# Sustainable Development Action Plan

## Sustainable Development Commission

# Ministry of Defence

**Sustainable Development Minister:
Derek Twigg MP**

**SDC Assessment**

**Gearing up**

# Checklist

## Sustainable Development Action Plan

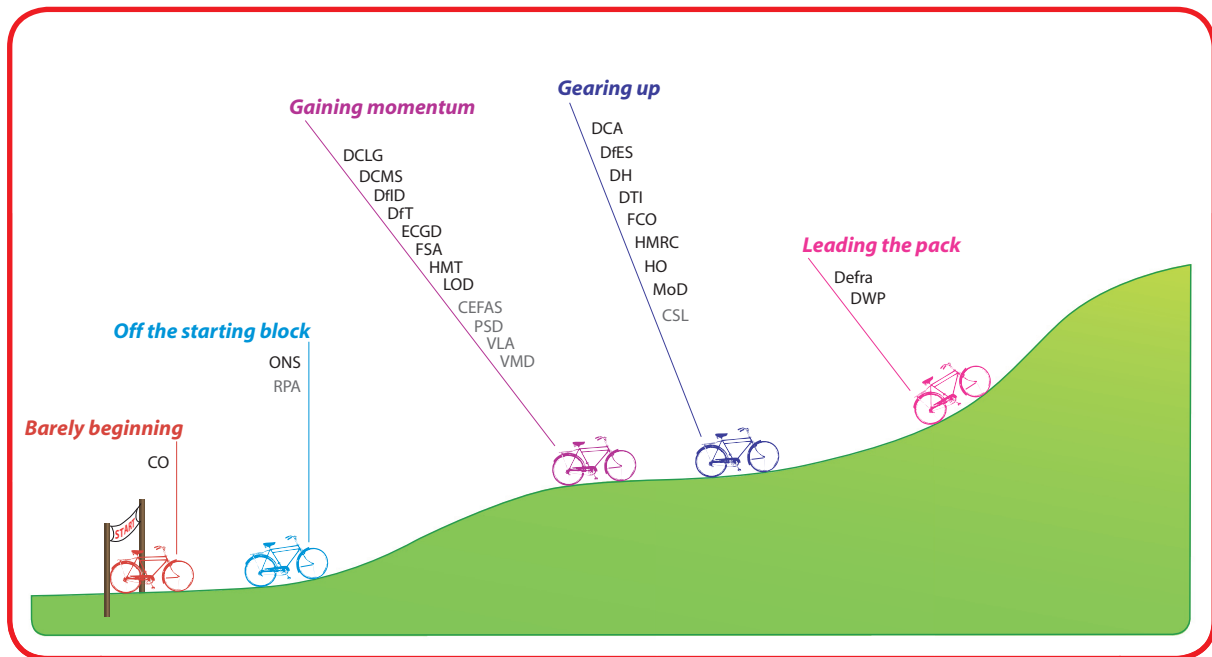| # | Question | | Comment |
|---|----------|---|---------|
| 1 | Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover? | ✔ | Plan includes key deliverables for 2006. |
| 2 | Does the plan specify which organisations it covers? | ✘ | It is not made clear if the executive agencies are covered by the plan. However, MoD's Policy statement is applicable to all of its executive agencies. |
| 3 | Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them? | ✔ | |
| 4 | Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation? | ✔ | |
| 5 | Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal? | ✔ | |
| 6 | Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of *Securing the Future*? | ✘ | The plan does not acknowledge that *Securing the Future* sets out four priorities for action. |
| | Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of *Securing the Future*? | ✔ | Plan mentions all of the priorities. |
| 7 | Does the plan identify links to the priorities of *Securing the Future*? | ✔ | The plan sets out operational commitments in the context of the priorities. |
| 8 | Does the plan acknowledge the principles of *Securing the Future*? | ✘ | The plan does not acknowledge or mention the guiding principles. |
| | Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of *Securing the Future*? | ✘ | |
| 9 | Does the plan identify links to the principles of *Securing the Future*? | ✘ | The plan makes no reference to the guiding principles. |
| 10 | Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan? | ✘ | The plan does not make clear whether executive agencies are covered. MoD explained that they are all included in the departmental plan. |
| 11 | Does the action plan contain a work programme? | ✔ | |
| 12 | Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy? | ✔ | |
| 13 | Does the action plan cover government policy? | ✔ | |
| 14 | Does the action plan cover operations? | ✔ | |
| 15 | Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006? | ✘ | |

