

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SCOTLAND - RIO, JOHANNESBURG AND BEYOND

1. This paper summarises the work undertaken in Scotland since the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to make progress on sustainable development. A central event in this period has been the creation in 1999 of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive (government) which have responsibility for a large range of issues including sustainable development which were formerly undertaken by the UK Parliament and Government.

Work and Progress since 1992

2. In 1994 the Secretary of State for Scotland set up the Advisory Group on Sustainable Development followed in 1996 by the establishment of a Sustainable Development Team in his own office. The Advisory Group which included leaders from business, local government and the NGOs provided advice on how Government could make progress on sustainable development in Scotland. It submitted its considered views on a wide range of topics including the Fishing Industry, Transport, Industry, Energy Utilisation, Land Use Planning and Economic Instruments. In its final report published early in 1999, the Group set out a series of action points which were important in maintaining the momentum on sustainable development during the preparation for and early implementation of the constitutional changes which took place in Scotland in July 1999.

3. Scotland has had a long history of social deprivation and the implementation of sustainable development has increasingly gone hand in hand with Government efforts to alleviate poverty and increase social justice. In early 1999 the Secretary of State published "Down to Earth" a comprehensive statement of action taken and of the priorities for the future.

4. Scotland's local authorities are major spenders and providers of public services. In 1997 Prime Minister Tony Blair set out a challenge to each UK local authority to have a Local Agenda 21 Plan by the end of 2000. The Scottish Office provided financial support to help achieve this objective and all Scottish local authorities met the Prime Minister's challenge by having plans in place. More importantly the work of local authorities on LA 21 did provide solid evidence that there had been a significant change of thinking within Scottish local authorities which provided a solid base for further progress on sustainable development. One of the most successful areas of activity has been the implementation of Local Biodiversity Plans. These have often involved local authorities working with a number of other partners including environmental NGOs and statutory bodies. The process was notable for its ability to attract local interest and the active participation of individuals from local communities. The Scottish Office publication "Changed Days; Local Agenda 21 in Scotland" published in February 1999 provided detailed information on the actions undertaken by each Scottish local authority to implement Local Agenda 21.

Since July 1999

5. Since 1999 action in Scotland on sustainable development has become more intense. Radical changes took place in the constitutional arrangements with the creation of the first Scottish Parliament for 300 years. Ministers in the Scottish Executive now run an administration dealing with a wide range of devolved issues such as health, education, housing, transport and the environment. Sustainable development was one of the issues which fell within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive and the new administration committed itself from the outset to “integrate the principles of environmentally and socially sustainable development into all Government policies.” Devolution itself was a major contribution to sustainable development not only in the formal sense of having a Parliament within Scotland to provide a focus for democratic debate. Devolution has been implemented with a special emphasis on ensuring that the new democracy is accessible to the general public. The rules of debate in the Parliament deliberately avoid unnecessary formality. Draft legislation arriving in the Parliament must have been subject to a considerable amount of prior public consultation

6. The main innovation to implement the Executive’s commitment to sustainable development was the early creation of a Scottish Cabinet Committee dealing with sustainable development. This was chaired by the Environment Minister and now by the First Minister, the Head of the Executive. Membership comprises a number of senior Ministers with responsibility for key issues such as social justice, transport and planning, health and business development.

7. A central theme of the work of the Executive has been the desire to communicate openly with major stakeholders and the wider public. The summary of the minutes of the Ministerial group is published. 3 external members, one from business, an academic and the other from a leading NGO sit on the Group. All Bills sent for consideration by the Scottish Parliament must include a statement of their effects on sustainable development and the Executive has instituted an annual debate on sustainable development in the Parliament to permit discussion on progress. Apart from the emphasis on social justice, the Scottish approach to sustainable development has a heavy emphasis on resource use. Officials in the Executive are encouraged to take account of the effects of their decisions on the resources used in their programmes and on the production of waste, the use of energy and on likely transport and travel implication. Arrangements are in place to ensure that the review of the Executive’s spending taking place in 2002 takes account of the implications of spending decisions on sustainable development.

8. The Executive will soon publish a formal statement of its approach to sustainable development and its plans for change. It will also give details on the Development Indicators for Scotland, a matter which had been the subject of independent research sponsored by the Executive and a significant amount of public consultation. The Executive is also taking forward plans for a Sustainable Development Forum which will provide a focus for debate on sustainable development

Stakeholder Consultation in Scotland in Preparation for the World Summit

9. The Scottish Executive instigated consultation in advance of the Johannesburg Summit to gauge the views of Scots on the changes they want to make Scotland more sustainable. It also used the requirement to consult in advance of the Summit to “spread the word” about sustainable development to the public. There is little doubt that there is still some way to go before there is widespread understanding of the term.

Process

10. The consultation was not a government controlled exercise but was undertaken by a Steering Group which also contained a wide range of other key stakeholders such as NGOs, business, and trade unions etc. Although some funding for the work came from the Executive, BT and Shell also provided significant private sector financial support. The process involved : -

- A series of seminars around Scotland managed by Scottish Civic Forum
- An e-consultation exercise managed by the International Teledemocracy Centre at Napier University, Edinburgh.

11. As Scotland contains large, mainly rural, areas as well as a densely populated central area, 2 of the 3 seminars were held outside the Central Belt - one in Inverness and the other in Newton St Boswells - to provide improved opportunities for people with an interest to attend. Over 250 delegates attended the seminars. The electronic consultation received nearly 400 comments. The level of attendees at the seminars was most encouraging particularly in the case of those held outside the Central Belt. Given the novelty of e-consultation the response to that element was satisfactory. However useful lessons were learned about how we might reach larger numbers of Scotland’s people in future electronic consultations.

The views of Consultees

12. Consultees raised a large number of issues. The three main broad areas of interest were the efficient use of resources, energy use and climate change, and changing public attitudes to environmental and sustainable development issues. More specifically, the following issues were the most commonly mentioned in responses and in discussion: -

- Waste
- Recycling
- Renewable energy
- Energy efficient buildings
- Changing lifestyles
- Education and awareness

13. Other issues included changes in the planning and building control systems to achieve greater resource use efficiency and measures to achieve traffic reduction

14. There was awareness of some of the initiatives taken by the Scottish Executive and the UK Government to implement more sustainable policies. Consultees referred to the following initiatives :

- The more effective expression of the sustainable development message
- Action on Third World debt
- Social inclusion
- Equal opportunities
- The minimum wage
- Action on drugs
- Improved family support
- Land reform (an issue of particular importance in the Highland areas of Scotland)

15. While there was support for much of the progress which had been made, there was also a general feeling that more needed to be done. In particular ; -

- Scotland's record on waste needed to be improved
- Further action was requested to make travel more sustainable.
- Further progress could also be made on promoting energy efficiency.

16. The single most common concern throughout the consultation that more needed to be done not just by the Executive but by all across the country to ensure that sustainable development is placed at the heart of Scottish life.

The WSSD agenda

17. The comments from Scotland stressed the importance of the Summit addressing issue of poverty and social justice. The agenda which is emerging for the Summit in Johannesburg appears to be very much along these lines.

Conclusions

18. Since the Rio Summit in 1992 a range of actions have been taken to make progress in Scotland on sustainable development. Governments (both the UK Government and the Scottish Executive) have been at the heart of this but major contributions have also been made by business, local authorities, NGOs and trade unions. There is a general recognition amongst all these organisations that, whatever has gone before, more needs to be done if we are to meet the challenges of sustainable development