

## Section 9

### Action on Climate Change

#### ***"What action is being taken to tackle climate change?"***

##### **International Action**

In response to increasing concerns about climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The aim was *"to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a low enough level to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system."* In total 188 countries signed the Convention which committed all developed nations to return their greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. In response UK emissions were 13.4% below the 1990 level by 2000.

It was quickly recognised that the UNFCCC commitments could only be a first step in the international response to climate change. Climate prediction models had begun to identify that much deeper cuts in emissions would be needed to prevent serious interference with the climate system. In December 1997 the Kyoto Protocol was agreed imposing legally binding emissions reduction targets on countries. Developed nations agreed to reduce emissions by 5.2% below 1990 levels by 2008-2012. The European Union agreed to an 8% reduction in its emissions of which the UK's contribution would be a 12.5% reduction. Whilst the UK had achieved its Kyoto target by 1999, since 2002 emissions have been rising and provisional figures for 2004 show a 12.6% reduction below 1990 levels. With the Russian Federation ratifying the protocol on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004, the agreed criteria on the percentage of developed nations' emissions covered by the treaty was met. The protocol became legally binding on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2005. Whilst Kyoto itself will not solve global warming, it is an important first step on the road to building a legally binding international agreement to tackle climate change.

##### **National Action**

The UK Government considers climate change to be one of the most serious threats facing the world's environment, economy and society. Consequently, it has committed itself to a global leadership role by putting in place a strong national programme of measures to achieve, and move beyond, its Kyoto target. The UK Climate Change Programme (DETR, 2000) was published in November 2000 and details how the UK plans to deliver its Kyoto target and move towards its domestic goal to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010. This domestic goal is challenging but is designed to signal the start of a

transition to a low carbon economy that will be essential for the longer term. Subsequently, the Energy White Paper entitled "*Our energy future – creating a low carbon economy*" was published in February 2003 (DTI, 2003) and sets out the longer term strategic framework for UK energy policy. It builds on the clear signals in the Climate Change Programme and sets an aspirational target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050. Unfortunately, provisional figures for 2004 indicate that progress towards the meeting the emissions reduction targets is falling well short of expectation at 4.2%.

In addition to promoting emissions reduction, the Government recognises that we are already committed to a degree of climate change as a result of historic emissions. Consequently, there is a need to identify the impacts and prepare appropriate adaptation responses. The UK Climate Impacts Programme was set up in 1997 to encourage private and public sector organisations to assess their vulnerability to climate change and plan their own adaptation strategies. UKCIP provides help and guidance for those undertaking such studies including a comprehensive set of climate change scenarios (Hulme et al, 2002) for the UK and adaptation and risk assessment toolkits (Willows and Connell, 2003).

Changing public awareness, attitudes and ultimately behaviour are all going to be vital if the UK is to achieve its climate change goals. On 16<sup>th</sup> February 2005 Defra announced a £12m package of funding over three years as the first part of a communications initiative to change public attitudes towards climate change. The initiative will focus on communicating at a local and regional level where the evidence suggests that it can be most effective. A toolkit will be published to help local communicators.

### **Regional Action**

At a regional level the importance of climate change is recognised in Integrated Regional Strategies, Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks and Regional Environmental Strategies. Action is focused on the adaptation agenda with a number of regional stakeholder partnerships formed under the UKCIP umbrella. In the South West, the South West Climate Change Impacts Partnership (SWCCIP) published its scoping study entitled "*Warming to the idea*" in January 2003 (SWCCIP, 2003) and is now embarked on a programme of raising awareness through a number of key sector groups including one for local authorities.

### **The Role of Local Government**

Given the ubiquitous nature of climate change, effective action can only be achieved through a partnership approach. The Government is clear that local authorities are critical to the success of the UK Climate Change Programme in that they can take direct action to reduce their own emissions and can influence the way others respond by raising awareness of the

need for action and providing practical advice on what people can do to make a difference. The Local Government Association works closely with a range of agencies including the Energy Saving Trust, Carbon Trust and IDeA Sustainable Development Commission to explore the challenges of effective energy use. It has also established working partnerships with the Environment Agency and UKCIP to communicate to local authorities the threats to, and opportunities for, local government that climate change issues hold. Our climate change strategy is about identifying those actions required by DCC in its roles as corporate manager, service provider and community leader. This latter responsibility is being discharged in part through the Devon Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy (DSP, 2004<sup>a</sup>).

Page intentionally left blank.