



Peatland Programme

Handbook for participants in the Defra Commissioned Peatland Evidence Review

November 2025 - March 2027



(C) Steve Hewertson

Table of Contents

Background and aims	2
Early stages and approach	2
Governance	3
Role of the IUCN UK PP team	4
Key IUCN UK PP contacts.....	4
Role of the project leads	5
Milestones	5
Code of conduct	6
GDPR	7
Review and synthesis methods	8
Outputs	9
File sharing	9
Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)	10
Structure and style guidelines	10

Background and aims

Policy development in England seeks to be based on the latest available high-quality evidence from research on peatlands like those found in England from across Europe. With a large volume of peatland evidence and research coming to the fore, the Defra family are keen to synthesise the evidence base on several key topics and have proposed a list of questions to address. The purpose of this project is to distil the evidence into a format which is accessible to a policy audience in a set of concise, topic-specific outputs.

IUCN UK Peatland Programme (IUCN UK PP), as a trusted organisation, have been contracted by Defra to undertake this work. Because of our role in convening the UK peatland community and working with international partners we are well placed to establish working groups on these issues and produce a policy-relevant evidence synthesis. These reports can be utilised as an evidence base to inform future policy and research by Defra and by others in the peatland community. The topic reports themselves will not make policy recommendations but will present a synthesis of the evidence.

Early stages and approach

IUCN UK PP have initiated and led on two similar processes in the past during 2011 and 2018. The [2011 Commission of Inquiry \(COI\) on Peatlands](#) was the first of its kind in bringing the disparate scientific evidence base together and presenting a cohesive summary on topics relevant to peatland conservation to policy makers. The COI brought together over 300 contributors from over 50 organisations over an 18-month period, drawing on a wide range of expertise from science, policy and practice.

The 13 topic reports under this project will be produced using a variety of different approaches including:

IUCN led authorship	IUCN UK PP team draft the briefing and circulate to specialists for comment/input/peer review.
Commissioned authorship	Single contract to an individual/individual organisation (if appropriate) to develop a completed report. The topic group will support the lead in identifying evidence and in assessing the evidence.
Collaborative authorship	Coordinate a group of individuals/organisations to work collaboratively to develop a completed briefing. Either a nominated lead individual(s) or IUCN UK PP will chair the group (as appropriate).

Governance

Defra are the commissioner and client for this contract.

IUCN UK PP are the contracted party responsible for delivering the project.

Project team

- Dr. Emma Hinchliffe, Programme Director - lead scientist appointed to have oversight of the project
- Jane Akerman, Programme Manager
- Dr. Jess Fior-Berry, Policy Lead
- Dr. Helen Harper, Programme Officer
- Dr. Renee Kerkvliet-Hermans, Peatland Code Manager
- Prof. Mark Reed, Research Lead – in charge of overseeing training and peer-review

Each topic has an appointed lead within the IUCN team – please see Key IUCN UK PP contacts on page 4.

No new steering committee is being established for the purposes of this project. The IUCN UK PP Steering Group which has over 30 representatives from organisations (govt, statutory bodies, eNGOs, academics, etc.) will be utilised for any decisions which cannot be made by the project team.

If any disputes arise which cannot be resolved between individuals, IUCN appointed topic lead, lead scientist, or the IUCN UK PP Executive Board will be called upon to make a final decision as necessary.

Role of the IUCN UK PP team

Each question will have an appointed IUCN UK PP contact who will oversee the review process. They will directly liaise with project lead authors and provide support in meetings as required. Please find the appointed IUCN contact relevant to your question in the table below. Appointed IUCN leads will:

- Support the topic lead (where not an IUCN team member or contracted party):
 - Act as a point of contact for the topic lead and the group.
 - Support the lead and the group in confirming the topic scope
 - Ensure the group are clear on the method for the Evidence Review and support and advise where any changes to the proposed method need to be made.
 - Support the topic lead in resolving any disputes, resource challenges or issues which may arise.
 - Provide reminders of project milestones and deadlines.
 - Lead on the review of the finalised topic reports and synthesise these into one main report with a narrative piece and 13 topic-specific chapters.

