

THE COALITION GOVERNMENT (2010-2015)

“THE GREENEST GOVERNMENT EVER”?

**BY NO STRETCH OF THE
IMAGINATION**

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BY NO STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION

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SECTION A: OVERVIEW

1: INTRODUCTION

Within a few days of taking office in 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron declared his ambition that his newly-formed Coalition Government should be “the greenest government ever”.

This short report reviews the degree to which the Coalition Government has delivered on that ambition over the last five years. For me, that means revisiting the “one year on” report that I did for Friends of the Earth back in May 2011. The principal conclusion I came to at that time was already worrying:

“It’s clear that the ‘growth at all costs’ lobby has already won out over the advocates of ‘sustainable economic development’. That in itself is discouraging, but is compounded by some much more problematic positioning on the part of the Coalition around more ideologically-charged issues like deregulation and ‘shrinking the size of the State’. That positioning (anti-regulation, hostile to planning, favouring the private sector, shrinking the State etc) makes it significantly harder to deliver on the ‘greenest government ever’ pledge, let alone to put sustainable development anywhere near the heart of government.”

So no-one will be too surprised, four years on, in the overall conclusion I have come to regarding the performance of the Coalition Government over the whole five years:

“By no stretch of the imagination is it possible to substantiate the claim that the Coalition Government was ‘the greenest government ever’. In all the most relevant policy areas (natural environment, energy, climate change, air pollution,

infrastructure and resource efficiency), what we see is a consistent picture of under-performance and ideologically-driven backsliding.”

Inadvertently, the Conservative Party actually confirmed this admittedly harsh judgment in its own 2015 General Election Manifesto, where it explicitly set out to demonstrate why it thought it had achieved its ambition to become the greenest government ever. It did this in terms of five “achievements”:

1. “Setting up the world’s first Green Investment Bank”

True. This is indeed an achievement, but as will be made clear (p28), only a fraction of what should have been achieved through the GIB has been achieved so far.

2. “Signing a deal to build the first new nuclear plant in a generation”

Contrary to this being seen as a contribution to any kind of green government, it’s seen by many people as one of the principal reasons why this government has completed failed to understand what a truly sustainable energy strategy would look like. (See p18.) And the deal hasn’t yet been finally signed anyway.

3. “Trebling renewable energy generation to 19%”

This is an incorrect claim. What has been tripled is the amount of renewable electricity – not the amount of renewable energy, which includes electricity, heat and liquid fuels. Even on the narrower electricity target, this should not be seen as a particularly significant achievement, in that it represents only about 50% of what could and should have been achieved compared to other EU countries.

4. “Bringing energy efficiency measures to over one million homes”

True, but this again is a signal of failure, not of success. Given the pledges that it made at the start of its time in office, and what independent observers believe should have been possible, this is probably less than 20% of what could have been achieved over the whole five years.

5. “Committing £1bn for carbon capture and storage”

True, but utterly meaningless. Committing the next government to future expenditure can hardly be counted as any kind of achievement. In fact, both this government and

the former Labour administration have failed completely to make any kind of progress on carbon capture and storage.

2: QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP

It would be misleading to focus solely on policy – either in terms of policy intent or policy outcomes. There’s also a critical issue regarding ‘tone’ and ‘leadership’.

Hopes were high back in 2010. In opposition, David Cameron had done a lot to “decontaminate” the Tory brand by emphasising his concerns about climate change and other green issues. This seemed to go deeper than just hugging the odd husky. Commentators and NGOs also assumed that having the Lib Dems in the Coalition Government would greatly enhance the likelihood of proactive and consistent engagement on environmental issues.

We’ve all been sorely disappointed on that score. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was clearly as detached from the whole green agenda as the Prime Minister himself. Once Chris Huhne was gone, leadership for the Lib Dems defaulted to Ed Davey and Simon Hughes – both very nice people, but utterly incapable of dealing with a majority of unreconstructed Tory Ministers in the government, let alone with the Treasury.

The true extent of this chronic leadership vacuum was revealed in November 2013. At the height of the scandal of yet another unjustified price hike from the Big Six energy companies, the Sun quoted a senior and reliable source in the Conservative Party that the PM wanted ‘to get rid of all the green crap’. This claim has never been categorically denied by David Cameron.

Such invective was described by former Secretary of State Chris Huhne as “uncharacteristic”. But the “green character” of David Cameron has been hard to read. For instance, during the whole five years of his first term as Prime Minister, it’s a remarkable fact that he met only once with the CEOs of the UK’s principal environmental organisations – and that was just a few months before the General Election.

And the Prime Minister certainly never did anything to counter George Osborne's ongoing commentary that 'the environment' represents an inconvenient impediment to growth and prosperity. This overarching view was encapsulated early on in Osborne's Party Conference speech in 2011: "We're not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business."

3: DEPARTMENTAL PERFORMANCE

Leadership on the green agenda has to be distributed across the whole of government, not just "managed" by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The former Labour administration succeeded in establishing a comprehensive framework for this, with the active engagement of its independent advisory body, the Sustainable Development Commission.

That has now been reversed. The Sustainable Development Commission was swiftly decommissioned (without so much of a murmur of dissent from the Lib Dems), and the entire "architecture" of sustainable development across government was dismantled with lightning speed. The claim was made at the time that this could all be done without any negative impact, since sustainable development had already been "successfully embedded across government". An absurd claim at the time, and even more absurd now.

All of which meant that everything under the Coalition Government defaulted back to individual departments. Which has proved to be a disaster.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Defra is now one of the weakest departments in Whitehall, hollowed out by savage cuts (already 20%, and up to 25% by the end of this financial year), and chronically poor leadership. In that respect, we saw a progressive descent from a reasonably well-intentioned Secretary of State in Caroline Spelman, to one of the worst Secretaries of State Defra has ever had (in Owen Paterson), to the ill-informed and ineffectual Liz Truss. It is not encouraging that David Cameron has confirmed Liz Truss as Secretary of State at Defra in his new Cabinet.

All the notionally independent agencies reporting to Defra (including the Environment Agency and Natural England) have had their budgets slashed – and have completely lost the will to stand up against Ministers. These are now client agencies of government, wholly captured by the current “small state” ideology.

