

Research and Peatlands to 2025: A Workshop

Meeting Note – 9 October 2014, ECCI Building, High School Yards, Edinburgh

Attended by Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Government (Neil Ritchie as Chair), James Hutton Institute, Universities of Birmingham, Dundee, Glasgow, Highlands & Islands, Stirling & St Andrews, Crichton Carbon Centre, Scotland's Moorland Forum, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scotland's Rural College, Scottish Water, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and ClimateXChange.

Purpose

The meeting was arranged on behalf of Scottish Natural Heritage as part of the consultation process on [Scotland's National Peatland Plan](#) and their longer term vision with the following aims:

1. Review 'what is known' and 'what is required' in terms of research to inform a strategic approach to peatlands up to 2025; and
2. Discuss the possible functions of the proposed Peatland Research Group (p 25 of the plan)

Discussion

The workshop opened with scene-setting presentations by Andrew Coupar (Scottish Natural Heritage) and Simon Thorpe (Scotland's Moorland Forum).

Discussion followed on *what are the strategic priorities for peatland research up to 2025 in Scotland?* This was explored through four breakout groups, in which participants were asked to consider three main priorities, the key points of which are set out below:

Group 1

- Three main priorities:
 - i. A practical focus for sustainable use & land management options, with methods to assess risks and impacts
 - ii. A spatially explicit, comprehensive inventory of the peatland resource and related Ecosystem Services, using the Ecosystem Approach
 - iii. Cost-benefit analysis of management/ restoration, with spatial & locational focus
- They emphasised multiple answers – depending on what the drivers are, such as carbon management
- Importance of interdisciplinary opportunities – and value of learning from others, such as agri-environment schemes
- What is the restoration that we are aiming for? Is there an agreed definition that can provide a focus for discussion?

Group 2

- Three main priorities
 - i. Better understanding of peatlands as integrated social and ecological systems, for example, the economics of peatland land uses and rural communities
 - ii. Understanding and monitoring of both current and future (restored?) states – we don't yet have a robust enough evidence base
 - iii. Knowledge exchange – understanding peatlands in terms of funding models
- Optimal land use management (across time and space) for resilience of peatlands, as a cultural as much as an ecological service
- Need to think how to enable a network of long term research sites in Scotland
- Need to invest in coordination of research – time effort and thought is required on a trans-disciplinary basis, engaging the community in co-generating research

Group 3

- Three main priorities:
 - i. Understanding the impacts of changes – what impact do changes have (i.e. on Climate/GHGs, ecosystem services, site condition) on various site types and conditions
 - ii. Monitoring the current baseline and ongoing progress
 - iii. Understand costs and benefits – what benefit do we get from a defined level of investment and what tools are needed to support decision making
- Importance of demonstrating best practice – who do we need to communicate with and why
- Understanding language, definitions and typologies
- Improved use of existing knowledge

Group 4

- Three main priorities:
 - i. Understanding the information base – particularly in terms of the current baseline, reference systems and inventory, but also identifying and reducing uncertainty in the baseline
 - ii. Understanding impacts – across peatlands and including impacts of land use activity, of restoration, of external factors (such as climate change and atmospheric deposition); carbon footprint of the total restoration process
 - iii. Understanding socio-economic factors – including cost-benefit analyses of all options across a broad timeframe, and understanding the socio-economic (dis)incentives across all forms of peatland management
- Importance of peatlands group as a critical hub for example for national and international links and for coordination and consensus building
- Importance of a common language – how to support communication across all stakeholder groups to ensure maximum buy-in on the research strategy
- Value of horizon scanning – what are the unknown-unknowns

Plenary discussion

The following issues were raised during the plenary discussion:

- How is restoration defined in terms of outcomes, and how does it relate to ongoing natural processes?
- What can we restore effectively to – what is financially viable in a cost-benefit analysis of the full process and what is the net benefit, if any, across the full range of factors (e.g. scientific and socio-economic)
- What do we want to achieve through the national peatland plan, and how can we frame timescales – recognising a process of future revisions
- The NERC approach – there is no such thing as a natural environment, the question is what we want to do with the human impacted environment
- Coherence exists on the priorities for peatland exists (citing the IUCN commission of inquiry) but key questions remain around what is required to coordinate and facilitate the priorities with the research community
- Significant on-going activity, but insufficient funding for medium to long term research and a challenge in understanding all communities who have a stake in peatlands; active collaboration and compromise are required;
- Rural Environment and Land Use Programme (RELU) was cited as a prime example of how an inter-disciplinary programme can be made to work;
- Emphasis was placed on;
 - building links with other partners, particularly UK funding bodies
 - enhanced knowledge exchange between all stakeholders
 - the social science agenda and how to engage with the stakeholder communities
- A research programme should be multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional - potential is seen in the centres of expertise model (such as CXC & CREW) where the main research providers (MRPs) and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are drawn together with policy colleagues; suggestion of a modest reallocation of budget to this end
- Additional points were raised on:
 - Peat-cutting, and involving stakeholders with this interest
 - The Scottish Planning Policy and references to peat
 - No need to reinvent the wheel – using existing mechanisms where possible

Summary

The following strategic priorities emerged through the discussion:

- Embedding knowledge exchange across the breadth of stakeholder interests in peatlands in Scotland
- A better understanding of the information base and embedded monitoring over the longer term; this includes scientific and socio-economic aspects
- A better understanding of all impacts, on the resource, on the communities who are dependent on them, and the relationships between all factors

The chair thanked participants for a very useful meeting. He confirmed that a revised final version of the National Peatland Plan would be produced early in 2015.

The following links were circulated in advance of the event:

Attachments

You may find it useful to review the following documents in advance of this workshop:

- [Scotland's national peatland plan: Consultation Draft](#) (particularly the *vision* on pp 4-5 & the key issues for *research* on pp 24-5)
- [Scotland's peatland – definitions & information](#) resources, SNH 2014
- [Summary note from workshop on peatland research priorities](#), February 2014
- [Summary report of the an expert workshop on peatlands](#), February 2010
- [IUCN Commission of Inquiry on Peatland - Report](#), October 2011 (pp 89-92)