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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Rio + 20 debate

May 2012

Summary

- The Rio +20 summit is a key opportunity for Governments around the world to commit to action to move towards a global transformation in sustainable development and environmental protection.
- On 15th May, WWF launched its Living Planet Report, a bi-annual health check of our planet. This report charts a worrying decline in global biodiversity, coupled with an expansion in our use of natural resources – driving us into ecological overshoot.
- The most recent data for Scotland indicates that we are living a ‘three planet lifestyle’, consuming well beyond our environmental limits. Better choices need to be encouraged to bring our individual and collective footprints to ‘One Planet’ levels.
- WWF Scotland is calling for strong political leadership from the Scottish Government, with action both at Rio and at home.
- WWF Scotland is looking for leadership by the Scottish Government on three major areas:
 - Make the transition to a resource efficient, green economy, prioritising low carbon activity across the economy, and placing greater emphasis on measures beyond GDP
 - Step up efforts on climate change, strengthening the implementation of the Report on Proposals and Policies and taking account of consumption emissions
 - Increase resource efficiency, managing our natural resources more sustainably, minimising waste, and increasing energy efficiency

Key findings – WWF’s Living Planet Report

- Biodiversity continues to decline: Populations of global species continue to decline, with *tropical* and *freshwater* species experiencing the biggest declines. This is worrying given many areas of high biodiversity provide valuable ecosystem services upon which our health, wealth and well-being depend.
- Planet Earth is still in the red: The world’s Ecological Footprint exceeds the Earth’s natural biocapacity by 50 per cent - and this has doubled since 1966. It would take the Earth 1.5 years to produce the goods and services and absorb the CO₂ emissions that we use and produce in a single year.



Director of WWF Scotland: Dr Richard Dixon
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Chief Executive: David Nussbaum

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- Carbon is crippling the planet's life support system: Our current overshoot is largely due to carbon emissions, which accounts for over half of our Ecological Footprint. Higher incomes, high consumption patterns and bigger footprints: High income countries have a disproportionately high Ecological Footprint. Rising consumption trends in high-income groups around the world, combined with growing population, provide warning signs of even larger footprints in the future.

Make the transition to a green economy

A low carbon economy must become a central pillar of Scotland's overall economic strategy if we are to deliver Scotland's emission reduction targets as established in the internationally acclaimed Climate Change (Scotland) Act and reduce our global footprint. To send a clear signal of its seriousness of purpose, the Scottish Government must identify and support green, low carbon and resource efficient activity across *all* key sectors of the economy, not just certain sectors such as renewable energy.

As part of a more sophisticated approach to measuring Scotland's progress towards a green economy consistent with environmental limits, much greater emphasis needs to be placed on a range of factors rather than the traditional focus on GDP growth alone. As the Rio Summit will highlight, sustainable development is about more than just economic growth. The Government's National Performance Framework (NPF) already goes some way to measuring well-being, with its aspiration to create 'opportunities for all to flourish', but still relies heavily on GDP as a measure of progress. The Government should report on wellbeing, equality and environmental quality as part of the NPF, with adequate time set aside for Parliamentary scrutiny.

Step up efforts to tackle climate change

Scotland's First Minister began 2012 with a commitment 'to set our own house in order, to be part of the solution not the problem, but also to lead by example'.¹ The Act is indeed an excellent example of climate leadership, but Scottish Ministers must now take action to ensure that we step up action home to reduce emissions across the Scottish economy – particularly in homes and transport. The Scottish Government must commit to implementing the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP) in full, aligning its Budget with its climate ambitions. This must mean more action to reduce emissions from our homes and decarbonising our transport system.

Production emissions are not the total emissions Scotland is responsible for; our consumption of goods and resources also generates emissions. We must ensure that in our efforts to meet our climate change targets, we do not 'offshore' our emissions, and that our efforts at home actually reduce emissions globally. WWF Scotland believes that Scottish Ministers should set targets to cut emissions from consumption ensuring that this data is incorporated into climate policy making alongside data on production emissions.

Increase resource efficiency

The declining Living Planet Index demonstrates how we need to shift the way in which we manage, use and consume natural resources to live within our environmental limits. WWF Scotland believes measures must be adopted to ensure better resource efficiency:

- Ensuring that all Scottish fisheries are certified as sustainable (MSC)
- A commitment by public bodies to purchase only accredited sustainable products like seafood (MSC, ASC), timber (FSC), palm oil (RSPO) and soy (RTRS).
- Step up recycling levels to at least 50% recycled or composted by 2013,
- Produce a resource efficiency plan to cut waste volumes in half by 2020

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¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Speeches/china-cp>