

Scottish Wildlife Trust

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Call for Evidence

- *Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) - climate measures*



The Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee regarding the SRDP climate measures.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust's central aim is to advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. With over 37,000 members, several hundred of whom are actively involved in conservation activities locally, we are proud to say we are now the largest voluntary body working for all the wildlife of Scotland. The Trust owns or manages over 120 wildlife reserves across Scotland and campaigns at local and national levels to ensure wildlife is protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

As requested we have focussed our evidence on the prioritisation and value for money of the SRDP programme under the agri-environment climate package.

Context

The Fifth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹ was published on 2 November 2014 and states inter alia,

Human influence on the climate system is clear and growing, with impacts observed on all continents. If left unchecked, climate change will increase the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems. However, options are available to adapt to climate change and implementing stringent mitigations activities can ensure that the impacts of climate change remain within a manageable range, creating a brighter and more sustainable future.

Therefore, it is timely that RACCE is investigating the SRDP programme regarding climate change spend with regard to mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

In 2011 the Scottish Wildlife Trust published Policy Futures 3: Climate Connections² in which the Trust advocated that the maintenance and restoration of ecosystem health can play a key role in helping balance Scotland's carbon budget and create a low carbon, high biodiversity economy. Prerequisites to the restoration of ecosystem health include the recovery of species populations, the improvement of habitat quality and the building of functional connections between fragmented patches of habitat (e.g. an ecological network). By focusing effort on the restoration of ecosystem health, Scotland would make significant progress towards achieving ambitious greenhouse gas

¹ See: <http://www.ipcc.ch/index.htm>

² See:

<http://www.ipcc.ch/index.htm> http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/docs/027_104_publications_Climate_Connections_final_low_res_1306398243.pdf

emissions reduction targets (42% by 2020) and at the same time hit targets to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020.

The packaging of agri-environment and climate measures together in SRDP also chimes with the main theme of Climate Connections which states that: *Action to tackle climate change and efforts to prevent biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin* and,

that maintaining and restoring ecosystem health is a prerequisite to mitigating the impacts of, and adapting to, climate change. The creation of carbon sequestering landscapes offers new opportunities to re-balance our carbon budget whilst creating environments that provide for the needs of both the human population and for biodiversity.

The Scottish Government estimates that emissions of greenhouse gases from farmland make up around 20 % of Scotland's annual emissions.³ Because of this, coupled with the fact that nearly 80% of Scotland is given over to agriculture, there is a real need to ensure that farmland is managed in a way that improves overall ecosystem health e.g. through reducing chemical inputs and enhancing on-farm biodiversity. These are big challenges for farmers, more so as they need to be delivered whilst they cope with the impact of the changing climate on their operations.

How is biodiversity fairing?

The last round of SRDP funding and activity provides an opportunity to assess how agri-environment measures have contributed to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework in terms of strategic objectives, national outcomes, and national indicators.

As stated in the Scottish Government's submission to the EU's Rural Development Programme:

The abundance index of breeding birds on farmland in Scotland, which is a proxy for biodiversity, increased by 22% between 1994 and 2008. **However in recent years this trend has been reversed and there has been a sharp decline in the index. Between 2008 and 2012, the index has fallen by 10%, highlighting a decline in biodiversity.**

The Trust would like the Committee to note that there has been a significant decline (from 1995-2006) in a number of birds associated with farmed landscapes including kestrel (65%), lapwing (58%) and curlew (55%).⁴ What is happening to Scotland's bird populations (in terms of abundance) is also reflected at an EU level with common bird populations across Europe, including those found in the farmed landscape such as skylarks, having decreased by over 420 million in the past 30 years.⁵ The researchers suggest that new approaches to protecting common bird species that have been declining now need to be used including changing farming practices.

While the proportion of designated nature sites in favourable condition has increased since 2007 from 75% to 78% in 2013, **this still means that just over a fifth of designated nature sites in Scotland remain in unfavourable condition.**

In 2012 around 2,050 of the 3,200 water bodies in Scotland met the EC's Water Framework Directive stand of 'good status' with regards to ecology (63%). This has improved from 1,970 (61%) in 2008.