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

DCLG is undoubtedly a strong contender for the worst department in Whitehall from an environmental point of view – as was personally masterminded by Secretary of State Eric Pickles. This story is picked up at a number of points in this report, even though I have not been able to carry out a detailed analysis of the many changes it introduced over the last five years as regards the planning system. Many commentators believe that much of the countryside in England and Wales is now “under siege” as a direct consequence of those reforms, but it’s not possible at the moment to demonstrate what the impact of those reforms will be, especially given pledges in the Conservative Party’s 2015 Manifesto to “put in place stronger protections for our natural landscapes”, and to favour brownfield sites over open countryside for new housing schemes.

Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

This is something of a “curate’s egg” story. Good things have been done, but nothing like as much as could and should have been done. And some truly absurd decisions have been taken. Which means that this curate’s egg got smellier and smellier as Treasury forced DECC Ministers to row back on various commitments around its sustainable energy strategy. Ed Davey was almost universally recognised as a Secretary of State with his “heart in the right place”, but the record (see Section 2) is really not a good one.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Over the last five years, there were occasional shafts of insight from former Secretary of State Vince Cable, and some strong support for certain sectors through its influential

arms-length agency, Innovate UK (formerly the Technology Strategy Board). But there was no systematic pursuit of any kind of integrated green economy, and this left many sectors very exposed in the face of constant Treasury onslaughts.

The consequences of this were pointed out in an interesting blog by Trevor Hutchings, WWF Director of Advocacy, written for the Wildlife Trusts:

“There is a failure to understand the importance of our natural environment to our economic and social wellbeing. Instead, environmental protections are seen as a brake on prosperity, rather than the bedrock of a successful economy. The goods and services nature provides are not properly costed in policy appraisal processes, and are all too often treated as a free resource.”

Treasury

Almost all the blocked roads identified in this report are blocked primarily because of Treasury and, more particularly, because of George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Of all the Ministers in the Coalition Government, it's George Osborne who stands most directly accused of outright deceit in terms of his positioning before the last General Election in 2010 when compared with what he actually did as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Here's what he said in 2009:

“I want a Conservative Treasury to be in the lead of developing the low-carbon economy and financing a green recovery. I see in this green recovery not just the fight against climate change, but the fight for jobs, the fight for new industry, the fight for lower family energy bills, and the fight for less wasteful government. If I become Chancellor, the Treasury will become a green ally, not a foe.

A Conservative Government will green our economy and green the public sector. We will do what it takes to build the green companies and technologies of the

future. We will help create the jobs the country needs. And we will drive behaviour change throughout the public sector and beyond. The Treasury needs to be at the heart of this historic fight against climate change. If we form the next government, it will.”

Unfortunately, as we’ll see throughout the rest of this report, no Minister has done more to hold back business, discourage investment, destroy jobs and misuse public money than George Osborne. And nobody was too surprised at the fact that his 2015 Election rhetoric was very different from that of 2010, with only the most tokenistic of references to the green economy or climate change.

Departmental Coordination

Having abolished the Sustainable Development Commission, along with a host of other quangos that had played a significant role in helping to shape and coordinate environment policy, Ministers in the Cabinet Office (particularly Francis Maude) then decided that there was no need for any additional mechanism to “join up policy” on environmental issues across Whitehall. Some Ministers went even further than that, with Eric Pickles (at DCLG) instructing his senior officials not ‘to waste their time’ attending meetings organised by other Departments.

The resulting policy confusion is a direct consequence of this imposed incoherence, as pointed out by Trevor Hutchings:

“Policy is often dealt with on an issue-by-issue basis, with little strategic overview and few overarching objectives to guide decisions. This makes it very difficult to reconcile competing policy objectives, for example around housing development versus protection of our green spaces. Even where decisions do try to balance these competing objectives, it is often the environment that loses out.”

4: OVERALL PERFORMANCE

As far as I can see, the only people who are now prepared to defend the claim that this has been “the greenest government ever” are Ministers in the former government, as

well as one or two independent commentators, including James Murray, Editor of BusinessGreen. (This was a strange judgement on his part, given that he'd just awarded the Coalition Government a combined score of just 5.5 out of 10!) To provide a flavour of the rest, I will comment on just two of the most influential reports.

First, in September 2014, the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) (made up of nine Conservative/Lib Dem MPs, six Labour and one Green) came to the following conclusion:

“It's not possible to measure precisely whether, as the Prime Minister intended, this is ‘the greenest government ever’. It is possible, however, to assess the state of progress in particular areas of the environment. In none of the ten environmental areas we have examined is satisfactory progress being made, despite the necessary urgency.”

The EAC then identified three ‘red card’ areas of particular concern (air pollution, biodiversity, flooding and coastal protection), as well as seven ‘amber cards’ denoting unsatisfactory progress. Even more tellingly, they were unable to award a single green card (which would have demonstrated ‘satisfactory improvement’ since 2010), as they simply couldn't identify any area where such improvement had been made.

Second, Wildlife and Countryside Link (an affiliation of 44 voluntary organisations which also uses a “red, amber, green” scorecard) awarded the Coalition Government nine red cards, twelve amber cards, and four green cards in its last full Report before the General Election. The four green cards were awarded for the Coalition Government's performance on the Common Fisheries Policy, on opposition to commercial whaling, for its ban on ivory sales, and for its work on managing the impact of ash dieback on the UK's forests and woodlands.

Lastly, it's only fair to add that a small group of Tory MPs (led by Laura Sandys, Greg Barker, Zac Goldsmith and others) did their best to hold back this tide of indifference and anti-environmental hostility. In February 2014, under the aegis of the Conservative Environment Network, they urged the Coalition Government to get its house in order by emphasising the enormous economic benefits to be had by pursuing a more

proactive approach to the environment. They identified a £5bn a year boost in economic growth, creating 300,000 jobs, by pursuing environmentally-friendly policies.

Unfortunately, their views cut as little ice with George Osborne and the Tory Party's very own "Tea Party" extremists as anyone else's.

This report is primarily a retrospective rather than any kind of 'forward look' over the next five years, but it's worth pointing out that we shouldn't necessarily be anticipating five more years of such significant disappointment.

And it's particularly heartening that David Cameron has made two important new appointments in his new Cabinet: Amber Rudd as Secretary of State at DECC (she made a good impact when she was a Junior Minister in DECC under the Coalition Government, and is particularly strong on climate change), and Greg Clark at DCLG – an experienced, thoughtful and 'sustainability-friendly' politician. In effect, pretty much the polar opposite of his predecessor, Eric Pickles.

