

10/07/00

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL VISION

A response by the Institution of Environmental Sciences To the consultation by the Environment Agency

A long term vision for the environment is essential if man is to survive on the planet let alone maintain and improve the present patterns of living. Existing environmental deterioration will take many years to reverse and it will take even longer to develop sustainable policies that will cope with population increase, growth in urbanisation and increased industrial activity.

These policies will need to be challenging and dramatic, probably far more so than the present range of targets for improvement that have been set. Present targets have been set for varying periods from ten to twenty years but the 'improvements' targeted, even if achieved, will not eliminate the fundamental problems and achieve long term sustainability. Fifty years would be a more realistic time scale for the vision although shorter term planning will still need to form an essential part. The pace at which change can be envisaged is difficult to forecast since it will depend on peoples will to change and the influence of the social and economic forces that will enable it to happen on a global scale.

The Environment Agency has a central role to play in the context for the United Kingdom. Whilst regulation will continue to be needed, leadership and direction will be essential. The Agency will need to work in close collaboration with the DETR to achieve the implementation of the new policies. Partnerships will be needed involving local authorities, commercial organisations, the professions and the general public and they will need to operate at national, regional district and local level. Both the Agency and the DETR have operational structures in place that can enable this lead to be given.

The themes adopted in the consultation document cover the principle objectives and outcomes and the key environmental issues. Whilst the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions probably has the highest immediate priority, all the key issues need to be addressed urgently if sustainability is to be achieved. The maintenance of social and economic progress is an objective which should be maintained but the form of this progress may require some radical rethinking!

The co-operation of business and industry will be an essential part of any successful progress which will require innovative techniques in manufacturing and the development of new economic ideas. Co-operation can only be achieved by persuasion (education) and by involvement and this is equally true of the contribution required from the public generally.

The Agency will need to become a more dynamic and pro-active body and there are signs that this is occurring already in some areas. More co-ordination and encouragement of effort will probably be required in the regional context and also at more localised levels. This will ensure that policies are implemented consistently at ALL levels. The present proposals for change seem to be in the right direction.

The Institution looks forward to the production of the final vision and will be interested to respond on short to medium 'frameworks for change'.

RAF/IES/7.5.9
10/07/00