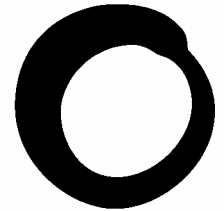


December 2004



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# **Consultation Response**

## **Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation**

**A response by Friends of the Earth**

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## **Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation**

Friends of the Earth believes the publication of draft PPS 9 and the accompanying legal circular together with the forthcoming Good Practice Guidance, presents the Government with an important opportunity to ensure that it delivers its commitments on biodiversity through the planning system. Friends of the Earth supports the detailed comments made by the Wildlife and Countryside Link organisation. We are, however, particularly concerned to emphasise five areas of concern about the scope and objectives of the draft PPS 9.

### **1. A lack of Vision**

One of the key weaknesses of the draft PPS 9 is its failure to set a clear vision of the importance of biodiversity in the context of global and national decline of species and habitats. The beginning of PPS 9 should acknowledge the crucial and not simply 'significant' role of land use planning in defending and enhancing the nation's biodiversity. In addition, while the value of biodiversity is recognised in relation to its economic benefits there is no discussion of the intrinsic value of biodiversity in general and specific habitats in particular. The document outlines a number of key principles (particularly v and vi) which appear to emphasise biodiversity as a tradable asset underplaying its intrinsic value and the importance of particular habitats to local communities. Friends the Earth believes PPS 9 should contain an upfront and powerful statement of the value of biodiversity and we suggest incorporating the statement made by the EEAC and cited by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in their report 'Environmental Planning' 2002:

***“The natural environment offers critical resources and services, which can seldom be substituted by, or traded for, economic or social products of civilisation. It is our home, and the living world in all its diversity is of fundamental importance to our dignity as humans. These intrinsic aspects of nature may be termed unique values. Together with the critical values of the natural environment they constitute a heritage that a sustainable society must be able to hand on to future generations”.***<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Climate Change and Biodiversity**

Friends of the Earth strongly objects to the failure of the draft PPS 9 to adequately deal with the impact of climate change on biodiversity. Climatologists predict that if urgent action isn't taken now, average global temperatures could rise by almost 6°C by 2100<sup>2</sup>. Temperature increases of this scale would have a devastating effect on animals and plants around the world - a recent study of six wildlife-rich parts of the world suggests that a quarter of land animals and plants could go extinct if average global temperatures rise by just 2°C<sup>3</sup>. (The study's lead author says that extrapolations of his findings to other parts of the world and other habitats suggest that altogether one million species could be lost)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> EEAC 2001, cited in the 23rd report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, Environmental Planning, HMSO 2002

<sup>2</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2001) "Climate change 2001: the scientific basis" Summary for Policy Makers p.13

<sup>3</sup> Thomas C et al (2004) "Extinction risk from climate change" Nature Vol. 427 pp145-48

<sup>4</sup> Kirby A (2004) "Climate risk 'to million species'" BBC News World Edition 7 January 2004

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3375447.stm>

Given this dramatic threat, PSS 9 must provide more detailed guidance on the impact of climate change on biodiversity and how the planning framework should respond at national, regional and local levels. PPS 9 must illustrate the need to join up the imperative to protect and enhance biodiversity with a range of other climate related strategies dealing with, for example: CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, resource use, transport strategies and energy policy. This strategic drive for climate change avoidance should be complemented by a clear link to the adaptation and mitigation in relation to biodiversity. PPS 9 should make clear that this may mean providing added protection to vulnerable habitats including extending the size of existing designations and creating new designations.

### **3. The coherence of the policy package**

Friends the Earth strongly supports Wildlife and Countryside Links concerns about the minimal extent of policy contained in PPS 9. At only 14 paragraphs the substantive policy is by far the shortest of any of the published new format PPSs. This attempt at brevity means that many important issues surrounding biodiversity are not fully explored nor policy properly developed. Whether it was the intention or not this sends a clear message to the public that the Government regards the protection and the enhancement of biodiversity as a secondary policy objective.

We strongly urge that the current draft PPS 9 is expanded not just to provide more context for the policy on biodiversity but so that it deals fully with the issues outlined in this note and the Wildlife and Countryside Link submission. We note the inclusion of some further guidance in the legal circular but we remain concerned that the circular is not properly integrated with the PPS, fails to provide proper cross referencing and itself leaves a number of important areas of omission. In addition the circular does appear to address a number of policy issues that would be better expressed in the PPS and its publication separately raises legal uncertainty between the status of the two documents. This legal uncertainty will become even more significant in relation to any important information published in the Best Practice Guidance. At the very least Friends the Earth believes the contents of the legal circular should be an annex to PPS 9.

We are also concerned that the publication of a range of documents on biodiversity is in fact more confusing and difficult to comprehend for non expert users of the planning system. In this sense PPG 9 has a clear advantage over the draft PPS by concentrating general guidance in one document.

### **4. The importance of local designations and the wider countryside**

While Friends of the Earth welcomes the strong emphasis in PPS 9 on the protection of existing designated sites we believe greater acknowledgement should be given to the value of the wider countryside both in terms of general biodiversity and the quality of life of local communities. Regional and Local Planning Authorities should be encouraged to develop policy to protect and enhance these valuable biodiversity assets.

We are also concerned that stronger encouragement be given to the designation of local biodiversity designations. Many communities have a strong interest in protecting the local environment both in urban and rural areas. This can also be reflected in the desire to protect specific sites. PPS 9 should strongly encourage community based

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initiatives and recognise that these local designations should be identified on proposals maps and the material in planning decisions. Without such opportunities, communities' participation in the planning process in relation to biodiversity has no meaningful policy outcome.

### **5. Species Protection**

Friends of the Earth is extremely disappointed that the draft PPS 9 does not take a much more robust policy line in relation to species protection. The lack of cross reference into the legal circular results and the underplaying of the importance of European protected species in considering planning decisions. Friends the Earth believes the approach taken in PPG 9 was more successful, making clear to all parts of the planning community the importance and materiality of protected species in plan making and development control decisions.

Once again PPS 9 emphasises protected species as a tradable asset ("*unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh that harm*"). First, this emphasis is unnecessary since the planning process is defined as one of considering the development plan and all other material considerations, secondly it is likely to result in the incremental and cumulative impact on protected species in a way which undermines the overall drive to enhance biodiversity and which fails to reflect the current and severe decline that many protected species are experiencing.