SECTION B: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

1: CLIMATE CHANGE

In the middle of February this year, the Leaders of the three main Parties came together to sign up to a joint agreement:

- to work together, across Party lines, to agree carbon budgets in accordance with the Climate Change Act;
- to seek a fair, strong and legally-binding global climate deal, which limits temperature rises to below 2°C;
- to accelerate the transition to a competitive, energy-efficient, low-carbon economy, and to end the use of unabated coal for power generation.

Few realised at the time that this was rather more than a rare example of cross-party solidarity. It was also a very smart way of ‘sanitising’ any further debate about climate change throughout the Election campaign, on the grounds that they’d already sorted it out by affirming their confidence in the Climate Change Act. Which means that UK electors have gone through yet another entire Election campaign with little more than a few (rapidly closed-down) mentions of climate change from the Green Party, and a belated effort from Nick Clegg on the final Sunday of the campaign to say how critically important this was to the Liberal Democrats.

All of which does at least remind us just how fortunate we are to have the Climate Change Act here in the UK – a cross-party legislated approach which remains unique in the world. The Act was indeed staunchly defended by all Lib Dems in ministerial office, most notably by Chris Huhne and then by Ed Davey. The Tories were far more ambivalent about the Climate Change Act right from the start, and there were more than a hundred Tory back-benchers in the last parliament who wanted to see it repealed. As well as various Tory Secretaries of State over the last five years – not least Owen Paterson and Eric Pickles.

The Government as a whole has been rightly praised for achieving the target set in the Third Carbon Budget under the Climate Change Act, and, on balance, it’s fair to say

that its performance on climate change over the whole five-year period has been adequate, if inconsistent and wholly uninspiring in terms of making the case for low-carbon wealth creation to UK citizens.

That inconsistency was demonstrated in the fierce internal debate within the Coalition Government around the Fourth Budget period in the Climate Change Act (requiring a 50% reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2025, against a 1990 benchmark). This proved to be highly controversial, and the Fourth Budget was only finally adopted in July 2014 after a series of pitched battles between Ed Davey and George Osborne. Eventually, David Cameron had to weigh in against his own Chancellor.

However, the likelihood of that target being achieved, on the basis of existing policies, is remote. This is Lord Deben's comment in his evidence to the Energy and Climate Change Steering Committee, as Chairman of the Committee on Climate Change, in December 2014:

“Our 2014 Progress Report to Parliament identifies that existing UK policies and measures would not be sufficient to achieve the Fourth Carbon Budget. Development and strengthening of policies to reduce emissions, as well as setting a Fifth Budget on the cost-effective path to the 2050 target, will therefore be important parts of the challenge facing the next Government.”

However, there's still plenty of time for the new Conservative Government to get things back on track, and one policy that could be particularly useful in that regard is the carbon floor price. This was introduced by the Treasury in 2013 (as an alternative to the Labour administration's very successful Carbon Reduction Commitment), albeit at a very modest level, and essentially as a revenue-raiser. It has recently gone up from £9.55 a tonne to £18.08 (on top of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme price of around £4 a tonne), generating revenues of around £1bn a year. Beyond that, it's scheduled to rise to £50 a tonne by 2020, but rather than simply absorbing revenues into the general exchequer, it would be so much more efficient (and politically intelligent) to “recycle” that revenue into investment in energy efficiency, either refurbishing existing housing and eliminating fuel poverty long before the current target date of 2030, or

putting the money back into promoting energy efficiency in the commercial sector, exactly as the Carbon Reduction Commitment did.

2: ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND DEMAND MANAGEMENT

As in so many priority areas, hopes were initially high for a step-change in our approach to energy efficiency, based on the simple but all-important proposition that the cheapest, safest and most secure form of energy is that which is not consumed. This was properly recognised in the Coalition Agreement of May 2010, where energy efficiency was given a lot of prominence.

In 2012, the Prime Minister pledged to make the UK “one of the most energy-efficient countries in Europe”, and he himself was clearly very committed to that ambition in his first year in office. He immediately set a target for a 10% reduction in energy consumption for all government departments, and every single department delivered. But when the media showed no interest in this achievement, he seemed to lose interest too; a much lower target was set for the rest of the parliament, and no-one has even bothered to follow up to see what has happened since then.

That unilateral opting out by the Prime Minister has serious consequences. There are many gaps between what was promised by the Coalition Government back in 2010 and what has been delivered, but nowhere is the gap bigger than on energy efficiency. And that gap can be attributed primarily to failings on the part of two Departments (DECC and DCLG), both under the thumb of the Treasury.

DECC

Many believe that DECC is now so subservient to the interests (and lobbying demands) of the Big Six energy companies as to be incapable of delivering policies that will deliver the UK’s three high-level objectives: energy security; energy affordability; low carbon. Its record on energy efficiency has been particularly woeful.

ECO (Energy Company Obligation)

ECO is the latest in a long line of measures imposed on the Big Six to force them to play their part in improving energy efficiency in our housing stock. It wasn't as well designed or as cost-effective as its predecessors, but it was having a reasonable impact – until both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to scapegoat ECO and other low-carbon measures to distract attention from constantly rising energy prices.

At the behest of the Big Six, a disgraceful and largely dishonest attack was launched on all this “green crap”, on the grounds that it was imposing a completely unacceptable burden on consumer bills. DECC's own figures totally contradicted this. But the damage was done, delivering a devastating blow to the UK's already demoralised energy efficiency and retrofit sectors. Investors completely lost confidence, and tens of thousands of good jobs in the private sector were lost over the next couple of years.

And as a result, the number of home energy improvements taking place in the UK today has dropped by 60% in comparison to the schemes that ECO replaced, though it's only fair to point out that ECO is targeted more at “hard-to-treat” properties, which makes direct comparisons somewhat misleading.

The Green Deal

This was to be the Coalition Government's principal scheme for persuading homeowners to invest in making their homes more efficient. It had an uncomfortable gestation period: there were endless delays both in design and execution; warning voices from both within industry and civil society were disregarded; it was then massively over-hyped by a succession of Ministers, but massively under-promoted at the point of delivery.