Key IUCN UK PP contacts

Question	IUCN contact	Email
1	Emma Hinchliffe	Emma.Hinchliffe@iucn.org.uk
2	Emma Hinchliffe	Emma.Hinchliffe@iucn.org.uk
3	Emma Hinchliffe	Emma.Hinchliffe@iucn.org.uk
4	Jessica Fior-Berry	jessica.fior-berry@iucn.org.uk
5	Jane Akerman	Jane.Akerman@iucn.org.uk
6	Jessica Fior-Berry	jessica.fior-berry@iucn.org.uk
7	Jessica Fior-Berry	jessica.fior-berry@iucn.org.uk
8	Jessica Fior-Berry	jessica.fior-berry@iucn.org.uk
9	Emma Hinchliffe	Emma.Hinchliffe@iucn.org.uk
10	Jane Akerman	Jane.Akerman@iucn.org.uk
11	Jane Akerman	Jane.Akerman@iucn.org.uk
12	Jane Akerman	Jane.Akerman@iucn.org.uk
13	Renee Kerkvliet-Hermans	Renee.Kerkvliet-Hermans@iucn.org.uk

General IUCN UK PP info box: info@iucn.org.uk

Role of the project leads

Each question will have an appointed topic lead, or in some cases two co-leads. The role of the topic lead is to:

- Work closely with the IUCN lead to ensure meetings are scheduled and planned ahead with suitable frequency.
- Will arrange and chair meetings with the group and any external parties (as necessary). Produce high level meeting minutes and record major points and decisions.
- Will ensure the topic and review remains in scope.
- Have clarity on the rapid review methods being used and direct the group in applying these methods.
- Be responsible for allocating and sharing workload across the group as required.
- Follow up with the group members to ensure milestones and deadlines are met.
- Support group discussion around the evidence base, as required. Agree where consensus exists and highlight this. Document divergence from the consensus or contradictory evidence.
- Be responsible for reporting any disputes, resource limitations or issues to IUCN in a timely manner.
- Be responsible for pulling together and submitting the drafts and final drafts of the reports to IUCN (for commissioned and collaborative topics).

Milestones

The table below summarises some key milestones. Exact deadlines for drafts and regular meetings will be topic-specific and agreed with topic leads.

Milestone	Month due
Initiation of topic	March 26
Kick-off meetings to agree project scope and plan for each topic	March-April 26
Training on PRISMA rapid evidence synthesis (recommended, free of charge)	24 th March 26 (online) or self-guided training available (approx. 3 hours)
Meetings with the working group	Scheduled as needed throughout the review process
First draft (draft of main content which shows narrative, all reviewed content and summary of findings) due to IUCN UK PP	Project-specific and TBC with each group; August/September 26
Final group meetings and report wrap-up	October/November 26
Final draft due to IUCN UK PP	Project-specific; latest November 26
Commissioned peer review	November-December 26
Final amendments by group following peer review (as needed)	December '26
IUCN review reports, send final draft to Defra	January 27
Online presentations to Defra (IUCN and lead authors only)	13 th and 14 th April 27 9:30-12:30
Publication of report on gov.uk	TBC

Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct governs the Defra commissioned, IUCN UK Peatland Programme–led *Peatland Evidence Review*. Its purpose is to ensure a positive, respectful, and collaborative environment throughout the project so that a consensus view on the evidence can be reached and additional evidence or views be recorded. These principles apply to all members of the topic working groups and the project management team.

All participants are expected to uphold the following principles to foster a collaborative and effective working environment.

1. Respectful Communication

- Treat all participants with respect and courtesy, regardless of background, role, or seniority.
- Encourage open dialogue and value diverse perspectives.
- Bullying behaviour is prohibited. Bullying refers to repeated inappropriate behaviour—verbal, physical, or otherwise—that undermines another person’s dignity during project activities.

