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### DARTMOOR TRAINING AREA - THE MANAGEMENT OF CONTINUING MILITARY TRAINING

As a result of briefing the Dartmoor Steering Group in January I have been asked to write to you as an interested stakeholder in the Dartmoor area and bring you up to date with recent developments in the management of training on the Dartmoor Training Area.

Today the MoD uses approximately a quarter or 13,000 hectares of Dartmoor's open moorland as a training area. Part of the Dartmoor Training Area is owned by MoD on a freehold basis, but the majority is used under license from local landowners, including the Duchy of Cornwall. Dry tactical training (using blank ammunition and pyrotechnics) and live fire tactical training are both undertaken on the Dartmoor Training Area, whilst the surrounding open moorland is used for non tactical transit and adventurous training. Dartmoor's demanding terrain, challenging climate and isolation provide realistic and arduous training in a natural environment for our light forces (i.e. those who move on foot supported by some light vehicles and helicopters such as the Royal Marines) within which the conditions and frictions of war can be experienced. The Dartmoor Training Area therefore plays an important role in ensuring that our military personnel are thoroughly prepared for the many and varied demands that are increasingly being placed upon them.

The MoD has developed a good reputation for the protection of environmental resources on its training estate and its support for associated local communities. Current environmental and social policy originates from the Strategy for the Defence Estate set out in "*In Trust and On Trust*", published in 2000 by the Secretary of State and refreshed following a re-write in March 2006. In line with this policy MoD has reinforced its management systems to ensure that the effects of military training are fully assessed and, where there are negative effects, put control measures in place in order to mitigate the impacts. Dartmoor Training Area's Environmental Management System, published in 2002 was recently audited by external consultants. The audit process included consultation with the local statutory bodies (Dartmoor National Park Authority, Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, Environment Agency, DEFRA's Rural Development Service) the Duchy of Cornwall and the Dartmoor Local Access Forum. The audit identified local issues and concerns, made recommendations for improvements to control procedures and suggested



further areas for study to inform appropriate management practices acceptable to all stakeholders. The revised Environmental Management System will be supported by a Management Plan setting out how the MoD will manage military training and its environmental responsibilities in the future.

To inform further the management practices on the Dartmoor Training Area and as a result of the recommendations made in the external audit of the Environmental Management System, the MoD commenced a number of environmental studies in 2005 and will undertake more in 2006. These include a National Vegetation Classification survey, review of archaeological features conducted in liaison with English Heritage, an assessment of the impacts of military training on landscape character, a noise study, an examination of the impacts of military training on agriculture and other land use, bird surveys in liaison with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and a tourism and socio economic study undertaken by Tourism Associates. The outcomes of these studies will inform both the Environmental Management System and the Management Plan, which will in turn be used to monitor the delivery of sustainable military training on the Dartmoor Training Area.

MoD keeps its requirement for training areas under frequent review. To inform future requirements on the Dartmoor Training Area it commissioned an independent study in 2005 on "*The Continuing Need for Military Training on Dartmoor*". This concluded that military training capability for light forces, most notably that of the Royal Marines, would be at risk if training does not continue on Dartmoor. The MoD therefore intends to re-negotiate its licences with local landowners in order to continue military training beyond 2012.

The military review process will also be informed by a consideration of future options capable of meeting the required military output whilst taking into account the MoD's socio-economic and environmental objectives and responsibilities. Details of how future military training will be managed will be provided in a new Dartmoor Training Area Management Plan, which will be consulted upon widely at local level through the existing forum of the Dartmoor Steering Group. This will be supported by the revised Environmental Management System, ongoing socio-economic and environmental studies and a complementary shadow non statutory Environmental Appraisal. This comprehensive approach will help to ensure that both the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for the Environment are fully briefed and able to take informed decisions on the future of light force military training on Dartmoor.

The MoD greatly appreciates the local support that it has received over the last 200 years of training on Dartmoor. It also looks forward to an inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders on the continuing need to train on Dartmoor into the future. Your contribution to the debate over the coming months will be most welcome.

Yours truly,

Paul Norrington-Davies