In terms of the number of households which have taken up the Green Deal, the figures reveal a truly disgraceful story. The initial ambition level was that millions of homes would make use of the Green Deal to improve their energy efficiency. By the end of 2014, however, a mere 317,481 households had been formally assessed for a Green

Deal, and just 17,005 had actually been retrofitted, of which only 4,095 had taken up the original Green Deal, with the rest coming through a new Green Deal Home Improvement Fund, introduced in a state of panic in April 2014. From millions to 4,000: it's hard to imagine a more depressing policy failure than this one.

Community Energy

One area where DECC showed significant commitment is on Community Energy. Inspired in part by the success of Community Energy in Scotland, both Ministers and Officials in DECC worked really hard over the last two years to develop a very reasonable Community Energy Strategy, varying the feed-in tariff threshold for shared ownership projects, and making it possible for community groups to directly supply customers. There's every reason to hope that this Strategy will feature prominently in the new Secretary of State's priorities.

The EU's Energy Efficiency Directive

It's clear that DECC officials have also been doing everything in their power to block efforts by the EU to deliver on its long-established goal of 'turning the EU into the most energy-efficient economy in the world'. Those civil servants have been instructed to block, delay and water down every measure designed to deliver on that manifestly critical priority, especially through the Energy Efficiency Directive.

DCLG

As the Minister responsible for planning, Secretary of State Eric Pickles has had endless opportunities to push through consistent and transparent policy on helping deliver a low-carbon economy. Unfortunately, he's done exactly the opposite. For instance, he constantly watered down the goal of making new homes as carbon-efficient as possible, set out to exempt housebuilders from their obligation to build zero-carbon homes, sought to unpick provisions in the 2011 Energy Act that make it illegal for landlords to rent out commercial or domestic properties that fail to meet minimum performance standards, attacked the use of Display Energy Certificates in 58,000 public buildings, and even tried to eliminate them altogether.

Eric Pickles also played a big part in undermining the government's own Green Deal. Soon after it was launched, he killed off well-developed proposals for what are known as "consequential improvements", requiring homeowners to reach higher standards of energy efficiency in return for planning permission to build a conservatory. Once the Daily Mail had described this as a "conservatory tax", Pickles did an instant about-turn, even though his own department had calculated that this one measure would deliver more than two million Green Deals.

Under the Labour administration, DCLG was once a champion of prosperity and affordability through low-carbon investments. It's now exactly the opposite.

3: FUEL POVERTY

It is universally recognised that the UK has one of the highest percentages of people living in fuel poverty anywhere in Europe. That reality is obscured rather than illuminated by an extraordinary level of definitional and statistical confusion, but the bottom line is that around five million people in England, one million in Scotland, and half a million in Wales live in poor quality housing and cannot afford a "reasonable" standard of warmth. That's about 10% of the UK's population. That's an absolute scandal.

In February 2015, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group (the advisor body to DECC on the effectiveness of fuel poverty policies) reminded Ministers that what was required was a funded programme of home insulation and installation with a price tag of about £1.7bn per annum for 15 years. It went on to point out that "successive governments have failed to fully grasp the nettle of fuel poverty", and rather forlornly commented that "none of its recommendations in this area have been acted on by government".

In March 2015, a briefing paper from the Association for the Conservation of Energy pointed out that in the five winters since 2010, around 46,700 people had died due to living in cold homes. "In 2013, in England and Wales, cold homes killed over four times as many people as road and rail accidents; nearly four times as many people as drug misuse; and about as many people as alcohol."

In March this year, DECC's former Ministers published a new Strategy, based on bringing as many fuel-poor homes "as is reasonably practicable" to a better level of energy efficiency by 2030. This Strategy is full of weasel words, and after five years doing very little to address this problem, this ambition level can only be described as pathetic.

4. FOSSIL FUELS

Transitioning to "a competitive, energy-efficient, low-carbon economy" demands one thing above all else: reducing our dependence on fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) over as short a period of time as is feasible.

But this is absolutely not what has happened over the last five years. In its helpful report, "The Westminster Parties' Green Record", Friends of the Earth succinctly concludes its section on coal and climate change as follows: "The Conservatives have consistently put fossil fuels ahead of decarbonisation".

Astonishingly, the Coalition Government has even tried to keep its options open for the use of coal in the energy generation mix. By failing to introduce an emissions performance standard (widely recognised as the best way of eliminating coal-fired generation without carbon capture and storage), by gearing the capacity market to keep the door open for coal, and by playing fast-and-loose with the carbon price, it means that there may still be quite a lot of unabated coal generation here in the UK through to 2030 – whatever they may have signed up to regarding their renewed commitments to the Climate Change Act back in February.

As regards the oil and gas industry generally, it's been able to rely on constant support from Treasury and DECC, with a whole host of tax reliefs and new allowances (up to £3bn) introduced in the 2012 Budget. In 2014, in response to collapsing oil prices, another raft of financial and taxation supports were brought in by George Osborne.

But the Coalition Government's most egregious pro-fossil fuel interventions have been in the area of fracking. Unsurprisingly, it was George Osborne who set the tone by

announcing that the Coalition Government would be “going all out” to support fracking in every way it possibly could, introducing extraordinarily generous tax allowances for companies getting into exploration in the 2014 Budget. It also used the passage of the Infrastructure Bill to ensure that the views of local communities could be ignored in any planning process regarding new fracking developments.

This foolhardy and almost childish enthusiasm for a form of gas extraction that is, by any standards, highly controversial, makes even less sense when one takes into account the fact that many new fracking developments will be brought forward in the teeth of strong opposition in Tory seats. Let alone that it is in complete contravention of what all Parties are signed up to under the Climate Change Act, as pointed out by the Environmental Audit Committee in its January 2015 Report:

“Extensive production of unconventional gas through fracking is inconsistent with the UK’s obligations under the Climate Change Act and its Carbon Budgets regime, which encompasses our contribution to efforts to keep global temperature rise below two degrees. Shale gas, like ‘conventional gas’, is not low-carbon, and the objective of government policy should be to reduce the carbon intensity of energy whatever its source. Shale gas cannot be regarded as a ‘transitional’ or ‘bridging’ fuel.

A moratorium on the extraction of unconventional gas through fracking is needed to avoid both inconsistency with our climate change obligations, and to allow the uncertainty surrounding environmental risks to be fully resolved.”

