House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Environmental Audit Committee

Pre-appointment hearing with the Government’s preferred candidate for Chair of Natural England: Government Response to the Twelfth Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Seventeenth Report of the Environmental Audit Committee


Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 2 April 2019

HC 2096
Published on 5 April 2019
by authority of the House of Commons
The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

Current membership

Neil Parish MP (Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton) (Chair)
Alan Brown MP (Scottish National Party, Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
John Grogan MP (Labour, Keighley)
Dr Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative, Sleaford and North Hykeham)
Kerry McCarthy MP (Labour, Bristol East)
Sandy Martin MP (Labour, Ipswich)
Mrs Sheryll Murray MP (Conservative, South East Cornwall)
David Simpson MP (Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann)
Angela Smith MP (Independent, Penistone and Stocksbridge)
Julian Sturdy MP (Conservative, York Outer)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

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

Evidence relating to this report is published on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website.

Committee staff

Noah Belser (Committee Researcher), Ian Blair (Committee Assistant), Jonathan Finlay (Committee Specialist), Andy French (Committee Specialist), James Hockaday (Senior Committee Assistant), Xameerah Malik (Senior Committee Specialist), Annabel Russell (Committee Assistant), Ben Street (Second Clerk), Joe Williams (Media Officer), and Sian Woodward (Committee Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 7341; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using @CommonsEFRA.
Environmental Audit Committee

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

Current membership

Mary Creagh MP (Labour, Wakefield) (Chair)
Colin Clark MP (Conservative, Gordon)
Dr Thérèse Coffey MP (Conservative, Suffolk Coastal)
Alex Cunningham MP, (Labour, Stockton North)
Geraint Davies MP (Labour (Co-op), Swansea West)
Mr Philip Dunne MP (Conservative, Ludlow)
Zac Goldsmith MP (Conservative, Richmond Park)
Mr Robert Goodwill MP (Conservative, Scarborough and Whitby)
James Gray MP (Conservative, North Wiltshire)
Caroline Lucas MP (Green Party, Brighton, Pavilion)
Kerry McCarthy MP (Labour, Bristol East)
Anna McMorrin MP (Labour, Cardiff North)
John McNally MP (Scottish National Party, Falkirk)
Dr Matthew Offord MP (Conservative, Hendon)
Dr Dan Poulter MP (Conservative, Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)
Alex Sobel MP (Labour (Co-op), Leeds North West)

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

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

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

Evidence relating to this report is published on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Lloyd Owen (Clerk), Leoni Kurt (Second Clerk), Ruth Cahir (Committee Specialist), Laura Grant (Committee Specialist), Laura Scott (Committee Specialist), Jonathan Wright (Senior Committee Assistant), Baris Tufekci (Committee Assistant), Anne Peacock (Media Officer) and Simon Horswell (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environmental Audit Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 8890; the Committee’s email address is eacom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using @CommonsEAC.
Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Environmental Audit Committees’ Report on the pre-appointment hearing with Tony Juniper, the Government’s preferred candidate for Chair of Natural England (HC 1979) was published on 1 March 2019 as the Twelfth Report of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Seventeenth Report of the Environmental Audit Committee of Session 2017–19.

This one of a small number of public appointments which are subject to pre-appointment scrutiny by Parliament. The outcome of this scrutiny is typically an endorsement or rejection of the proposed candidate, and Government departments are expected to consider this recommendation when finalising appointment. Following Government consideration, the outcome of the process is then publicly announced, negating the need for a Government response to the Committee.

When we endorsed Tony Juniper’s suitability for public appointment, we made several recommendations to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on its recruitment process, and to the candidate on his political activity and business interests. The Government responded to these recommendations and its correspondence is appended to this Report.

Appendix: Government Response

I am writing to thank the Committee for the recent report following the joint pre-appointment scrutiny hearing with the Environmental Audit Committee into the suitability of Tony Juniper for the position of Chair of Natural England.

I noted the report contained a number of caveats and recommendations which I am happy to address. Those concerning Tony Juniper’s appointment have been discussed with him. Whilst serving as Chair Tony has confirmed that he will refrain from engaging in political activity and will resign his Green Party membership. With regard to the Robertsbridge Group he will divest his small shareholding and cease further consultancy work for this company.

I am pleased that the Committees welcomed Tony’s nomination and supported the appointment, and with Tony’s willingness to accommodate the Committees’ recommendations, I can advise you that I have now confirmed the appointment with effect from 23 April 2019 for a term of three years. An announcement will be made very shortly.

You also made recommendations to the Department on the recruitment process, specifically about the timing of future consultations with the Committee and diversity. On this first point, I can fully appreciate the importance of avoiding consultation with you during recess periods. In this case the need to take forward the recruitment at the time we did arose from the Chair signalling he intended to step down early. We moved at pace to plan and start the campaign but in order to provide an appropriate application window for candidates to apply we were not able to schedule the start of the campaign to avoid the long summer recess period. For the vast majority of recruitments we plan and schedule ahead and expect to consult Committees whilst Parliament is sitting.
With regard to diversity, I am grateful the Committee has acknowledged Defra’s efforts to encourage diverse applications for this role and note the comments from the Committees about further action the Department could take. I can assure you we are committed to improving diversity in public appointments and are working with the Cabinet Office as part of the Government’s overall strategy in this area. I was pleased to see Lord Holmes’s recent review into opening up public appointments to disabled people. Reviews such as these will benefit all Departments.