³ Agriculture and related land use was estimated to contribute 10.1 MtCO₂e of greenhouse emissions in Scotland in 2011

⁴ Harris, S.J., Risely, K., Massimino, D., Newson, S.E., Eaton, M.A., Musgrove, A.J., Noble, D.G., Procter, D. & Baillie, S.R. 2014. *The Breeding Bird Survey 2013*. BTO Research Report 658. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.

⁵ Inger et al (2014). Common European birds are declining rapidly while less abundant species' numbers are rising. *Ecology Letters*, November, 2014. 10.1111/ele.12387

The Trust notes that there has only been an increase of 2% in the four years and over a third of water bodies have failed to meet the ‘good status.’

Prioritisation

With regard to the prioritisation within SRDP to direct spend on agri-environment climate (AEC) measures we maintain that this round of spend lacks ambition (in terms of funding) to truly deliver a carbon sequestering landscape that would help re-balance Scotland’s carbon budget and create environments that provide for the needs of both the human population and for biodiversity.

We stated early on in the consultation process that we believed the Scottish Government should transfer 15% of Pillar I to Pillar 2 (as was allowed under CAP rules), and because only 9.5% was transferred the monies allocated are smaller than they could have been – down by c. £220 million – over the lifetime of the funding. Coupled with this we note that the AEC package (£46.8 million) is less than that for supporting farmers in less favoured areas (£65.5 million). Since High Nature Value farming makes up only about half of the LFASS not enough money overall is being spent on delivering public benefits with regard to the environment and mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Carbon sequestering landscape

The Trust supports, with caveats (see below) monies allocated for peatland restoration (c. £10 million in 2015-2016), which will help restore some of Scotland’s degraded peatlands. It is estimated that 70% of Scotland’s blanket bogs and 90% of Scotland’s lowland raised bogs are damaged to some degree⁶. Damaged bogs emit greenhouse gases and reduce water quality. The National Peatland Action plan states that: *there is an estimated 600,000 hectares of restorable peatland and that we need a step change in action*. The Scottish Government’s *Second Report on Proposals and Policies* proposes “accelerated restoration of degraded peatland, targeting up to 21,000 hectares a year.”

Bearing this in mind, the Trust questions how this ambition will be realised given the lack of clarity over peatland funding for the rest of the SRDP programme; any uncertainty going forward may be reflected in the lack of take up by farmers/land managers.

The Committee should also note that the cost of restoring degraded bog would equate to c. £550 ha⁻¹ or £198 million over the next six years (if it is assumed that 40% have already achieved with present spend leaving 360,000 ha).⁷

To further clarify, from the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s own research⁸ it was estimated that lowland raised bog restoration capital costs would be c. £1,280 ha⁻¹ and annual management costs would be c. £40 ha⁻¹ year⁻¹.

Extrapolation across the whole of the Scottish lowland raised bog resource equates to c. £21 million (capital cost) and an annual management cost of c. 650,000.

The Trust also notes that spend for peatland restoration is not ‘new money’ but will come directly out of the AEC budget (at least in the first year as there is no allocation beyond this point) which means that there will be less money to spend on other agri-environment measures that deliver other biodiversity objectives, healthy ecosystems and carbon sequestering landscapes outwith peatlands.

⁶ SNH, Scotland’s National Peatland Plan: working for our future. A consultation paper.

⁷ Clifton Bain, IUCN Peatland Programme director

⁸ Matthews, P, Hughes, J and Dowse, G. (2012) The state of Scotland’s lowland raised bogs in 2012: interim findings from a survey of 58 Scottish lowland raised bogs and analysis of change since 1994/95. Scottish Wildlife Trust, Edinburgh.

Co-operative action

The Trust has advocated and supports a joined up approach to environmental projects which will deliver environmental /climate change benefits at the landscape scale/catchment scale rather than at the farm scale alone.

To deliver a National Ecological Network, which is an ambition of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, there will be a need to sharpen priorities at this scale to direct agri-environment spend towards schemes that best connect core habitats (in the form of international and nationally designated sites, wildlife reserves, local nature conservation sites and other biologically important sites) to ensure hedgerows, woodlands, wetlands, restored peatlands, rivers, streams and other natural features link together to help deliver multiple benefits whilst protecting and adding to the resilience of Scotland's natural capital.

We do have concerns regarding resources and expertise in deciding where co-operative action will deliver the greatest benefits and we are also concerned that this activity will be funded directly from the AEC monies rather than being additional to it.

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