5: RENEWABLES

As we saw on page 2, the Conservative Party specifically cited its performance on renewables as part of its claim to being “the greenest government ever”. Apart from not being able to tell the difference between energy and electricity, this particular claim bears little scrutiny. The final figures for 2014 are still not available, but in 2013:

1. Regarding renewable electricity, the UK is in 18th place out of the 28 countries in the EU league table.

2. Regarding renewable energy, the UK is in 25th place out of the 28 countries in the EU league table, with only Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands below us.

This is hardly the brilliant achievement that it has been made out to be.

Offshore wind

There is, however, one area where we hold an undisputed lead over every other country in the EU – and indeed across the world. And that’s in the offshore wind sector. The Coalition Government did a really good job here, building a reasonably secure supply chain for offshore wind, and in facilitating planning arrangements together with the Crown Estate. It will be critically important to maintain this level of political priority and new investment. There are now 1,184 large turbines generating electricity offshore.

Onshore wind

The wind industry will be extremely nervous of the outright victory of the Tories in the General Election. In its Manifesto, it says, under the subtitle “We will halt the spread of onshore windfarms”:

“Onshore wind now makes a meaningful contribution to our energy mix and has been part of the necessary increase in renewable capacity. Onshore windfarms often fail to win public support, however, and are unable by themselves to provide the firm capacity that a stable energy system requires. As a result, we will end any new public subsidy for them and change the law so that local people have the final say on windfarm applications.”

This is a hugely regrettable policy, not least as surveys consistently show strong public support for wind power, both onshore and offshore, despite an endless barrage of hostility in most of the UK press.

There is still huge potential for onshore wind in the UK. Right now, there are 4,937 large onshore turbines generating 8,146MW of electricity, with another 6,350 large turbines either in the planning system, approved and awaiting construction, or in construction.

What's more, onshore wind is the cheapest mainstream renewable energy technology, and will continue to improve its overall competitive position as prices fall. It's already cheaper than new nuclear, as indeed, according to some experts, is offshore wind.

Solar

The story of solar power in the UK over the last five years is a good one. Electricity generated by solar went from practically nothing to more than 5,000MW of capacity by 2014 – split roughly 50:50 between domestic rooftops (c.650,000) and ground-mounted solar farms. Government policy wasn't necessarily responsible for that success (indeed, its policy was often very unhelpful, especially in terms of the endless chopping and changing that went on regarding feed-in tariffs), but this is still a real achievement.

Indeed, in 2014, the UK installed more new solar capacity than any other European country, well ahead of Europe's traditional solar powerhouses in Germany and France. And looking at the pipeline for new developments, it's reasonable to assume that the 2015 results will be equally good.

Having got this far, you might think any government would want to build on such solid foundations. But exactly the opposite is likely to happen. The consequence of the latest policy changes introduced through the Coalition Government's Electricity Market Reform has already produced a near standstill in new investments in large-scale solar. This is a pattern that is now playing out across the whole of Europe, but the UK Government has been particularly vulnerable to lobbying from the fossil fuel and nuclear industries.

6: NUCLEAR

Having persuaded the Lib Dems to sign up to the Conservatives' strong pro-nuclear position, the Coalition Government then spent the whole five years in office doing literally everything it could to launch a new nuclear programme here in the UK.

Its chosen vehicle was the French state-owned company, EdF, which is still hoping to build two new reactors at Hinkley Point. Two large Chinese companies have been brought into the consortium as co-investors to help cover the cost of what, on completion, would almost certainly end up as the two most expensive power stations anywhere in the world.

The deal has still not been finally confirmed, and it is by no means certain that it will go ahead at all. The decision by the EU Commission to approve the massive levels of state subsidy that the UK Government had to put on the table has now been appealed by both Austria and Luxembourg, as well as by Greenpeace Energy in Germany. This will necessitate a delay of at least another 18 months. Even on the best construction timetable (and that's all but guaranteed to be as unrealistic as all the other new-build timetables involving this particular reactor design), the earliest possible date for Hinkley Point to come on stream is 2027.

And any suggestion that the EU will approve the broad principle of further subsidy support for nuclear power was blown apart by Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's Vice-Chancellor, and Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, in March this year:

“There are countries in the EU that want to support nuclear power with tax money. We think that is absolutely out of the question,” Gabriel said. “We will not agree by any means that nuclear energy be supported by public money. Nuclear energy is the most expensive kind of generation. It has now been around for 50 years; it is not new, and it is dangerous.”

To be fair, there are still a handful of environmentalists who are still very concerned about these delays, and would like to see the reactors at Hinkley Point built as soon as

possible, having mysteriously persuaded themselves that it's impossible for the UK to achieve its low-carbon goals without nuclear being part of the mix.

By contrast, the rest of the environment movement is increasingly concerned at the massively distorting effect that this obsession with nuclear is having on the rest of the UK's low-carbon strategy. Both onshore wind and solar will be competing with nuclear, on a subsidy-free basis, by 2020 at the latest; the dramatic improvements in storage technologies that are now imminent will greatly reinforce that case.

The combination of energy efficiency (as our 'first fuel'), plus renewables, plus smart local grids, now clearly provides a better alternative to large-scale nuclear generation. But the fear is that the UK's remarkably resilient nuclear fantasy will continue to block these alternatives, to cause the misdirection of massive amounts of both public money and private sector investment, to confuse the general public, and generally set back our prospects for secure, affordable, low-carbon energy options here in the UK.

SECTION C: THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

1: OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, Defra has suffered as much as any Department over the last five years in terms of reduced budgets and poor leadership. Its ability to deliver on a domestic UK agenda has been severely impaired, and it's struggled to fulfil its international obligations.

Environmental and conservation NGOs have come to expect very little from Defra. In the "Nature Check 2013 Report", from the Wildlife and Countryside Link (see page 8), the 44 affiliated organisations came to the following overall conclusion: "We know that nature is in crisis. This crisis is harder to turn around with each year of delay or ineffectual action. There has been no step-change on leadership or delivery for the natural environment."

Overall, they concluded that there were indeed a few bright spots deserving credit, but commented mainly what they described as "government stasis" in progress towards achieving objectives for the natural world, and in many cases on a further worsening in the basic situation.

In its evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee in July 2014, it yet again advocated "urgent action to halt and reverse the decline in our wildlife and natural places", pointing to the following five priorities:

- Political leadership of the environmental agenda.
- Effective implementation of agreed policies.
- Basing policy on scientific evidence.
- Independence and resources for statutory bodies to fulfil their remits.
- Support for environmental legislation.

