

Peatland Programme

Supporting Sustainable and Healthy Peatlands After Brexit

The European Union framework for UK land management funding and policy has had a major impact on our peatlands. Environment LIFE funds have supported peatland conservation and restoration activity, whilst Rural Development Programme funds, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, have been a mainstay of support for peatland management but also included incentives that harmed peatlands.

The Brexit planning process should recognise global and national commitments to safeguarding our peatlands and their vital contributions to Sustainable Development Goals. The IUCN UK Peatland Programme, as a broad partnership including NGOs, land managers, public bodies and scientists, has identified ten key elements to ensure we continue to deliver healthy peatlands and avoid the huge costs to society of degraded and damaged peatlands.

Setting strategic goals and action

Strategic plans for each of the four countries to set ambition and direction, support collective effort and ensure ongoing long-term commitment to peatland action are being promoted as an important tool by UNEP and IUCN. Progress by the UK and devolved administrations in this strategic work can inform other countries, including the UK Overseas Territories.

Funding for the restoration and sustainable management of peatlands

Land managers (including farmers, crofters and foresters) require financial support for restoration, transition and long-term sustainable management of peatlands. This will help sustain rural economies and reduce the costly consequences of damaged peatlands.

Payments should be based on the public benefits provided by peatlands. Long-term commitments are required to give land managers confidence to move forward from damaging practices, and introduce and maintain good practice throughout the recovery and ongoing management phases.

Additional funding is required to address the loss of EU LIFE funding and the private investments it has leveraged to support peatland restoration and conservation on our most important wildlife sites. It is through these routes that much of the UK's world leading expertise in peatland management has been developed and demonstrated as exemplars internationally.

Supporting regional peatland partnerships

Regional peatland partnerships depend on their core costs being met to assist in the delivery of government objectives for peatlands in a cost effectively manner and on a landscape-scale. These partnerships have a key role in demonstrating good practice, working to coordinate effort across sectors and engaging with local communities to reinforce understanding and valuing of peatlands.



Incentives to support private investment

The private business sector has a key role to play in funding peatland natural capital. Further research, development and promotion is required to encourage private investment, including through Payment-for-Ecosystem-Services (PES) and recognised market standards e.g. the Peatland Code. Placing obligations on more businesses to report on carbon reduction, including nature-based activities, would provide greater incentive to take action. Private investment should be seen as complementary to public funding in enabling restoration and long-term sustainable management.

Accounting for peatland condition

International climate change and biodiversity obligations recognise the significant roles of peatlands. Regular assessment of the condition and extent of our peatlands by Government would facilitate proper accounting for greenhouse gas emissions and removals, and progress to favourable condition. Voluntary inclusion of peatlands in the UK National Greenhouse Gas Inventories in advance of the mandatory EU timetable will help build private sector confidence for investment in peatlands.

Retain, improve and extend designated sites

Our designated sites network supports international commitments including the Ramsar, Bonn and Bern Conventions and IUCN resolutions that require identification and safeguarding of protected areas. It is important to improve on the delivery of conservation objectives in these areas, extend coverage of designated peatlands and undertake regular condition assessment. Wider catchment measures to support good status of water bodies and peatlands, and conservation management beyond designated boundaries, will complement and reinforce our site network.



Sphagnum farming: a novel and sustainable way to manage land productively

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International commitments require identification and safeguarding of protected sites

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Control management practices harmful to peatlands

Care should be taken to avoid incentives under payment and policy regimes for land management that cause harm to peatlands. Regulation and prohibition of management practices such as drainage, burning, grazing and afforestation of deep peat, where there is a risk of damage, are essential for sustainable peatland management. Similar controls are necessary for development including wind farms and commercial peat extraction. Compliance of planning conditions and restoration requirements for abandoned peatland sites post-extraction should be enforced.

Government-supported peatland research and monitoring group

There is a need for a national group to identify and help resource key research and monitoring requirements, including citizen science, to further quantify carbon, water and biodiversity gains. A strong evidence base is essential for policy making, peatland management decisions and funding mechanisms as well as communicating peatland values.

Transition of drained peatlands under productive use to wetland agriculture

Set policy direction and develop farm support, with trials and advocacy, for wetter farming with sustainable economic management of previously drained peatlands, particularly fenlands, under intensive productive use. Encourage and support transition to management for peatland species and wider benefits such as soil conservation and climate change mitigation.

Achieve end of peat-use in horticulture

Government commitment to ending peat use in horticulture needs strong incentives, including potential regulation, working with retailers and producers to help industry achieve transition to sustainable growing media.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK Peatland Programme exists to promote peatland restoration in the UK and advocates the multiple benefits of peatlands through partnerships, strong science, sound policy and effective practice.

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