Examples of Bullying (non-exhaustive)

Verbal: Insults, demeaning remarks, repeated humiliation, unwelcome nicknames, ridicule, or threats. **Non-verbal or Indirect:** Exclusion with negative consequences, hostile attitudes, or spreading malicious rumours. **Abuse of Power:** Persistent excessive or inappropriate criticism, withholding information to undermine a colleague, or altering responsibilities without justification. **Physical:** Aggressive behaviour, intimidation, unwelcome physical contact, or assault.

2. Constructive Feedback

- Provide feedback constructively, focusing on issues rather than individuals.
- Receive feedback openly and without defensiveness.

3. Clarity and Transparency

- Communicate clearly to minimise misunderstandings.
- Avoid discussions that distract from project objectives.
- Share relevant information promptly so all participants have access to necessary documents and updates.

4. Use of Appropriate Communication Channels

- Meetings will be conducted online. If a face-to-face meeting is required, contact the IUCN UK Peatland Programme team.
- Use designated communication channels appropriately. Email will be the main form of communication but groups may use alternative tools if the whole group is happy and the tool is accessible to all.
- Google Drive is the primary file-sharing system. Additional systems may be used if all members have full access.

5. Timeliness

- Respond to messages and requests promptly to maintain project momentum.
- Be mindful of differing time zones when scheduling meetings or sending communications.
- Project business should generally occur during working hours (9:00–18:00, Monday to Friday), with no expectation to respond outside these hours.

6. Resolving Disputes

Disagreements may arise even with clear processes. Conflicts should be addressed directly, respectfully, and with the aim of reaching resolution.

Step 1: Informal Discussion The individuals involved discuss the issue informally and attempt to reach agreement.

Step 2: Informal Discussion with Assistance If Step 1 is unsuccessful or unsuitable, the assigned IUCN topic lead may assist.

Step 3: Formal Investigation and Decision If informal steps do not resolve the issue, a formal process will be initiated and overseen by the IUCN Project Lead.

7. Confidentiality

- Protect sensitive information and do not disclose it without appropriate consent.
- All project discussions are confidential.
- From March 2026 until publication on GOV.UK, project findings must not be shared externally without agreement from the project lead (Emma Hinchliffe).
- Participants must not make public statements about the project process or findings until the reports are published by Defra.
- Defra retains the project's intellectual property and may publish reports on GOV.UK before any other use. Any additional publication plans (e.g., academic papers) should be discussed with the project lead. IUCN are in discussion with Defra to try and ensure there is potential for formal publication of reviews in peer-reviewed outlets where desired by the authorship group.

8. Non-Compliance

The IUCN UK Peatland Programme reserves the right to remove participants from a group or the project if they do not adhere to this Code of Conduct.

GDPR

Participants' contact details (name and email address) provided through the Expression of Interest (EOI) process will be used solely for the purposes of organising and facilitating collaboration within the evidence review project. To support group working, group leads will initially be provided with the names and email addresses of individuals assigned to their topic area.

Initial communication from group leads will be sent using BCC to protect participants' contact details. Group leads will then confirm whether participants are happy for their details to be shared more widely within the group where this may be helpful for collaboration (for example, where two or more contributors are working together on a specific sub-question).

Participation in the project is voluntary. You may withdraw from the project at any time, and you may request that your contact details are removed from project distribution lists. Any personal data will be used only for the duration and administration of the project and handled in accordance with applicable data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). If you have questions about how your personal data are used within this project, please contact info@iucn.org.uk.

Review and synthesis methods

As the approach to producing an output and response to each question may vary depending on how the contracted group/organisation wish to undertake the creation of the report and the degree of existing review evidence being able to be drawn on. However, leads must ensure that the response to each question addresses:

- strength of the evidence
- quality of the evidence
- level of uncertainty around conclusions
- level of consensus within the scientific community

Where possible, a consensus view should be reached amongst the author team and any stakeholder groups. Where a consensus is not attainable, the arguments should be clearly presented, and knowledge gaps summarised. Where possible, suggest protocols for research to address these knowledge gaps.

