

Protecting and improving Scotland's environment

Summary impact report (12 month)

The report findings and recommendations

1. This paper outlines the impact of *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*, a joint Accounts Commission and Auditor General for Scotland performance audit report published on 14 January 2010.
2. *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment* provided an overview of the public sector's performance against targets in four aspects of the environment – air quality, the water environment, biodiversity and waste management. The section of the report on waste management followed up the *Sustainable waste management* report published in September 2007.
3. The report found that:
 - There had been mixed progress against European and Scottish environmental targets, and it would be challenging to achieve future targets.
 - There needed to be strong leadership and long-term commitment to meeting Scotland's environmental goals, particularly at a time when there may be pressure to divert money to more immediate issues.
 - To continue to improve Scotland's environment some policies needed to be better coordinated at both a national and local level.
 - The Scottish Government and public bodies had a major role to play in protecting and improving the environment, but they could not do this alone. There needed to be better partnership working across the public sector, and greater cooperation with organisations outside the public sector.
4. The report contained six recommendations for the Scottish Government and public bodies, which are set out in Appendix 2, along with an assessment of progress in implementing them.

Media interest, downloads and presentations

5. The report received media coverage on the day of publication and subsequently, including coverage on broadcast news, local and national newspapers, and public sector publications. The media coverage focused on the mixed progress against environmental targets, in particular those for waste management (recycling and

landfill) and air quality. Over the 12 months following publication, the report was downloaded from our website 3,766 times, above the average of 2,949.

6. The findings of the report were presented at the EURORAI (European Organisation of Regional External Public Finance Audit Institutions) seminar on environmental auditing in October 2009. A number of the findings accorded with those of other audit bodies who had conducted work in this area.

Parliamentary scrutiny

7. The Scottish Parliament Public Audit Committee considered the report on 10 February 2010. The Committee agreed to write to the accountable officer in the Scottish Government, for clarification on:
 - The funding available to councils to improve air quality
 - The funding available to councils to increase recycling rates
 - Strategies, targets and funding to tackle non-household waste
 - The Scottish Government's policy on energy-from-waste
 - Funding available to Zero Waste Scotland
 - The role of the Scottish Futures Trust in investment in waste treatment facilities.
8. The response from the accountable officer was noted at the Public Audit Committee on 14 April 2010, and the Committee referred the report to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

Developments since the report

9. An update on progress against the 38 targets listed in Exhibit 1 of *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment* is set out in Appendix 1, using the most up to date data available at the end of 2010.

Air

10. There has been no change in performance against the national targets for air quality. However, three new air quality management areas (AQMAs) have been declared in the Falkirk Council area with respect to emissions from road transport bringing the total number to 24. No AQMAs have been revoked. During 2010, the Scottish Government and other UK administrations reviewed the effectiveness of the local air quality management (LAQM) process. The Scottish Government is currently considering the recommendations resulting from this review.

Water

11. There has been no change in performance against the target for all waters to achieve good ecological status by 2027. The next key date will 2015 which will mark the end of the first six-year river basin management planning cycle. Bathing water quality results for 2010 showed a slight (one per cent) improvement in the proportion rated good or excellent relative to the most recent data (2009) presented in the report.

Biodiversity

12. The Scottish Government's target for 95 per cent of all protected areas to be in favourable condition by 2010 has not been met. More data are now available on the 17 Scottish biodiversity indicators, which show that more indicators are now at risk of not being met.
13. In March 2010, Elaine Murray MSP asked whether the Scottish Government planned "to provide improved guidance to public bodies on delivering biodiversity at a local level, as recommended in Audit Scotland's report, *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*." Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Minister for Environment, responded that the Scottish Government planned to develop new guidance for public bodies, following discussions with stakeholders and an international conference on biodiversity in October 2010.
14. The Scottish Government is now working with Scottish Natural Heritage to re-develop existing guidance on biodiversity. The revised guidance is intended to clarify what public bodies are expected to do to comply with their statutory duty to further the conservation of biodiversity, and provide specific guidance on biodiversity action. The guidance is due by the end of March 2011.
15. The finding in the report that the duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity had had little impact on public bodies informed the development of guidance for public bodies by the Scottish Government on the climate change duties that came into force on 1 January 2011.

