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From the Secretary of State
The RT Hon Caroline Spelman MP

Dear Colleague,

Oct 21st

Response to public comments on the draft Defra Structural Reform Plan

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation on Defra's draft Structural Reform Plan. A number of issues covered by the plan evinced insight and passion, and we believe it was important to voice and discuss these views publicly.

The main areas on which members of the public and the third sector commented were firstly National Parks, then jointly bovine TB, Big Society and Water Conservation and thirdly, Sustainable Agriculture/Food Production.

The largest number of people joined in discussions around the governance and accountability arrangements for England's National Parks, including many from members of the public living within the boundaries of National Parks, particularly the New Forest. Of these, strengthened local representation on Parks' governance structures featured prominently. Others felt that national representation reflected the need to ensure that the Parks are managed as national assets. Several comments suggested that residents should be consulted more widely ahead of changes to the structure and management of parks. Public consultation on the governance arrangements is to be launched in early November and the outcome announced by the end of March 2011.


The second most frequently commented upon areas were jointly bovine TB, Big Society and Water Conservation. Many correspondents on bovine TB focused on the issue of 'science led badger control' and questioned whether the policy should focus on all measures to tackle bovine TB rather than only on badger control. Equally, respondents questioned the long term ability to control TB and the effectiveness of eradication. Eradication remains the Government's long term goal, however, the disease will be tackled through a package of measures. On 15 September the Minister for State published a document setting out our approach to tackling the disease and in both cattle and badgers, and launched a public consultation on a badger control policy. Badgers remain a significant reservoir for the disease and without taking action to control the disease in them, it will continue to spread.

On Big Society, correspondents sought to broaden the scope of priority areas that could be referenced in relation to the subject. Suggestions for expansion included tapping into local communities and knowledge to improve water quality, land management and flood defence. It was suggested that championing and galvanizing local knowledge and existing grassroots activity could contribute to a greener UK with social and environmental as well as economic benefit in both rural and urban locations. Rainwater harvesting dominated comments on Water Conservation with many wishing to see strengthened planning guidance promoting harvesting measures. The Coalition Government has committed to publish a Water White Paper by June 2011. This will focus on a number of key areas, including water conservation.

The third most frequently commented upon area was Sustainable Agriculture/Food Production. There was a strong call to support British farming through sustainable food production. Others noted that sustainable food production was not just about farming and highlighted the role for domestic and community food production. The importance of British farming and environmentally sustainable agriculture is strongly supported by this Government and we are committed to taking action to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain, working with civil society, industry and the farming community.

In addition, we also received a number of comments covering areas such as the UK Overseas Territories, Rural Community Councils, Green Spaces and the National Tree Planting Campaign where comments broadly supported the campaign. I was heartened to see so many linking the concept of Big Society to comments made across the board of Reform Plan subjects. It seems to me that there is a genuine appetite for public engagement with local issues and there were many good ideas on how local action can be tailored to implement national objectives. This for me is an excellent example of people and Government working in partnership.

I'd like to finish by saying thank you once again for all those who took the time to comment on Defra's draft Structural Reform Plan. These comments are now being considered as part of the Spending Review process. A final Structural Reform Plan will be published as part of Defra's Business Plan.

Yours ever,

CAROLINE SPELMAN