

The Environment White Paper

summary and policy briefing

Introduction

This short briefing paper outlines the recently published Natural Environment White Paper and the context in which it sits, namely the National Ecosystem Assessment and Lawton Review.

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature is the first White Paper on the natural environment to be published in 20 years. It comes after a period of public consultation during 2010 and strongly links the value of the natural environment in delivering economic growth. It sets the Government's policy towards sustainability and sustainable growth.

Key issues outlined in the White Paper include:

- A healthy natural environment that functions well is a key ingredient in delivering sustainable economic growth, communities that prosper, and personal wellbeing.
- The Government wishes to ensure that nature is valued. It will do this by:
 - o Helping communities take action locally to protect and improve nature
 - o Creating a green economy where economic growth and healthy natural resources sustain each other and value the role of nature
 - o Connect people and nature more strongly
 - o Show leadership in the European Union and internationally to protect and enhance nature across the world

At the same time as publishing the White Paper, the Government also released its response to the Lawton Review - **Making Space for Nature**, which stated that nature in England is highly fragmented and unlikely to respond well to new challenges such as climate change or population growth.

Reaction to the White Paper has been largely supportive, especially over how it links the natural environment to wellbeing and economic development. Others have argued that the White Paper needs to go further in protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

There are some key issues for researchers and policy-makers: especially the new or enhanced links between different government and non-government organisations, and a clearly stated requirement for additional research, new performance indicators and evidence-based decision-making.

National Ecosystem Assessment

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment is the first analysis of the benefits that the natural environment provides to society and economic prosperity. The study began in mid-2009 and the final report was published on 2 June 2011.

The final assessment was independently peer reviewed, and along with the technical report and evidence base can be accessed at:

<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=82&tabid=38>

The assessment made 6 key findings:

1. The natural world continues to be undervalued in economic analysis despite being critically important to prosperity and wellbeing.
2. Changes in society have driven changes in ecosystems and the way they have been managed.
3. There is a variation in quality of how ecosystems are managed.
4. As the population of the United Kingdom continues to grow, demands and expectations will evolve, putting pressure on ecosystems and how they are managed, especially where climate change will create out-of-proportion impacts.
5. Decisions taken on the environment now will have major impacts in the future.
6. Sustainable development requires an appropriate mixture of regulations, technology, financial investment and education. This includes how individuals and communities interact with the environment as well as how ecosystems are managed.

The Environment White Paper reflects the Government's response to the **National Ecosystem Assessment** and supports the Coalition policy of focussing on sustainable growth.

The Environment White Paper: The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature

Definition of 'natural environment'

A broad definition of 'natural environment' is given. It covers⁽¹⁾:

- **A wide diversity of organisms:** wildlife, rivers and streams, lakes and seas, urban green space, open countryside, forests and farmed land
- **Requirements for human survival:** food, fuel, air, water
- **Natural systems that:** cycle our water, deal with pollutants, produce healthy soil, give protection from floods, and regulate the climate
- **The interaction between:** town / country and landscapes / natural heritage

Several key concepts are defined in the White Paper. A glossary of these terms is available at the end of this briefing.

The White Paper outlines its pledges and policies in 4 key areas:

- **Protecting and improving our natural environment**
- **Growing a green economy**
- **Reconnecting people and nature**
- **International and EU Leadership**

Protecting and improving the natural environment

A vision for the future

- A new phase of research into the benefits that the ecosystem can provide to nature and people, including tools to assist decision-makers in applying lessons from the National Ecosystems Assessment
- A new Biodiversity Strategy for England
- A halt to biodiversity loss by 2020

(1) Environment White Paper, "The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature" DEFRA: (June 2011) p.7

Local Nature Partnerships

- Encouragement of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) where they are wanted. LNPs will be partnerships of local stakeholders. This could include local authorities, businesses, statutory authorities, civil society organisations, land managers, local record centres, local enterprise partnerships and people from communities themselves.
- They must demonstrate leadership, add value to the local area in the way they contribute, support the green economy and use their knowledge to develop a shared set of priorities for the area.
- At the moment there are no specific requirements for them to monitor their activity, however the application form for LNP funding requires information on expected outcomes and outputs, key milestones and a timeline for delivery.
- A one-off fund of £1million during 2011-12 to develop LNPs.
- A new network of 50 Natural Value Ambassadors to engage decision-makers and opinion formers, using latest evidence and materials.
- 1 bid round has already taken place with a second running until 31 October 2011. More information on LNPs, including how to bid in Round 2, can be found at: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/local-nature-partnerships

