

MR TURNBULL

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

The Official Committee on Environmental Protection (EP) finally met on Friday to review environmental issues. Although some progress was made, further work is required before a suitable paper for the proposed Prime Minister's meeting can be produced.

The attitude of the departments represented on EP was largely predictable and generally defensive. Even the Department of the Environment which produced a reasonable analysis of the problems failed to offer adequate solutions.

I emphasised the importance which the Prime Minister attaches to this subject and expressed the hope that the Ministerial meeting can take place in about a month's time.

In order to follow this up and imbue Departments with an appropriate sense of urgency, we recommend that a date for the Prime Minister's meeting should be set now and communicated to Departments. Ideally the meeting should take place in early April and certainly before Easter.

The Cabinet Office have now taken over the drafting of the paper for the Prime Minister's meeting and would regard a firm date as a helpful step. It will be important that the paper presents clear policy and presentational options based on a programme of action. The underlying conflicts which occasionally surfaced during the meeting will have to be brought out explicitly.

The Prime Minister's meeting will need to review policy and the scope for improving presentation. As well as the need to restore public confidence and to adopt a positive approach in certain selected areas, there are a number of important international dates in the environmental calendar this year. The UK will require a clear position on a range of issues including acid rain, car exhausts, nuclear waste and dumping at sea by June.

The Government has also to respond to the recent Tenth Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. It was suggested at EP that this response, coupled with a positive initiative on the environment, could be timed to coincide with the Economic Summit in June.

All of this emphasises the importance of the Prime Minister's meeting. I shall be advising the Cabinet Office during the coming weeks. If EP continues to adopt a defensive approach, the Policy Unit will be well placed to give appropriate advice to the Prime Minister.

*DLP.*

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