| 16 | Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation? | ✔ | Yes, will assess training needs and implement actions. |
|----|------|------|------|
| 17 | Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan? | ✔ | |
| 18 | Does the plan make it clear who signed it off? | ✔ | |
| 19 | Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan? | ✔ | |
| 20 | Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan? | ✔ | MoD is currently developing framework to monitor progress. |
| 21 | Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan? | ✔ | |
| 22 | Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report | ✔ | Will report in their annual sustainable development report. |
| 23 | Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis? | ✘ | SDAP explains that progress will be reported in March 2007 Annual Report. It is not made clear whether MoD will report on a regular basis in future years. |

**Senior Accountable Officer:** Dr Michael Rutter, Director

Status of Plan: Published 22.02.06

**Please note that the SDC rating is based on a competency framework and not straight addition of the scores in the table above. Please see main report for full explanation of the methodology.**

# How is MoD doing?



Gaining momentum

Gearing up
DCA
DfES
DH
DTI
FCO
HMRC
HO
MoD
CSL

DCLG
DCMS
DfID
DfT
ECGD
FSA
HMT
LOD
CEFAS
PSD
VLA
VMD

Leading the pack
Defra
DWP

Off the starting block
ONS
RPA

Barely beginning
CO

## Background

The UK's Armed Forces, supported by civilians in the MOD, exist to defend the UK and its interests, strengthen international peace and security, and act as a force for good in the world.

## Context

The Ministry has taken an active approach to producing its SDAP. The Ministry has published a clear and prioritised action plan which acknowledges areas where MoD needs to improve and specifies strategic actions to address these. MoD's next task is to translate its strategic thinking into key outputs and work streams supported by the improved evidence base which it has highlighted as a high priority for 2006.

## Coverage

The SDAP covers all of MOD's executive agencies some of which include the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency, Defence Aviation Repair Agency, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Duke of York's Royal Military School, Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency and the Veterans Agency. It was explained in bilateral discussions that some of the Ministry's agencies, such as the Defence Aviation Repair Agency, are Trading Fund Agencies but are still represented by MOD's SDAP.

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## Departmental view of Sustainable Development

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is the largest government department in terms of both employees (295,000) and coverage of estate buildings (almost 69million m², which accounts for 80% of the central Government estate). The Ministry's SDAP acknowledges that as a major landowner and large employer, the Ministry has a "crucial role" to play in the sustainable development agenda. The Ministry centres its plan around the recognition that it is reliant on natural resources – land, sea and air – to house, train and equip forces to test weapon systems. It is therefore essential that the Ministry manages its use and disposal of natural resources.

The MoD SDAP explains how the Ministry's role in defending the UK and its interests, and its peace-keeping work, are consistent with the sustainable development goal, as set out in *Securing the Future*. i.e. in terms of securing a better quality of life for all. In the bilateral, the Ministry also acknowledged the key relationship between environmental conditions and conflict as well as the MoD's significant impact on local communities and economies. The Ministry also recognises the contribution it can make to developing the skills of young people, and to their welfare in the support for ex-service personnel. This full range of MoD impacts were not highlighted in MoD's SDAP. However, they are more fully discussed/acknowledged in MoD's Sustainable Development report. The SDC appreciates the overlap of this year's SDAP and MoD's existing sustainability reporting as well as the need to keep narrative concise in an SDAP. However, a brief acknowledgement of these wider impacts would have been helpful to put the specified actions and priorities in context.

### Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

Taking a sustainable development approach would enable the Ministry to achieve its core task of producing 'battle-winning people and equipment through access to land, air and sea.' The Ministry recognises the need to look after these global natural assets in order to make use of them effectively, and remain legitimate users in the face of other pressures on natural resources in the context of acceptability and public opinion.

