

# The EAC's 'Air Quality' report: A changed landscape for air quality management?

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# This morning's presentation

- Background on the Environmental Audit Committee
- The 'Air Quality' report
- Thoughts on implementation, and our new UK Government

# The Environmental Audit Committee

- A Common's Select Committee
- Examines the contributions of Government policies and programmes to environmental protection
- Audits the Government's performance against targets set by Ministers



# Membership

- 16 MPs
- Cross party membership
- Chaired by Tim Yeo (Conservative) during the previous Parliament
- Now chaired by Joan Walley (Labour)



# Previous work

- Committee was established in 1997
- Reports during 2009/10 session included:
  - Green Jobs and Skills
  - Carbon Budgets
  - The role of carbon markets in preventing dangerous climate change
  - Adapting to Climate Change

# Process for the AQ Enquiry

NAO  
background  
briefing

Gathering of  
written  
evidence

Oral  
evidence  
sessions

# Headline Conclusions of the Enquiry

- 'UK should be ashamed of its poor air quality'
- Air quality has not been seen as a priority for Government
- The number of premature deaths associated with poor air quality in the UK is around 35,000 per year, and could be as high as 50,000

# This generated some media interest!

Exclusive

## Britain. A breath of foul air

The UK faces £300m in fines after failing to meet EU pollution targets, but Britons also pay the price with heart disease, asthma and cancer

By Nina Lakhani

Sunday, 21 March 2010

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More than 50,000 people are dying prematurely in the UK every year, and thousands more suffer serious illness because of man-made air pollution, according to a parliamentary report published tomorrow. The UK now faces the threat of £300m in fines after it failed to meet legally binding EU targets to reduce pollution to safe levels.



Front page, Independent on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March

# Recommendations – Government Priorities

- DEFRA (as the lead Department) should better communicate the impacts of poor air quality
- Air quality should be a responsibility for a greater range of Government departments, better guidance is needed on including AQ impacts in policy appraisal
- ‘Minsters must drive this from the top, introduce measures to ensure this becomes routine practice and accept responsibility for policies that conflict with air quality’

# Recommendations - Quantification

- More work is needed to quantify the impacts of poor air quality, including:
  - Morbidity (ill health) impacts and the cost to the NHS
  - Impacts of NO<sub>2</sub> on health
  - Ecosystem impacts
- Cost/ benefit analysis should also include the likely impacts of EU fines

# Recommendations - Actions

- Climate policy (particularly on transport) needs to be tuned to maximise AQ benefits
- A national framework for Low Emission Zones should be developed
- Planning Guidance should be urgently reviewed to see how it can be strengthened and applied to cut air pollution

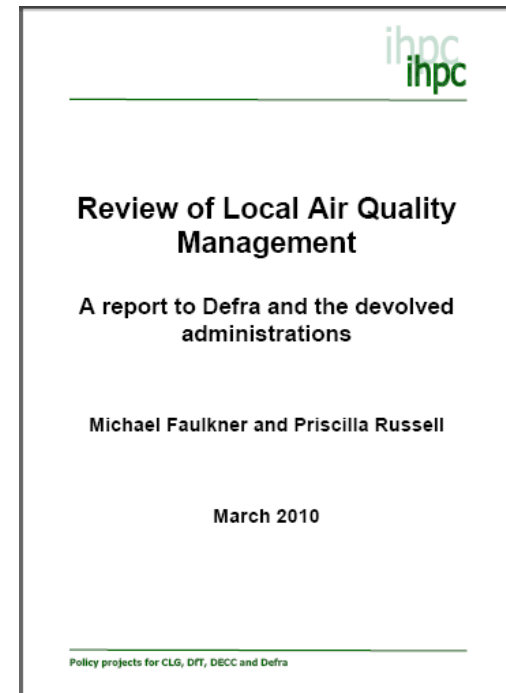
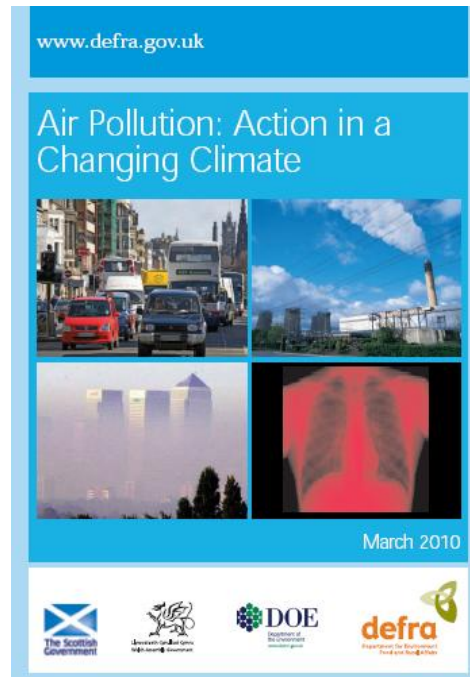
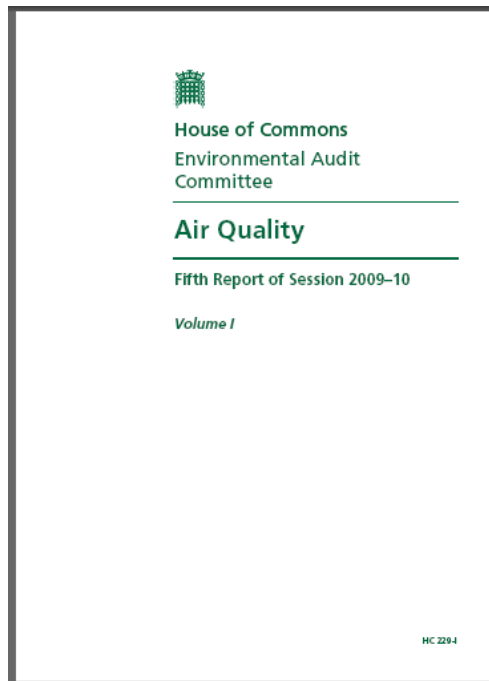
# Recommendations – Local Authorities

