



**defra**

Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

# Coalition Government's Environmental Priorities

Robin Mortimer

Director for Wildlife, Landscape &  
Rural Ongoing Activities, Defra



# Structural Reform Plan

- In July 2010 the Coalition Government announced new Structural Reform Plans.
- These outline how each Department will implement proposals in the Coalition Agreement, including on localism, public service reform and the Big Society.
- Are being used to make Departments accountable for the implementation of the reforms.

# Defra's 3 Priorities

- Defra's Structural Reform Plan sets out three departmental priorities:
  - To support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production;
  - Help to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life; and
  - Support a strong and sustainable green resilient to climate change.



# National Ecosystems Assessment

- 2 year ground-breaking, independent study – over 200 scientists and economists
- The first analysis of the UK’s natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and our continuing economic prosperity – “ecosystem services”
- Looked back to see what we’ve got in the past from nature and looked forward to see how our choices will affect what we get in the future
- Developed methods for making economic analysis of ecosystem services
- Will help decision makers to make the most of the value of the natural environment – a key part of the evidence for the Natural Environment White Paper

# Natural Environment White Paper

- **Three ambitions (an SD approach).**
- **A long term vision (c. 50 years).**
- **Immediate actions within this Parliament.**

- **Protect and enhance our natural assets:**  
to halt the piecemeal decline in biodiversity and enhance the quality and quantity of our critical natural assets, by creating a resilient and coherent natural network, across our towns, cities, countryside, rivers and seas. Better environmental, social and economic benefits everywhere.
- **Create a thriving green economy which supports growth:**  
to reflect the fact that our prosperity and security rely fundamentally on the health of our environment. Using natural capital sustainably as an enabler for growth. Recognising the interplay between natural capital at home and abroad.
- **Connect people and nature:**  
to capture the huge benefits for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities that flow from contact with nature. Supporting greater environmental citizenship and local action.

# Peat

- Increasing recognition of importance of peat for range of ecosystem services
- National Parks contain 25% of England's deep peat and around half of England's total area of blanket bog habitat
- Consultation recently closed on policy proposals to **reduce and eventually phase out the use of peat in horticulture** and now analysing 180+ consultation responses to inform future policy.

# Offsetting Biodiversity

- Defra Business Plan: “**assess the scope for offsetting the damage to biodiversity from development**”
- Not looking to develop a mandatory approach at this stage – considering **an approach which local planning authorities could choose to use**, enabling areas to secure both the development they need, and a healthy natural environment
- **Potential benefits:** more effective implementation of planning policy for biodiversity: simple, straightforward way to agree compensation and secure delivery. Potential to be more strategic e.g. pooling contributions.
- Expect Ministers to want **to test the approach** before making final decisions (also recommended by Lawton) - currently talking to local authorities and others about what a testing phase might look like

**Would be really pleased to discuss further:**

**[bio.offsets@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bio.offsets@defra.gsi.gov.uk)**

# National Park Authority Governance

- A programme for government commitment.
- Public consultation ran from 09 November 2010 to 01 February 2011. Over 300 responses received.
- Each NPA (and the Broads) then made proposals for changes to its governance arrangements, reflecting its circumstances and comments made in the consultation.
- Slight delay in Defra response which takes us into purdah so will now announce after the May elections.
- Have already decided that schedules 5 and 6 of the Public Bodies Bill will not be needed but schedule 3 may (e.g. To remove the Secretary of State's role in appointing parish members).





# Government Rural Policy Statement

- To be published before summer 2011
- It will include:
  - Rural Fairness and Rural Proofing
  - Localism and the Big Society
  - Policies (broadband, housing, transport , health, economy, fuel etc)
  - Cross cutting issues (ageing, Market Towns)
  - Defra's role
    - Ministers as Rural Champions
    - Rural Communities Policy Unit
    - Wider Defra rural interests (farming food, landscape, environment etc)
- It will be a living document – regular progress reports and updates

# Broader Planning Reform and Localism agendas

- Simplified National Planning Policy Framework – more strategic, less prescriptive with strong presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Continued protection for national designations, green belt, National Parks, AONBs
- Localism - authorities and communities best placed to know how to conserve the distinctive rural character of the countryside in their areas.
- Localism Bill will put communities in charge of planning and give neighbourhoods the flexibilities and powers they need to shape the places they live in.
- New locally accessible and flexible Green Areas designation to protect areas of importance to local people