Planning and sustainable development

- Wide-ranging consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework
- Pilot testing a new voluntary approach to biodiversity offsetting
- Establishment of a research programme to fill gaps in evidence about environmental impact of new infrastructure

Getting the best from agricultural land

- Within one year, government, industry and environmental partners to decide how to improve the environment while increasing food production
- Use the 2012 review of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan, and evidence from elsewhere to assess the effectiveness of voluntary industry-wide approaches
- Development of outcome-focussed Environmental Stewardship
- A review of how advice and incentives for farmers and land managers creates integrated, streamlined and efficient approaches to better environmental management

Protecting and improving woodland, forests and soils

- The Independent Panel on Forestry to advise on how people can best experience and enjoy woodland
- Appropriate protection for ancient woodland
- Working with communities in a number of areas to support local engagement in landscape planning

Diverse and living landscapes

- A research programme over 4 years to explore how soil supports vital ecosystem services and how best to manage peat reserves
- Reduction of peat use to zero by 2030 with specific milestones

Rivers, water bodies and the marine environment

- A new strategy to deal with significant sources of non-agricultural water pollution
- 15 catchment level 'healthy water body' partnerships with options for more
- An increase in Entry Level Environmental Stewardship schemes
- Reform of water abstraction rules
- Marine plans in place for the entire English marine by 2022

Restoring nature in towns, cities and villages

- Creation of coherent and resilient ecological networks with organisation-specific Biodiversity Action Plans

Growing a green economy

Capturing the value of nature

- The ONS to include natural capital in the UK Environmental Account
- A scoping study in 2011 for a natural capital asset check
- A 'Roadmap to a Green Economy' to give clarity to business on the future direction of environmental policy
- Help for businesses in understanding and addressing their environmental impacts
- Through the Total Environment initiative, local authority partnerships to deal with barriers to using green infrastructure to promote sustainable growth
- A Government-led Ecosystem Markets Task Force
- Business Link website to provide information on natural capital, including guidance and tools
- New guidance in 2012 for businesses wishing to report their corporate environmental impacts
- Working with communities in a number of areas to support local engagement in landscape planning
- Supplementary guidance on the Treasury's Green Book. This will be published before the end of 2011

Reconnecting people and nature

Connecting nature with health, tourism and wellbeing

- Local Nature Partnerships and the Health and Wellbeing Boards should actively seek to engage each other in their work. Guidance will be issued soon
- Public Health England will provide clear, practical evidence about how to improve health through a good environment
- Public Health England and NICE will develop a relationship that enhances the use of resources by Directors of Public Health
- Investigating feasibility of a national framework for Low Emission Zones
- Visit England will act as a source of best practice, identifying and sharing advice with Destination Management Organisations and others in the tourism industry who wish to develop payback schemes

International and EU Leadership

Supporting global environmental ambitions

- The UK will press for international implementation of the [Nagoya Agreement](#)
- Support for the [World Bank Global Partnership of Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services \(WAVES\)](#).
- Funding for a £210,000 project to carry out case studies on how to apply Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity principles to the development of National Strategic Biodiversity Plans

Progress and outcomes will be monitored and reported through a selection of independent organisations (such as the proposed Ecosystems Knowledge Network), and by key metrics including national wellbeing measures, key performance indicators (by spring 2012) and a single, regular report on the state of the land environment. This report will be supported by new data as it becomes available, including web-based publication of thematic report. Details on who will produce and update the report have not been made clear, however the White Paper states that the Government will work with its “environmental bodies” to deliver it.