Back in 2011, the Natural Environment White Paper was issued when Caroline Spelman was still Secretary of State at Defra. In 2011, she also oversaw the publication of a White Paper, “The Natural Choice”, which set out the Coalition Government’s aspiration that theirs would be “the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited”.

Now would certainly be a good time to start doing what needs to be done – urgently – to reverse the kind of decline that’s been going on for decades. 60% of British wildlife species are still in decline. In 2013, “The State of Nature” report analysed population trends amongst 3,000 different species, and determined that almost 2,000 of them were in either poor shape or in decline, with one-tenth of all species at risk of going extinct. This is primarily because of modern farming practices: for example, there are now more than 40 million fewer breeding birds here in the UK than there were in the 1970s.

The Coalition Government showed little, if any, applied interest in addressing that crisis. The principal statutory agenda charged with responsibilities in this area – Natural England – is now half the size that it was back in 2010, and all but incapable of stemming the tide of continuing destruction from intensive agriculture and economic development in rural areas.

2: THE NATURAL CAPITAL COMMITTEE

The Natural Capital Committee (NCC) was set up in 2012 as a consequence of “The Natural Choice” White Paper. Its remit is to advise Ministers on how best to “ensure that England’s natural wealth is managed efficiently and sustainably, thereby unlocking opportunities for sustaining prosperity and wellbeing”. The NCC is seen as a significant institutional innovation by the Coalition Government, and it’s certainly produced some interesting and provocative papers.

Its 2014 Report said that it was crucial for the Government to find ways of integrating natural capital into all its principal decision-making processes. This was the only way of enhancing “taxpayers’ value for money and generating net benefits for society”.

By 2015, the tone had become a little more urgent:

“England’s natural capital – the elements of the natural environment which provide valuable goods and services to people such as clean air, clean water, food and recreation – is in long-term decline.”

“The decline in natural capital seen over the last 60 years will continue into the future, and is likely to accelerate, unless there is some radical departure from the approaches of the past.”

As yet, however, there is no evidence of any discernible impact on Government policy as a consequence of the Natural Capital Committee’s existence, let alone on how that policy is being implemented on the ground. As Tony Juniper (a former Director of Friends of the Earth) has pointed out, the natural environment is still seen by contemporary politicians as “an impediment to be swept aside by technology and the drum-beat of growth”. George Osborne is one of the worst offenders here, constantly attacking environmental laws and regulations (or, as he describes them, “endless social and environmental goals”) as an unnecessary burden on wealth-creators.

He has specifically targeted the EU Habitats Directive as “a ridiculous cost on British business”. This particular claim was found to be entirely spurious by an official Government review set up as a result of his attack. This showed that it was only the wind power industry – reviled by Osborne and other Ministers – that had been negatively impacted by the Habitats Directive!

A Position Statement just out from the Joint Links Group – one hundred of the most influential nature conservation and environmental organisations in the UK – has flagged just how critical an issue this is going to be over the next five years. The EU Commission has recently launched a “fitness check” of key EU Directives (including the Birds and Habitats Directives), with the clear intention of watering down those Directives’ provisions in order to make it easier for business to bring forward new developments.

“This review is the single biggest threat to UK and European nature and biodiversity in a generation. Weakening existing protection for species and

habitats would be a retrograde step, and short-sighted politics must not be allowed to put the future of nature and biodiversity in Europe at further risk.”

On the basis of its record over the last five years, it’s highly improbable that Defra will do anything to block the EU in this regard. Indeed, it’s far more likely that it will end up as its cheer-leader in chief.

The Natural Capital Committee will have no more important task over the next five years than trying to educate both Liz Truss and George Osborne, and to make some kind of impact on senior officials in both Defra and the Treasury – who remain the most implacable opponents of any kind of intelligent policy-making in this area.

3: FORESTRY

The Coalition Government’s true intentions (in terms of shrinking the size of the state and slashing all expenditure on the environment) was first revealed through its attempt in 2011/2012 to sell off the whole of the Public Forest Estate in England and Wales.

The UK’s conservation and environmental NGOs either didn’t understand the significance of these proposals, or were still taken in at that stage by Ministers’ vague promises around the “greenest government ever” theme. But whilst they stood idly by, a massive protest by local community groups and the general public saw off the Government’s proposals, and led eventually to the dismissal of Caroline Spelman as Secretary of State.

The Coalition Government then did what Governments always do when they can’t get their way: kick the whole thing into the long grass by setting up a weighty committee (the Independent Panel on Forestry, chaired by the former Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones) and delay any subsequent action for as long as possible. In this case, all the way through to the General Election!

Apart from a tokenistic commitment to plant a million trees by 2015 (which would have happened anyway, not least as a result of the continuing success of the National

Forest, an initiative set up in 1990), nothing has been done to address the continuing and critical issues regarding the future of the Public Forest Estate.

Given that the Conservatives now have an outright majority for the next five years, one rather hopes that those self-same NGOs will be preparing for a near-inevitable re-run of these privatisation proposals, whatever promises may have been given on that score by Ministers in the Coalition Government.

4: FLOODING

The floods in January 2014 caused enormous damage, resulting in David Cameron declaring that: “Money is no object in this relief effort. Whatever money is needed, we will spend it.” This was a more than ironic statement given the huge cuts that his own Government had made in the Environment Agency’s budget to reduce flooding risk. And as the Environmental Audit Committee pointed out in September 2014, this remains an area of particular concern, with more than five million properties still at risk from various flooding threats.

Little has been done to address some of the systemic causes behind this growing threat, not least the continuing failure to change farming practices in critical watersheds: more than £1bn of economic damage is incurred every year through soil erosion and degradation; it is still a voluntary matter for water companies whether or not they wish to commit resources to promote integrated catchment management; and farm subsidies are still promoting precisely the wrong kind of farming practices, exacerbating rather than mitigating flooding risk.

The EU’s Water Framework Directive could play a very big part in helping to address these catchment-scale challenges. Agreed back in 2000, the Directive’s purpose is to ensure that all surface waters are in good condition in terms of both water quality and ecological factors. And 2015 is the year when we are meant to start complying with the Directive’s multiple requirements. There is literally zero chance that this will happen this year – not least because all the key regulatory bodies involved (including the Environment Agency, Natural England, Ofwat and the Drinking Water Inspectorate)

have their own separate agendas going on, and Defra has neither the will nor the professional competence to bring them all together.