Waste

16. While the target to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill was met early, the target to recycle 40 per cent by the end of 2010 has not been met despite an increase in recycling of municipal waste from 34 per cent in 2008/09 to 37 per cent in 2009/10.

17. In June 2010, the Scottish Government published its Zero Waste Plan which aims to minimise the amount of waste produced in Scotland. A number of measures in the plan seek to address issues raised in *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*, including:
- Supporting the development of facilities to collect, sort, recycle, compost and recover energy from waste.
 - Providing advice to councils on the approach that should be taken when planning for new waste infrastructure.
 - Increasing recycling rates by introducing more separate collections of waste for recycling (e.g. food), and banning certain types of waste from landfill sites.
 - Using powers under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to require businesses to provide information to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on the waste that they produce, including construction and demolition waste (from January 2011).
18. In a debate on the development of the Scottish Government's Zero Waste Plan (12 May 2010), two MSPs highlighted findings from *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*, including:
- The need for additional waste management facilities to meet national landfill and recycling targets.
 - The challenges faced by councils in meeting landfill and recycling targets beyond 2010.
 - The need for councils to work together to provide cost-effective waste management facilities.
19. Waste management will remain an area of significant challenge for councils, with requirements for significant investment in infrastructure over the next decade if European targets are to be met. We will be seeking further information from councils on the impact of the original *Sustainable Waste Management* report and the follow-up contained in the *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment* report as part of the 2011/12 audit of individual councils.





Conclusion

20. The impact of *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment* to date has been limited. This is perhaps to be expected for an overview report with relatively few recommendations focused on a very specific sector. Many of the issues and targets highlighted in the report are necessarily long-term and, as pointed out in the report, extend far into the future. We will continue to monitor performance in this area and the implementation of the recommendations.

Appendix 1

Update of performance against environmental targets

Exhibit 1
Summary of performance against environmental targets
There has been mixed progress against environmental targets.

Outcomes	To value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.	To reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.	We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.	
National indicators	Air quality 	Water environment 	Biodiversity Increase to 95 per cent the proportion of protected nature sites in favourable condition by 2010 Increase the index of abundance of terrestrial breeding birds 	Waste Reduce to 1.32 million tonnes biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill by 2010 
Other key indicators and targets	Air quality (see Part 1) Benzene 1,3-butadiene Carbon monoxide Lead Nitrogen dioxide Nitrogen oxides Ozone Particulate matter (PM ₁₀) Particulate matter (PM _{2.5}) Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons Sulphur dioxide	Water environment (see Part 2) All water bodies to reach good ecological status by 2027 All urban areas to have appropriate sewage collection systems by 2005 All bathing waters to meet European standards by 2015 All shellfish waters to meet minimum standards by 2012	Biodiversity (see Part 3) Halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 17 Scottish biodiversity indicators 6 indicators 3 indicators 7 indicators 1 indicator*	Waste (see Part 4) Increase the amount of municipal waste being recycled to 40 per cent by 2010 Stop growth in the amount of municipal waste by 2010

Key

Target being met	Target at risk of not being met	Plans in place to meet target	Target not met	* Data not available
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Source: Audit Scotland

Note: The target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 remains 'at risk of not being met', as data for 2010 are not yet available.

Appendix 2

Summary of report impact against Audit Scotland's framework for measuring impact

HOLDING TO ACCOUNT AND HELPING TO IMPROVE	Assurance and accountability	Planning and management	Economy and efficiency	Quality and effectiveness
Recommendations				
The Scottish Government should improve the coordination of policies on air quality and road transport at a national level.	●	●		●
In councils with poor air quality caused by pollution from road transport, air quality teams should work with transport and planning colleagues to identify and implement actions to reduce emissions from road transport.		●		●
Councils with Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) should review their action plans, identify funding to implement actions to tackle poor air quality, and set timescales for when they expect to be able to revoke their AQMAs.		●		●
The Scottish Government should provide clearer guidance to public bodies on delivering biodiversity at a local level and meeting their statutory duty to further the conservation of biodiversity.				●
Scottish Natural Heritage should continue to improve the availability and accuracy of data, to better monitor progress against Scottish biodiversity indicators.	●			●
The Scottish Government and individual councils should agree plans that together combine to meet European Union and Scottish targets for the amount of waste recycled and sent to landfill.	●	●		●