

Red card' for environment policies



A committee of MPs have given the Government a 'red card' for its efforts to prevent flooding, cut air pollution and protect wildlife

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The Government has been given the "red card" for its efforts to cut air pollution, protect wildlife and prevent flooding, by a committee of MPs.

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The Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) has assessed 10 areas of environmental policy under the coalition, which David Cameron promised would be the "greenest government ever".

The scorecard gives ministers no green ratings for making satisfactory progress, while seven areas get an "amber" rating and three areas - air pollution, protecting nature and preventing flooding - get a red rating.

It has been published by the committee as the main political parties prepare for party conferences which are expected to outline their policies ahead of the general election.

EAC committee chairwoman Joan Walley said: ""Our inquiry provides a wide ranging examination of the state of the environment and shows that further and continued effort is required to protect it properly.

"A dedicated, wide-ranging 'Environmental Strategy' is needed, overseen by a new 'Office for Environmental Responsibility' to ensure the Government meets the requirements to protect human health and the natural world."

She added: "Effective action on environmental protection is essential, both during the current Parliament and beyond. Parties should therefore be considering credible environmental protection in their manifestos.

"I want them to use our report as both a wake-up call and a template for the measures that need to be put forward.

"Consistent action by successive governments will help ensure that the benefits of nature are available to future generations as much as they are to ours."

The Government gets a red rating for increases in emissions of air pollutants in 2013 and failing to meet targets for nitrogen dioxide pollution across the country, with predictions several areas would take until 2030 to make the grade.

An assessment of measures to protect UK wildlife showed deterioration in a number of areas; there has been a worsening of the situation for three out of four types of bird populations, and invasive species are becoming more prevalent, the MPs said.

Climate change is putting increased pressure on coastal and flooding defences and some 2.4 million properties are at risk of flooding from rivers or the sea, and three million from surface water, the scorecard said.

The report calls on the Government to set up an independent "Office for Environmental Responsibility" to advise on appropriate environmental targets, policies and adequacy of resources, and monitor performance.

A Government spokesman said: " We completely disagree with the committee's assessment - we are deeply committed to improving our natural environment.

"That is why we will be spending more than £3.2 billion - compared to £2.7 billion in the last parliament - on protecting the country from floods. We are also working to improve air and water quality; and to protect wildlife habitats both on land and at sea."