

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

July 2010

Defra response to public comments on Coalition Programme

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation on the Coalition's Programme for Government. A number of the issues incited a lot of passion, and we believe it is important that these views be aired and discussed publicly.

The three main areas on which members of the public commented were hunting with dogs, the culling of badgers and food policy. Strong views were expressed about hunting on both sides of the debate – this was the subject that received most comments overall. The majority of responses were opposed to repealing the Hunting Act for reasons ranging from animal welfare to pressures on parliamentary time. Others supported hunting as a traditional country activity or to minimise damage to livestock. The majority of those commenting considered hunting policy to be an issue of conscience: for this reason, it has always been subject to a free vote in Parliament when raised. Since the Hunting Act has not been a demonstrable success, the Government wishes to give Parliament the opportunity to review the legislation, although it is not currently a priority given pressures on parliamentary time.

There was considerable public interest in a possible badger cull to control bovine TB (bTB). Several people grouped this issue with hunting and described it as an animal welfare issue. Others questioned the scientific basis for a cull. Bovine TB is a serious problem for the farming industry, with over 25,000 cattle slaughtered to control the disease in England in 2009. Evidence suggests that without addressing the problem in the badger population, it will not be possible to eradicate bTB in cattle. The Coalition Government has committed, as part of a package of measures, to introduce an affordable, carefully-managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine TB. We need to consider all the issues carefully, including the scientific evidence, to work out the detail of the package to ensure we get it right. We will be looking at vaccine and culling options as part of that package. We are developing proposals that will be published for consultation.

The third most frequently mentioned area was food: members of the public suggested increasing UK food production, ensuring food security and sourcing food locally. The range of issues covered was wide, including reducing meat consumption, understanding of nutrition and land for people to grow their own food. The Government is keen to support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production, while helping to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life. Other priorities include encouraging people to make sustainable and healthy food choices, and promoting a competitive agriculture sector that frees farmers to farm.

In addition to these three main areas, we also received a number of comments covering areas such as reducing waste and wildlife protection, where the public broadly supported the Programme. These areas will be key priorities for Defra in the

coming years. Our Structural Reform Plan includes commitments to publish a White Paper setting out measures to protect wildlife and habitats, as well as spearheading international progress on conservation and endangered species. We will also be reviewing waste policy and set out new goals to drive us towards a 'zero waste' economy, and publishing a White Paper on reform of the water industry to ensure more efficient use of water and to protect poorer households. A key role for Government is to lead by example, so we will be acting to ensure this is the greenest government ever, with ambitious waste reduction targets and increasing purchases of sustainable food, transport, and other goods and services. But Government alone cannot achieve these things – it will require action at all levels of society, with members of the public, local communities, the private sector, charities and social enterprises all needing to work together. We hope you will continue to engage with us on this ambitious programme to ensure our society and economy are genuinely sustainable for us and for future generations.