- ‘Local authorities are key to improving air quality’
- AQ should be more of a priority for Local Strategic Partnerships – preventative healthcare
- As with national Government, AQ needs to be a higher priority and one shared amongst all relevant local authority functions

# Thoughts on the recommendations

- These recommendations are nothing new – many people have been saying the same things for years
- EAC report hugely raises the importance of the recommendations though, and the Government will need to formally respond
- Government response due any day now

# March was a busy time for reports...



How will these reports be implemented?

# Our New Government



First peacetime  
UK coalition  
Government  
since the  
1930s. Will it  
last?



# Conservatives

- Conservatives have a new green image, but how will this impact on their response to air quality?
- The London experience suggests the Conservatives are not fans of major policy interventions such as LEZs and congestion charging!
- Still a largely Eurosceptic party – spectre of EU fines less likely to wash



# LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

- The Liberals are the only party who made a unambiguous pre-election commitment on air quality
- They said they would ensure the United Kingdom complies fully with air quality laws for PM<sub>10</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> by the time of the 2012 Olympics (made May 2009)
- Coalition policy is a compromise between Conservative and Liberal policies

# Greenest Government Ever?

HOME > EARTH > EARTH COMMENT > GEOFFREY LEAN

## David Cameron runs the greenest government ever? Tell it to the birds

Although the Coalition is likely to come good on its commitment to combat climate change, it is less clear that it cares about the rest of the environment, writes Geoffrey Lean.

By Geoffrey Lean

Published: 5:49PM BST 30 Jul 2010

71 Comments



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Geoffrey Lean 

Politics 

Conservative 

Liberal Democrats 

Earth 

Energy 

- Define 'greenest'?

- Proof of the pudding is in the eating!

# Coalition agreement



## II. ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Government believes that we need to protect the environment for future generations, make our economy more environmentally sustainable, and improve our quality of life and well-being. We also believe that much more needs to be done to support the farming industry, protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable food production.

- We will introduce measures to make the import or possession of illegal timber a criminal offence.
- We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.
- We will launch a national tree planting campaign.
- We will review the governance arrangements of National Parks in order to increase local accountability.
- We will work towards full compliance with European Air Quality standards.

# Conclusions

- EAC report is a landmark document, criticisms and recommendations that the Government will have to formally respond to
- Together with LAQM review and Air Pollution and Climate Change report we have a rough blueprint for what needs to be done
- Will it be done?

## Conclusions (2)

- Defra, together with other Government departments, are working on implementation of EAC and LAQM reports in tandem, announcements should start soon
- Implementation will have to fit in with the Government's key themes of budget cuts and localism, so unlikely to be either:
  - More money
  - New statutory commitments on local authorities

## Conclusions (3)

- Associated policy areas such as planning also due for major shake ups soon
- Government's overriding concern for air quality for the next few years will be to avoid infraction action by the EC for PM<sub>10</sub> (now) and NO<sub>2</sub> (from next September)
- Note that 'avoid infraction action' does not necessarily mean full compliance, need for air quality bodies to act in a watchdog role

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