The timeline and budget for this project does not allow for a full and formal evidence review process. We will strive, where possible, to bring in and update previous reviews and will employ the method outlined below for most topics:

Recommended method for synthesis: PRISMA Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

The Institute for Methods Innovation (IMI) have been contracted to provide a series of materials, support and training in applying the PRISMA methodology for Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). Training is available free of charge to all participants in the project and will be provided through either:

- An online, live training session 24th March 2026 11am-2pm. Link to be provided through email from info@iucn.org.uk
- A self-guided session using online materials (approx. 3 hours).

Whilst it is not mandatory for every participant to undertake the REA training it is being provided to ensure a consistent and high-quality output from across the topics. The training will support participants in learning how to frame actionable research questions, identify and screen relevant evidence, assess quality, and present your findings clearly.

Further guidance on this method will be provided from IMI directly.

Other methods

We recognise that for some topics that a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) will not be/or will only be partially possible. Alternative methods should be discussed with the IUCN lead, but groups are reminded that all reports should address:

- Availability of evidence
- strength of the evidence
- quality of the evidence
- level of uncertainty around conclusions
- level of consensus within the scientific community

Language

It is Defra's desire that the reviews should not be limited to publications in English; European publications will be included but it is likely that the review will be restricted to English language specifications unless the skills of contracted authors allow otherwise.

Outputs

Report

Each topic will present a separate report of maximum 30 pages. These reports will be tied together with a narrative piece (written by IUCN) and submitted to Defra for approval and publication on Gov.UK.

Presentation of findings

Lead author or nominated co-author to attend and present the topical findings at a Defra family conference 13th and 14th April 2027 (09:30-12:30). Outline structure is below.

Session 1 (3 hours)

Welcome & Introduction to the project — 20 minutes

Key messaging summary — 20 minutes

Topic Presentations 1–3 — 25 minutes each (≈75 minutes total)

Comfort break — 15 minutes

Topic Presentations 4–7 — 25 minutes each (≈100 minutes total)

Wrap-up & Quick reflections — 20 minutes

Session 2 (3 hours)

Recap of Session 1 — 10 minutes

Topic Presentations 8–10 — 25 minutes each (≈75 minutes total)

Comfort break — 15 minutes

Topic Presentations 11–13 — 25 minutes each (≈75 minutes total)

Extended Q&A / Panel discussion — 40 minutes

Closing & Next steps — 20 minutes

File sharing

File sharing structures have been set up for each topic on Google Docs. Google has proven to be the least problematic and most accessible platform for most in other projects but please let IUCN UK PP lead or topic lead know if this causes accessibility issues.

We have set up these folders for your review materials and these are accessible within Google Drive. The link for each topic will be shared via IUCN and the topic lead.

- **Document template for drafts**- Google docs.
- **Folder for papers**- place to put links and pdf articles, reports etc.
- **Minutes of meetings** and any big decisions taken (removing/adding scope, contentious evidence)
- **Project brief**- scope and objectives for each question
- **Template for presentations** (leads only, April 2027)

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We recognise that AI is increasingly being used in day-to-day work and support its use in some limited instances e.g., producing transcripts and minutes of meetings (where all participants consent), bringing clarity to short passages of text etc. We also recognise that given the time constraints of this project that AI can be a helpful tool to support a rapid synthesis. However, all participants involved in the project take responsibility for any materials produced using AI.

We are particularly cautious around the use of AI tools to support the evidence synthesis process and, again, reiterate that all participants take full responsibility for cross checking any material or process which has used AI. This paper provides a helpful example as to the concerns for the use of AI in an evidence review: - [AI-Assisted Scientific Assessment: A Case Study on Climate Change](#)

In order to maintain transparency a short usage of AI statement must be provided for each report this should be placed at the end of the references in the main report and include the following information:

- A list of the AI tools used and why these tools were selected;
- a short explanation of what you used the tool for (e.g. information gathering, to refine scope or develop lines of questioning, to format references, to check grammar, format writing into a singular style, or to analyse data).