Integrated land use and catchment management is absolutely critical to a host of environmental and conservation issues today. The Coalition Government demonstrated little interest in such integrated approaches over the last five years, and in 2013 demonstrated its contempt for this whole agenda by reducing the proportion of subsidy made available under the Common Agricultural Policy for environmental improvements and conservation. Only Wales held that percentage constant, while England, Scotland and Northern Ireland all reduced the percentage that can be dedicated to those environmental purposes.

Over the course of the next five years, around £3bn a year of CAP subsidies will be available to farmers in England, which amounts to around £400 per household. It's remarkable that a Government so focussed on reducing public expenditure and providing better "value for money for taxpayers", did so little over the last five years to secure benefits for the whole of the UK population through further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

5: MARINE

One of the few "green cards" that Friends of the Earth awarded to the Coalition Government in its "The Westminster Parties' Green Report" was for the creation of Marine Conservation Zones in 2013. Two years on, however, it's a much less promising picture.

Having started out with an ambitious plan for 127 Marine Conservation Zones, all around the UK's coastline, things then got stuck – as was so often the case with Defra over the last five years. We're now down to just 27, a process that has been trenchantly attacked by the Marine Conservation Society as a surrender to narrow economic interests at the expense of "creating value on a much wider scale." In particular, Defra has taken very inadequate account of all the different "ecosystem services" that these Marine Conservation Zones would have been able to protect – and indeed amplify.

By contrast, in the run-up to the General Election, the Coalition Government announced some highly significant decisions regarding the establishment of a huge new Marine Protected Area around the Pitcairn Islands. Beyond that, there are strong signals that similar measures will now be introduced for Ascension Island and other “dependent territories.” This could make a massive contribution to current international efforts to protect the world’s oceans and fisheries.

It should also be said that the Coalition Government deserves praise for its robust work in 2013 on helping to reform the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy, especially in terms of addressing the challenge of the massive waste caused by “by-catch” – the dumping at sea of non-quota fish species.

6: HEALTH

This may seem like a strange sub-heading for a section on the natural environment. But there’s now a growing scientific consensus that access to and enjoyment of the natural world makes a significant contribution to people’s health and wellbeing – and could make a much greater contribution if Ministers in the Department of Health could ever be persuaded to acquaint themselves with that science.

One of the last things that the Sustainable Development Commission did under the former Labour administration was to compile a bibliography of all the major scientific reports around the world looking at the link between contact with the natural world and improved health outcomes – especially in terms of chronic problems like obesity and diabetes, as well as in the context of the growing burden of mental health, bearing in mind that around four and a half million adults in the UK seek assistance for a wide range of mental health difficulties every year.

This analysis (including critical bodies of work produced over more than a decade by The Conservation Volunteers (through its “Green Gyms” initiative here in the UK) and by Mind) was ignored by the Coalition Government throughout the last five years. Individual capital projects, however, have taken on board some of the most important

lessons here. The new Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool, for example, is an outstanding example of “green design” in practice.

This remains an inexplicably wasted opportunity. Quoting from an influential report from Natural England back in 2009, Tony Juniper recently highlighted the scale of the potential benefits here:

“Natural England suggested that every pound spent on establishing healthy walking schemes could save the NHS more than £7 in avoided costs in treating conditions such as heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes. If every household in England had good access to green space, the report estimated that £2.1bn could be saved in avoided healthcare costs. At a time of intense debate about future affordability of our NHS, these findings should be of great interest to policy makers and the public.”

SECTION D: ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

This report is based almost exclusively on the “green” elements of sustainable development; the proposition I’m testing is whether or not the last government can claim to have been “the greenest government ever”, not the “most sustainable government ever”.

I have not therefore examined its record on overall economic performance, on issues around fairness or social justice, on human rights and privacy, on public services like health and education, or critical concerns around defence or foreign affairs.

However, one of the Coalition Government’s achievements does stand out in that grey area between “green” and “sustainable”, and that’s its record on committing 0.7% of GDP to overseas aid and economic development in poorer countries. In the eyes of all those who hope to see the UK “punching above its weight” in international affairs, this is not just a counterblast to all the mayhem we’ve caused over the last two decades by constantly destabilising countries through unjustifiable wars, but exactly the kind of distinctive leadership that very few other countries have been able to demonstrate. David Cameron deserves much credit for holding the line on the 0.7% commitment.

Ironically, with UKIP on their right hand and the Daily Mail on their left, it became almost impossible for Ministers in the Coalition Government to remind UK citizens of the scale and impact of this achievement. One can only hope that the Prime Minister will continue to stay true to this impressive success story, and that his government will leverage this strong position to do everything in its power to ensure that the emerging Sustainable Development Goals (the UN’s successor initiative to the Millennium Development Goals) are as strong and potentially impactful as possible.

Beyond that, I’ve chosen just four issues to look at in more detail in this Section:

1: THE GREEN INVESTMENT BANK

As you will have seen on page 2, this is one of the five principal defences of its “greenest government ever” claim that the Tories highlighted in their Manifesto. And it was a claim that they kept coming back to time after time during the last five years.

The pledge to set up a Green Investment Bank was made by George Osborne in opposition, and it’s one of the very few specific commitments that he has stayed true to. The UK is indeed one of the very countries to have a bank of this kind, and its potential contribution to securing a genuinely sustainable economy for the future is enormous. However, pretty much everything that’s happened over the last three years indicates that George Osborne would have much preferred it if his fiscal offspring had been strangled at birth. Having cleverly tied the future potential scope of the Green Investment Bank to a metric involving public borrowing as a percentage of GDP, the prospective borrowing powers that were meant to kick in by 2015 were deferred in both of the last two Budgets, most recently in March this year.

This means that the full potential of the Green Investment Bank to stimulate funding for investment in the green economy remains seriously constrained. By December 2014, the Bank had made available only £200m of the original £1bn that had been earmarked for investment. The Association for Consultancy and Engineering has flagged the impact of these delays on business confidence:

“Industry fully understands the need to bring down the public sector deficit, but with the deficit target now unlikely to be hit until at least 2017-18, action remains to be taken to avoid delay to the Green Investment Bank’s borrowing powers. This delay may hurt investor confidence and halt projects that have the potential to spur growth in the economy. Taking an interim step to fix the date for borrowing powers for 2015 would bring the Green Investment Bank’s rules back into line with industry expectations and provide much needed clarity for investors planning to deliver growth through green infrastructure investment.”