## Link to *Securing the Future*

### Guiding Principles

MoD explains the need to embed sustainable development into defence policy and practice. However, the Ministry does not acknowledge the five shared UK principles in the SDAP, which have been set out in *Securing the Future* to achieve the Government's stated sustainable development purpose. The SDAP does outline MOD's own strategic principles and the SDC would have expected the SDAP to explain how far these are compatible with the *Securing the Future* principles.

### Shared priorities for UK action

MoD's SDAP only identifies its contribution to the priorities of *Securing the Future* in the context of its operational delivery priorities. The plan conveys no real sense of how the Ministry views its overall contribution to *Securing the Future* or how it will implement and integrate the five principles. MoD explained in the bilateral that its sustainable development report (not SDAP) made many of these links and the Ministry had not wanted to repeat them all in the SDAP.

Whilst MoD does feel it can contribute to all four priorities, it highlights its contribution

to Climate Change and Energy as being most significant. The SDAP plan includes an action to 'Develop a Climate Change strategy and implement actions arising.' MoD explained that this strategy will be the thread linking all of the MoD's operational activity together.

MoD also acknowledged the immense impact it can make on the Govenrment's sustainable consumption and production goals because of the size of its estate and procurement power.

## Policy priorities

MoD's key policy commitment is aimed at 'embedding sustainable development into defence'. The related action is:

*'To develop a coherent policy framework for environmental management based on air, land and water as a key enabler of defence'.*

The SDAP doesn't provide much explanation of why the protection of natural resources is a "key enabler of defence" or identify the outputs that MoD expects from this approach in order to measure progress. The bilateral clarified MoD's thinking in this area. MoD recognises that it needs a robust approach to environmental management in order to minimise the impacts on the natural environments upon which it depends to carry out its operations on air, sea and land. The Ministry is well aware that it is in competition with others for access to these resources. Therefore, negative impacts on local amenities and/or a poor reputation for natural resource management could impact on this access in the future. Currently, much of MoD activity is supported by Royal Prerogative but MoD recognises that its access may be at risk as natural resources become scarcer or there is growing public resistance to MoD's use of land etc.

The Ministry has chosen to articulate this approach in narrow environmental management terms. However, this risk based approach would equally apply to MoD's wider policies beyond environmental impacts, including those relating to procurement of local food, contributing to sustainable communities, skills etc.

In order to monitor against this commitment effectively, MoD recognises it will need to set out what it means by a "coherent policy framework", identify its key elements, and then specify particular outcomes to be achieved within set timescales.

## Leading by example

MoD achieved a three star rating in the SDC's 2005 review of government performance against the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate. Despite its size, the department achieved an average/above average performance for most Framework targets.

MoD confirmed that the operational commitments had been selected on the basis of the Ministry's most significant sustainable development impacts. These include procurement, waste, water, land remediation, biodiversity and EMS. The department has also made a commitment to publish a biodiversity strategy in 2006 for the Defence Estate. The SDAP does not refer to the *Securing the Future* commitment to offset carbon emissions arising from official and Ministerial air travel. As of April 2006 all departments were required to offset carbon dioxide emissions arising from official and Ministerial air travel. MoD has some concerns about the coverage of this commitment which it feels will have disproportionate cost to the Ministry and could divert resources from core defence capability spending.[1]

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## *Securing the Future* commitments

### Departmental commitment

*Securing the Future* does not specify any commitments for which the MoD has the lead across government. However, MoD explained that the Ministry signed up for operational commitments once the strategy was published. These include a commitment to reduce MoD's contribution to global warming in line with Government led objectives, as well as working to meet the Framework's Biodiversity Targets. However, these were not addressed in their SDAP due to their operational nature.

### Cross-government commitments

The plan includes a range of actions relating to knowledge and skills and a commitment to implementing "actions arising from the Sustainable Procurement Task Force." However, the plan does not set these actions in the context of contributing to the *Securing the Future* cross-government commitments.

