

UK PEATLAND STRATEGY LAUNCH

Workshop Goal: Adaptive Management

Shifting management of drained peatlands under intensive productive use to deliver wetter ways of farming.

Some existing land uses currently rely on maintaining drainage of peatlands. Resulting negative environmental and socio-economic impacts can be reduced by providing new products that thrive on wet peatland soils, minimising the need for drainage.

This represents an opportunity to maintain farming livelihoods and generates new enterprises within UK agriculture.

CONTEXT

This goal focuses on seeking change in the ways in which intensively farmed peatlands are managed, including both arable cropland and intensive grazing. It also highlights unsustainable peat extraction in terms of developing alternative products as soil conditioners and growing media, with a focus on finding solutions that don't simply shift the burden onto other countries. The ultimate aim of this goal is to retain the extent of existing peat soils by keeping them wet and in situ either through adjusting management such as reduced tillage and raising water tables through to more effective measures involving the growing of plants that survive in wet peatlands (often termed paludiculture) as alternative crops for food or energy production

NOTES FROM WORKSHOP

Who should we engage with to co-ordinate delivery of this goal?

- Land managers:
 - Groups representing landowners and farmers e.g. NFU and CLA
 - Individual Farmers – what it would take to adapt management to avoid soil loss
 - Start with most willing key farms or 'frontier farmers' so that they can set an example. Not all farmers are negative to the concept.
- Statutory Agencies – equivalents in all four devolved administrations:
 - Environment Agency and Natural England
 - Defra – both soils and climate change policy
 - Forestry Commission – opportunity to look at provision of biomass as an alternative product
 - Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs)

- IUCN – promote the Dutch Model of sourcing sustainably ‘**Sustainability of international Dutch supply chains**’ report. Encourage china as major buyer of peat to consider environmental impact.
- Potential beneficiaries of adaptive management:
 - Horticultural industry to include producers, growers (inc. plant breeders) and retailers
 - Water companies
 - People impacted by loss of peat soil
 - MPs
 - Local councils from a flooding perspective
 - Solar farm developers
- Consumers and suppliers:
 - Customers of peat products who are creating the demand e.g. gardeners
 - Retailers – both horticultural products and food derived from fenland farming
- Advisory/training providers:
 - Peatland contractors / experts
 - Agri-engineers; Crop research institutes and agricultural/horticultural development boards
 - Agricultural colleges – need to promote full cost-benefit analysis
 - NERC and other funders of research and reviewers
 - Fertiliser companies – ensure advice to farmers allows for wet crops
 - Zurich University, Switzerland – running a PhD around vegetable growing and payment system – could share findings.

What is already being done or has been planned that will assist in the delivery of this goal?

- Beadamoss – running a sphagnum paludiculture research project that is grant funded by Innovate UK
- Great Fen Project – running paludiculture trials
- Natural England – running paludiculture trials e.g. Bolton Fell project, although still marginal in organisation
- RSPB – running trials and looking at the economics behind supplying ecosystem services e.g. provision of biofuels and using bracken
- Anglian Water are thought to be exploring adaptive management in Lincolnshire
- Defra has set targets for the withdrawal of peat-based composts in England, in its 25 Year Environment Plan
- EA and Defra – catchment scale and farming programmes (Nigel Simpson)
- Scottish government have adopted UK phasing out peat targets but no firm signal from Northern Ireland and Wales
- Government has developed a Soil Strategy
- Welsh Government – study into the best and most suitable land for adaptive management
- EA Wetland Vision – maps arable/grassland opportunities
- Revive Defra’s agricultural land guidance and soil guidelines

How best can we monitor and report against the outcomes as set by this goal?

- Use farm objectives to observe e.g. habitat extent and condition – develop agri-peatland measures; farm level reporting – Defra and DBEIS

- Horticulture production figures – work with Growing Media Association and IPS
- PhD students – economics
- Monitor carbon mitigation – via Defra
- Carbon capture projects and Government carbon reporting – CEH
- Farm carbon accounting
- Look at international practices
- Single farm payment system Wales, identify who can ensure data on peatland adaptive management can be disaggregated.

Further thoughts and suggestions:

- Need partnership projects to deliver a co-ordinated approach at a catchment level
- Intermediate step required – Government policy (through Defra)
- Public education is needed (peat owners and adjacent land managers)
- Farming required – crop technology
- Impacts and showcases needed
- Build soil science research
- Defra grants for sphagnum harvesting
- Who is the lead body in Government for peat alternatives – is government leaving R&D to the industry?
- Demand for peat-products in China is growing
- Organisations need to commit to the strategy – not just keen individuals within NE, SNH etc – commitment needs to be across adaptation/soils/water departments
- Target places – not just those who have lost peat soil, but aim for places where progress can be made to develop showcase
- Find alternative name for 'paludiculture' to increase support/awareness
- Apply a high-end premium price to peat-free products and develop an artisan market for these products to drive demand i.e. environmentally-friendly crops

Next steps:

1. Initiate dialogue with land managing groups to discuss problems and find workable solutions
2. Bring adaptive management goal into Government policy with targeted funding for trial projects, research and advice.
3. Ensure peat phasing out targets adopted across all four devolved administrations
4. Develop some early showcase 'paludiculture' projects covering different crop types (Sphagnum, food crops, bioenergy crops) with examples in each of the four devolved countries.
5. Coordinate work across different e.g. environment/water/climate/soil statutory agencies to support large catchment scale projects
6. Develop a strategic research priority to explore the benefits and practical means of delivering adaptive management.
7. Work with statutory agencies/government to ensure intensive peat use problem areas and adaptive management progress can be monitored – combination of earth observation, monitoring grant schemes.