perspective on the desired design of those Goals, to form the basis for the Government’s engagement with the European Union and the UN in the lead up to 2015. (Paragraph 39)

12. The Government should examine the scope for introducing mandatory sustainability reporting for the private sector, going beyond the current emissions reporting requirement, along the lines already applied to its own departments. (Paragraph 47)

13. The Government should remind schools of the scope for addressing sustainable development in their learning plans and encourage them to set themselves up as ‘sustainable schools’ to promote such learning through the practical activities that that entails. The Government should also encourage schools to impart an understanding of the UN and other international bodies that are charged with setting out a sustainable development path. (Paragraph 55)

14. The Government should revisit its Aid Environment Strategy in light of the Rio+20 commitments. It should set out a commitment to play a full role in developing new sources of international sustainable development finance, and build in an explicit objective of promoting ‘GDP-plus’ metrics and natural capital accounting in aid-recipient countries, as well as private sector incentives to support a green economy. (Paragraph 59)

15. The results of Rio+20 should be regarded by the Government as a starting point for sustainable development in policy-making within the UK, as much as for global initiatives. The Government should update the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy, informed by the commitments and recommendations of Rio+20 as well as including targets linked to the Sustainable Development Indicators. In the meantime, the Government should establish forums for engaging businesses, civil society, educators and the wider public in exploring the Rio+20 commitments for the UK and how the Government could take those forward. And the Government needs to set out a plan to bring its influence, and that of parliamentarians across Europe (including through the regular meetings of environmental committee members under the rotating EU presidency), to bear on the Rio commitments at the key staging-points towards agreeing the Post-2015 Development Goals. (Paragraph 65)
Draft Report (Outcomes of the UN Rio+20 Earth Summit), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.
Paragraphs 1 to 65 read and agreed to.
Summary agreed to.
Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.
Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.
Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.
Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report, in addition to that ordered to be reported for publishing on 5 September and 24 October 2012, and 24 April 2013.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 12 June 2013 at 2.00 pm]
Witnesses

Tuesday 12 June 2012

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Andrew Lawrence, Director of Policy Delivery Group, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.  Ev 1

Wednesday 5 September 2012

Derek Osborn, President, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, Tom Bigg, Head of Partnerships, International Institute for Environment and Development, Adam Matthews, Secretary General, Globe International, Owen Gibbons, Executive Adviser to the Chief Executive, WWF-UK, Mark Edwards, Hard Rain Project, Dr Steve Waygood, Chief Responsible Investment Officer, Aviva Investors, and Jessica Fries, Director, International Integrated Reporting Council.  Ev 11

List of printed written evidence

1 Stakeholder Forum  Ev 26
2 International Institute for Environment and Development  Ev 31
3 WWF-UK  Ev 33
4 Mark Edwards, Hard Rain Project  Ev 39
5 Steve Waygood, Aviva Investors  Ev 40
6 International Integrated Reporting Council  Ev 41
7 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  Ev 44
8 Deputy Prime Minister  Ev 48

List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee's website www.parliament.uk/eacom)

1 The Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University  Ev w1
2 Alliance for Future Generations (World Future Council; Intergenerational Foundation; Planetary Boundaries Initiative; and Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development  Ev w3
3 Earth Community Trust  Ev w6
4 FIA Foundation  Ev w9
5 Christian Aid  Ev w11
6  Sightsavers  Ev w15
7  The Co-operative Group  Ev w22
8  Progressio  Ev w25
9  UNICEF UK  Ev w26
10 Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Northern Ireland  Ev w31
11 BioRegional  Ev w35
12 Peter Davies, Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, Wales  Ev w38
13 British Youth Council  Ev w38
# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government’s response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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