

**WWF-UK  
FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Non-governmental organisations call for stronger role for Parliament in sustainable development**

Today's report from the Environmental Audit Committee (1): "*Embedding Sustainable Development across Government*" confirms that sustainable development has not been fully embedded across Government because the political will to do so has not been maintained. However, it does not go far enough in calling for urgent institutional reform to make this the "greenest government ever" (2), say WWF-UK and FDSO (3).

WWF-UK and FDSO share the Committee's concern that sustainable development will become sidelined unless it is part of the central change-making mechanisms of Government. The two organisations endorse the Environmental Audit Committee's proposal that a Minister for Sustainable Development be appointed within the Cabinet Office to drive action on sustainable development across government. However, WWF-UK and FDSO warn that it is essential that DEFRA's existing sustainable development expertise is not watered down.

Endorsing the Committee's recommendation that a new Sustainable Development Strategy be developed to revitalise Government engagement, Halina Ward, Director of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development cautioned "*it is nonsense to expect the Cabinet Office or any new Sustainable Development Minister to review the sustainable development implications of departmental policy proposals, plans and practices when the Government has no sustainable development strategy in place to provide a transparent benchmark for transparency or for accountability to the UK's citizens*".

While the Cabinet Office, or a new Minister, can coordinate action across the Government, they cannot provide independent advice and scrutiny. Parliament must play a stronger role. WWF-UK and FDSO endorse the Committee's view that the EAC is not properly resourced to carry out the routine scrutiny work previously carried out by independent watchdog the Sustainable Development Commission. Equally, it is clear that academics, NGOs and community groups are in a limited position to do so.

Carol Day, Solicitor at WWF-UK said: "*We were appalled at the speed and ease with which the Coalition Government has been able to unravel bodies such as the Sustainable*

*Development Commission and the Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution. We clearly need new mechanisms with real teeth that are less vulnerable to attack. A beefed up Cabinet office with a new Minister in no way replaces the SDC as it will not provide independent advice and scrutiny - only new institutional measures outside of Government can do this.”*

Speaking about an emerging Coalition of NGOs inspired by the Hungarian scrutiny model of a Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations, Halina Ward added: “*Over the coming months, we’ll be working with a range of other NGOs in a new coalition to ensure long-termism and respect for future generations in the UK’s democracy so that we get the sustainable development that we desperately need. We see House of Lords reform as a first opportunity to secure the changes that are needed. Any proposals for reform of the Lords should be designed to ensure that concern for future generations is part of its remit.”*

## **ENDS**

### **Note to editors:**

WWF-UK Solicitor Carol Day and FDSO Director Halina Ward are available for media interviews and comment.

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FDSO press enquiries and interviews: [press@fdsd.org](mailto:press@fdsd.org); telephone: +44 (0)20 7022 1848; +44 (0)7825 164996

1. The Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) considers the extent to which the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development, and it audits their performance against any sustainable development and environmental protection targets. The Committee’s report on ‘Embedding Sustainable Development Across Government’ is its First Report of Session 2010–11, HC 504. The text of the Report will be available on the Committee’s website from 00.01am approximately, on 10 January 2011: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/publications/>
2. The Coalition government has committed itself to being the “greenest ever” – to deliver a green and more responsible economy, fairness and the Big Society - whilst cutting

the deficit, increasing efficiency and delivering structural reform to create better value for the tax payer. It has also committed to place two “animating purposes” at the heart of its term: bringing about a radical redistribution of power from central government to local communities and people; and governing for the long-term (see DPM Nick Clegg’s “Horizon Shift speech of 9th September 2010). See: [http://www.libdems.org.uk/news\\_detail.aspx?title=Nick\\_Clegg\\_speech%3A\\_Horizon\\_shift&pPK=f8f7b543-d586-40e2-b4c9-e7be68970bf3](http://www.libdems.org.uk/news_detail.aspx?title=Nick_Clegg_speech%3A_Horizon_shift&pPK=f8f7b543-d586-40e2-b4c9-e7be68970bf3)

3. WWF-UK and FDSO were two of the four non-governmental organisations (NGOs) invited to give evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee on the basis of written submissions.
4. The powers of the Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations include the following: investigation of complaints from members of the public; participation in the law-making process and in Hungary’s position in EU negotiations; intervention to prevent activities which are violating or which could violate the right to a healthy environment guaranteed in the constitution; and strategic research. More information on international initiatives can be obtained from WWF and FDSO and is based on a recent research report produced for the groups on this topic by barrister Dr Peter Roderick.

**WWF-UK** ([www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org)) is one of the world’s leading independent environmental organisations, with established experience in the management and conservation of natural ecosystems world wide.

The **Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development** ([www.fdsd.org](http://www.fdsd.org)) is a UK-based charity which works to find ways of equipping democracy to deliver sustainable development.

**Carol Day** is a Solicitor in WWF-UK’s Legal Unit. She has worked for WWF for nearly twenty years, first as a campaigner on town and country planning issues and latterly as a lawyer. WWF’s Legal Unit term implements a programme of wide-ranging and strategic activities aimed at achieving targeted but fundamental improvements to the consideration of environmental law within the legal systems of England and Wales, the UK, Europe and the UNECE.

**Halina Ward** is Director of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development. Before joining FDSD, she was Director of the Business and Sustainable Development Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. She has also worked as a Senior Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and as a solicitor practising commercial environment law.