

SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS

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Dear Sir/Madam,

DETR CONSULTATION "SUSTAINABILITY COUNTS"
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The following submission has been prepared under the aegis of the Environment, Health and Safety Committee of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

The Society's Royal Charter obliges it to serve the public interest by acting in an independent advisory capacity and we are happy for this submission to be put into the public domain.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on this document and the other recent DETR consultation papers on sustainability. Professional chemists, like other concerned citizens, will have a variety of views on many aspects of this wide-ranging paper. However, the following comments are written from the perspective of the profession of chemistry.

We agree with the concept and ethos of sustainable development which is not an option but an essential requirement for the continued existence of mankind. Overall we support the general philosophy underlying the proposals and the adoption of 'headline indicators'.

We would suggest however that the proposal should contain suggestions for activities to generate greater understanding of the need for sustainability in all activities and means to achieve it, and of how these indicators should be used.

For the aims of the document to be achieved sustainability must be a central element in planning for each of the areas shown in Chart 1 [page 7]. The paper makes no mention of setting targets for the indicators. Setting targets for the indicators will give some notion of the improvement required and how quickly progress is being made. Will this be the subject of a future consultation document?

Selection of appropriate 'Indicators'

It is very desirable to have a series of simple 'indicators' that can be readily understood and accepted by everyone. We therefore support the philosophy behind this document of extending indicators beyond purely environmental concerns.

We agree that the thirteen proposed headline indicators in Table 1 [page 5] represent a reasonable list of measurable parameters. The employment indicator might include the percentage employment amongst young first-time workers, as this is a measure of current work opportunities and a warning of potential social problems if the percentage falls. It might also be

useful to include renewable and non-renewable energy usage under “**Prudent use of natural resources**”.

In respect of ‘Aggregated Indicators’ we agree with the view on page 8 that these would tend to fog the issues. Distinct indicators, even if they are inter-dependant, will be more easily understood and measured.

Other points

Reporting: should be annual but the precise timing is relatively unimportant provided it occurs at the same time for all indicators because of their inter-dependency.

Scope: The Government should attempt to encourage the implementation of consistent sets of sustainability indicators world-wide.

Contribution of professional bodies: relevant professional bodies such as the Royal Society of Chemistry are a source of independent expert advice. They also regulate the professional conduct of their members and are thus well placed to play a central role in supporting and implementing the government’s sustainability strategy. The RSC is concerned to contribute to the improvement of public understanding of chemistry, its positive contribution to sustainability, and the other benefits that chemistry can bring to society.

I hope these comments are useful.

Yours sincerely,

Professor D Taylor
Chairman, Environment, Health and Safety Committee of the Royal Society of Chemistry

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The Royal Society of Chemistry was formed from a merger of the Chemical Society (founded in 1841) and the Royal Institute of Chemistry (founded in 1877); it inherited the prestige and responsibilities of its parent bodies. It is both the learned society for chemistry and the professional qualifying body for chemists in the United Kingdom.

There are about 46,000 members, of whom 10,000 are based abroad. Professional membership of the Society is an internationally recognized qualification. The Society also administers the examinations for the Mastership in Chemical Analysis (MChemA) which is a statutory requirement for practice as a Public Analyst.

The Society is one of the world's major chemical publishing houses with a wide range of primary, secondary, and tertiary literature, including research journals, abstracts and indexes, educational publications and computer-based information services.

Strong ties are maintained with government both at national and at European Community level. Formal contact with parliament is maintained through the Society's two parliamentary advisers and through its Link Scheme, whereby members of the Society are linked with individual Members of Parliament.

The Society has 35 local sections in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and a number of local sections overseas.