The Lawton Report “Making Space for Nature” and response

The Lawton Review took place in 2010. It was an independent study of England’s wildlife and ecology, and chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton. His key finding – that England’s wildlife and ecology network is fragmented and unable to respond to future challenges – led to 5 key recommendations:⁽²⁾

- Current wildlife sites must be improved, alongside better management of habitats
- The size of existing wildlife sites must be increased
- Connections between sites must be enhanced
- New sites must be created
- Improve the wider environment to reduce pressures on wildlife

Government response to Lawton: Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)

The Government used the Natural Environment White Paper to outline its response to the Lawton Report. The White Paper promised new Nature Improvement Areas to be delivering using the following framework:⁽³⁾

- Enabling new partnerships of local authorities, local communities, landowners, the private sector and conservation organizations to set up NIAs
- NIAs will be set up based on a local assessment of opportunities to significantly restore and connect nature
- Natural England will run a competition to identify 12 initial NIAs
- The Government will make £7.5 million over the current Spending Review period to support the creation of NIAs
- Planning reforms will allow planning authorities to support NIAs

(2) Environment White Paper p9

(3) Environment White Paper, p21

- The Government will capture learning from NIAs and review what further action is needed in planning policy, regulation and capacity building
- Governmental environment bodies will be reformed so they work better together, share information and can advise local partners more coherently
- The Government will maximize the contributions made by Environmental Stewardship and the Woodland Grant Scheme to promote the benefits of ecological restoration, including through NIAs

Reception and criticisms

Reception has tended to be supportive rather than sceptical. The **Environment Agency**, **Natural England** and the **Forestry Commission for England** have released a joint response to the White Paper.⁽⁴⁾ Their joint view is supportive. Ensuring that the true value of nature is recognised by society is supported. They state that it is integral to creating better places and a strong economy that is sensitive to the needs of the environment.

The **Horticultural Trades Association** responded to the White Paper by saying:

"...it appears to provide a genuine and ambitious commitment to value and protect the UK's natural environment and to establish a green economy that will foster economic growth, health, recreation and social cohesion."⁽⁵⁾

Some groups including the **Green Party** have been critical, arguing that the White Paper does not go far enough. Caroline Lucas MP:

"...while this white paper rightly recognises the need to address biodiversity loss, and step up efforts to protect our natural environment, there's a risk that its weak policy offerings – coupled with the Government's broader inconsistency on measures to protect our natural world and encourage a greener economy – will ultimately hamper conservation efforts."⁽⁶⁾

(4) "Joint statement in response to the Natural Environment White Paper" (7 June 2011): www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/130574.aspx [accessed 29/9/11]

(5) "HTA response to Natural Environment White Paper" (7 June 2011): www.the-hta.org.uk/page.php?pageid=626 [accessed 28/9/11]

(6) Caroline Spelman MP, "Environment white paper lacks policy, ambition and Defra's backing" (13 June 2011): www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/jun/13/environment-white-paper-policy-ambition [accessed 29/9/11]

Glossary

Biodiversity is used to describe the variety of all life on Earth, including all species of animals, plants, fungi and micro-organisms, their habitats and the ecosystems that support them.⁽⁷⁾ The Convention on Biological Diversity defines biodiversity as:

“Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.” ⁽⁸⁾

Biodiversity offsets are conservation activities designed to deliver biodiversity benefits that compensate for losses.⁽⁹⁾

Green infrastructure refers to the living network of green spaces, water and other environmental features in both urban and rural areas. The Government is seeking to use green infrastructure as a driver of economic growth, regeneration and improved public health, wellbeing and quality of life.⁽¹⁰⁾

There is no single accepted definition of **Landscape Scale**. It commonly refers to action that covers large spatial scales, usually addressing a range of ecosystem processes, conservation objectives and land uses.⁽¹¹⁾

Natural capital is defined as the stock of physical nature providing flows of services that benefit people, including pollinating crops, natural hazard protection, climate regulation or anything that improves individual, group community wellbeing.⁽¹²⁾

⁽⁷⁾ Environment White Paper, p17

⁽⁸⁾ Environment White Paper, p17

⁽⁹⁾ Environment White Paper, p22

⁽¹⁰⁾ Environment White Paper, p31

⁽¹¹⁾ Environment White Paper, p18

⁽¹²⁾ Environment White Paper, p11

Bibliography and Additional Resources

Guardian Report on the White Paper

www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/jun/07/environment-white-paper

Defra White Paper webpage

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper

Horticultural Trades Association response

www.the-hta.org.uk/page.php?pageid=626

Joint statement in response to the Natural Environment White Paper – Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission for England

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/130574.aspx

Lawton Review webpage

www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/09/24/nature-news

Local Nature Partnerships

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/local-nature-partnerships

Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing

www.cbd.int/abs

National Ecosystem Assessment

<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=82&tabid=38>

World Bank Global Partnership of Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/0,,contentMDK:22811907~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:244381,00.html>