### Target setting

The Ministry's SDAP helpfully indicates the division responsible for delivery of the actions and timescales for completion. However many of the actions are very strategic and ambiguous and not outcome focused. It is therefore difficult to get a real sense of what many of the key actions are intended to achieve, and will be difficult for MoD to effectively monitor and review. The key policy commitment set out in the plan is a clear example (see above).

## Policy making

### Sustainable Development 'proofing'

MoD's SDAP acknowledges the need to ensure that sustainable development is embedded into policy making. This is accompanied by an action point to 'provide advice and guidance on RIAs across the department.' The action plan does not clarify how MoD intends to do this. However, MoD explained that a team is being put together to work on RIAs and produce guidance which will be available on the website. MoD confirmed that this guidance would not re-invent the Cabinet Office guidance but would explain to staff how it fitted with the MoD's own processes. This will have to take into account the new impact assessment guidance currently being developed by the Better Regulation Executive in the Cabinet Office.

The plan does not tackle the cross-government commitment on integrating the five principles into the policy making process.

### Sustainable Development Skills

The MoD has recognised the need to improve the knowledge and skills of its staff to be able to deliver a step change in their performance on sustainable development. MoD will therefore assess the training needs of its staff this year and intends to develop a forward plan to meets the needs identified by this skills audit. MoD is aware that a wider communications approach beyond traditional training is important to building sustainable development capacity within the department. However, the Ministry is currently only at the early stages of developing a sustainable development communications strategy and plan (see below).

MoD has an important action to support sustainable development leadership at a senior level in the Ministry. Defence Management Board (DMB) members are actioned to "consider the environmental, economic and social implications of MOD's activities and agree the strategic and policy context for sustainable development. Unfortunately, the SDAP provides no more detail to support this action. Neither does it outline any expected outcomes or underpinning mechanisms. MoD admitted that although DMB is clear that this is the kind of action members should be aspiring to, the Ministry has yet to identify what this might actually mean in practice.

## Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

### Infrastructure

The plan lists the several Boards in existence which relate to sustainable development and how they relate to each other. However, MoD has acknowledged that it needs to simplify internal sustainable development governance arrangements and has set an action to review its infrastructure and implement any actions arising from the review.

### Engagement

The MoD recognise the need to increase and improve communications on sustainable development issues to ensure the concept is well understood across the organisation as well as how it can be integrated into MoD's delivery. The Ministry has therefore set an action to develop and implement a Sustainable Development Communications Strategy and develop a Communications Action Plan to ensure delivery.

The MoD communicated the launch of its SDAP by publishing it on its internet and intranet site. The plan was also emailed to senior officials.

## Monitoring and reporting

Whilst MOD is able to track the current SDAP targets, the Ministry has acknowledged that data availability and data collection are key issues it must address to track outcomes on some of the actions it has specified and has instigated processes to tackle this. MoD has identified that it needs a more robust evidence base to deliver operational delivery priorities and the plan is clear that this remains a high priority for 2006.

The MoD will report on progress against its SDAP in its annual Sustainable Development Report which will be published in March 2007.

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1  Since bilateral discussions were held, MoD has begun to contribute to the government wide carbon offsetting scheme.

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## Strengths to build upon

✔ Take action to tackle skills gaps as identified in the skills audit.

✔ Identify key elements and specify particular outcomes to be achieved under the key policy commitment to 'develop a coherent policy framework for environmental management based on air land and water as a key enabler of defence'.

✔ Underpin Defence Management Board's leadership action with clear objectives and frameworks for achievement.

✔ Ensure all future targets are outcome focused.

✔ Develop Climate Change Strategy in consultation with stakeholders.

✔ Identify key actions to follow-up infrastructure review.

## Challenges for 2007

Actively engage with policy-makers to ensure understanding of the need to include sustainable development in policy appraisals.

Develop set of clear sustainable development key messages to be promoted by the sustainable development communications plan and strategy, and ensure that these fit with the priorities identified in the action plan.

Include actions relating to sustainable communities. For example, MoD's contribution to the local sustainable communities plans as a landowner and manager of housing stock and in relation to skills development.

Progress monitoring (as identified in plan).

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