In addition to the statement an appendix to reports should be provided that includes more detailed information about the inputs to and outputs given by AI tools:

- Provide the prompts or questions used, the output generated, and how this was modified if included in the final report.

For example:

- Prompts used with <AI name>: *list prompts*
- Output generated: *Provide a copy of the output created*
- The output was modified as follows: *briefly explain the changes you made*

Provide references for the AI tools used at the bottom of the AI statement, separate to the main reference list:

Using the Harvard referencing style provide a reference for the tools which were used including the url and date accessed.

For example:

- OpenAI Chat GPT [version] [Year] ChatGPT response to [Name], 3/3/2026. Available at: <https://chat.openai.com/APA>.

Structure and style guidelines

Reports will be collated into a single document; however, to ensure consistency of style, based on a similar structure to existing government reviews reports must follow the structure outlined here:

Defra have specified that all reports must be a maximum of 30 pages in length, including references.

Topic question

Author list

Acknowledgements

A brief section should be provided naming those who made additional contributions to the report with the nature of those contributions. These should be grouped together by contribution type, for example: J. Gray, M. Brown, S. Green for contributing images; R. Red, L. Blue for assisting with reviews.

High-level summary of findings

The *brief* high-level summary of findings will allow readers to quickly understand what the review has found, this should be in bullet point format of no more than 6 points – using a format similar to that of a journal paper ‘highlights’ section [Hydrological effects of resource-access road crossings on boreal forested peatlands - ScienceDirect](#)

1. Introduction

Rationale and objectives for the overarching question should be provided here along with the sub-questions that are being covered in the review.

1.1 Context

This section should provide brief context for the topic and should be no more than 300 words in length.

1.2 Process

Details of the methodology followed for the review should be covered here including the number of papers/reports found and how these were excluded including keyword searches. It is expected that in most cases this will be following the PRISMA process for which training has been arranged. The keywords used to search for literature should also be included here. (Max 200 words).

1.3 Scope of the review

This section should highlight briefly (in no more than 150 words) what is covered within the review and topics which are outside of scope.

It is outside of the scope of the reviews to suggest how the evidence has shaped or should shape Defra/government policy.

2. Summary of findings

The summary of findings sits ahead of the detailed specific questions so that the overarching narrative for each report can be quickly accessed by policy makers who may not read the full report. The summary section is provided here so that policy makers can readily access the main findings of the report, the conclusions will be at the end of the report. These should be succinct and cover the key finding from across the questions, the section should be no more than 1000 words.

[Specific questions addressed by the review – we have provided examples from Q8 topic below, sub-headings may not be required within all topics]

2.1 How does grazing type, timing, and intensity affect peatland vegetation, soil structure, soil erosion, surface roughness, water quality and hydrological function?

2.2 Consider sheep, cattle (including dairy – with geographical constraints), deer and ponies. How do impacts change when considering different stock types?

2.2.1 Sheep

2.2.2 Cattle

2.2.3 Ponies

2.2.4 Deer

2.3 What are the mechanisms of compaction and disturbance, how do these vary between grazing species and how do they influence rates of accumulation and degradation?

2.4 Do changes to the vegetation community composition affect the peat formation process and carbon storage? If so, how?

2.5 How does grazing affect restoration outcomes?

2.6 How do herbivore impacts differ in upland and lowland peatland contexts?]

3. Conclusions

Following a similar format to Natural England evidence reviews ([The impact of moorland grazing and stocking rates - NEER006](#)) conclusions should be grouped according to topics and authors should indicate whether the evidence supporting the conclusions is weak, moderate or strong.

4. Evidence gaps and research recommendations

Finally reports should highlight where there was insufficient evidence to support conclusions on specific topics or questions and detail where research is most needed based on the review.

References

A full reference list for the report should be provided, and references should be formatted using the Harvard reference style.