2: NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Investment in infrastructure is one of the most critical ways in which any government's true intentions for the environment are revealed. The assets created through those investments (in transport, utilities, power supply, grids and so on) last for decades, and will either support or undermine an overarching ambition to move towards a genuinely sustainable economy.

The Coalition Government's early plans here (released in 2012) were relatively benign from a sustainability perspective. For instance, it was at that time opposed to any new airport expansion in the South East, and appropriately sceptical about notional economic benefits arising out of any new road-building programmes.

But by the end of 2014 a very different picture had emerged. A new National Infrastructure Plan in 2013 had already started to shift the pendulum back to much more conventional, carbon-intensive projects, and the Treasury's National Infrastructure Plan and "infrastructure pipeline" of December 2014 confirmed that any earlier commitments to low-carbon infrastructure had been swept away.

The highly respected Green Alliance has been tracking these regrettable developments over the last five years, and in October 2014, its Director Matthew Spencer summed up their alarm at just how retrogressive the Treasury's approach had become:

"The UK has led the way in taking a long term approach to decarbonisation. It now appears that a series of short term tactical decisions to promote road building, demote renewables and to offer tax breaks for oil and gas extraction have reversed what was a very encouraging picture for UK infrastructure. It means the government's infrastructure plan is likely to lock in greater fossil fuel dependency in our economy and narrow the UK's options for halving its carbon emissions by the middle of the next decade."

In the same vein, James Murray, Editor of BusinessGreen, placed the blame for all this fairly and squarely on George Osborne:

“Chancellor George Osborne released the high-carbon spending tap and through North Sea tax breaks and road building turned a carefully calibrated infrastructure plan that was designed to be compatible with the UK's long term climate change goals into a polluters' bonanza. He didn't have to tear up the Climate Change Act or the government's clean energy plans, and nor would he have wanted to, but a handful of relatively minor infrastructure and tax decisions risk having much the same result.”

3: AIR QUALITY

It's been recognised for a long time that the UK has particular problems with poor air quality. It's certainly not unique in that regard, and most EU Member States are in breach of the EU's legally binding limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and other airborne pollutants.

This has rightly been described as a “public health crisis.” Last year, the UK failed to meet mandatory EU standards in 34 of the country's 43 air quality zones, and every year around 29,000 people die early as a direct result of air pollution. Other experts have put the figure even higher, at around 50,000 a year. Air pollution is regularly linked to coronary disease, heart attacks and strokes, asthma and other lung conditions; the Labour Government's Air Quality Strategy estimated this cumulative damage to health at between £8.5bn and £20.2bn a year.

One of the principal causes of this pollution is the high number of diesel vehicles on our roads; around 80% of NO₂ comes from diesel vehicle emissions, which are much higher than from petrol engines. But rather than adapt its Air Quality Plans, particularly in our big cities, the Coalition Government resisted every effort by campaigning groups to acknowledge the severity of the problem. The Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, was the most outspoken opponent of the need for any adaptation in those Plans.

All this came to a fitting conclusion just a few weeks ago. After a five-year legal campaign by ClientEarth, that went back and forth from the High Court to the Court of

Appeal to the Court of Justice of the EU, the UK's Supreme Court finally instructed the Government to quash its current and entirely ineffective Plans to cut illegal levels of air pollution, and ordered it to deliver new Air Quality Plans by the end of the year. "The new Government, whatever its political complexion, should be left in no doubt as to the need for immediate action to address this issue."

This is a significant triumph. Without that ruling, people in London, Birmingham and Leeds would have been obliged to live with illegal levels of air pollution until after 2030 – yet another measure of the contempt that so many of our politicians have for basic human rights. But there's still a huge amount to be done; all we'll get by the end of the year (assuming Defra can somehow get its act together) are improved Air Quality Plans. They will then need to be implemented.

4: RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

One of the most important tests of a genuinely sustainable economy is the relationship between the use of raw materials and finished products. Like most developed economies, ours is a massively wasteful economy, and despite growing pressure from a wide range of NGOs, and increasingly enthusiastic engagement on the part of businesses in addressing this challenge, the Coalition Government itself made no effort whatsoever to acknowledge the importance of resource efficiency.

The Green Alliance sums up the high level of frustration that surrounds this important policy area and, yet again, points the finger of blame at the Treasury:

"There are many examples of Departments choosing not to exercise their powers to support resource security and productivity. Among these is the Treasury's unwillingness to support a review of resource depletion, climate change and growth, proposed after a discussion of the issues at the National Security Council, or to provide any support for more resource-efficient products or business models.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) also decided not to adapt producer responsibility legislation for better-designed electronic and

electrical equipment, despite advice from its own working group. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) continues to support weekly rubbish collections. And the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has announced that it is 'stepping back' from various areas of waste policy where there is no clear market failure, especially regarding commercial and industrial waste."

SECTION E: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As the title of this report makes clear, by no stretch of the imagination is it possible to look back over that five-year track record and make any kind of serious claim that the Coalition Government was “the greenest government ever.” In fact, it’s a disturbing and often shameful record, and it’s important to call out those politicians primarily responsible for such a state of affairs.

That has huge implications for the next five years with a majority Conservative Government. Collective leadership will still come from the top, in terms of David Cameron and George Osborne, and delivery will still depend on a handful of Secretaries of State who have (for the most part) failed to inspire any kind of confidence in their commitment over the last five years.

Such a record also has huge implications for the UK’s NGO community. No country in the world has a more experienced, diverse and potential influential and impactful Environment Movement than the UK, but with the best will in the world, one also has to point out that our own record over the last five years has not exactly been covered in glory. Collectively, we’ve failed both to find ways of bringing out the best from a Coalition Government that could so easily have done so much more, and then to hold those politicians to account for consistent underperformance and ideologically-driven backsliding.

If the same factors obtain over the next five years, with every likelihood of reduced effectiveness on the part of both Labour and the Liberal Democrats, intent on rebuilding themselves after such a calamitous Election result, then it will be an out-and-out disaster for the environment by 2020.

As the NGO community enters its own period of post-Election soul-searching and reflection, it serves little purpose obscuring the inevitability of such an outcome.

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