

Scottish Government debate: Environment and Climate Change (European Union Referendum)

Scottish Peatlands

- The fantastic outcome of a peatland resolution from the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Hawaii reminds us of the global imperative to protect and enhance our peatlands for climate change, biodiversity and water
- Scotland has shown leadership in developing a National Peatland Plan, providing protected areas for peatlands and funding peatland restoration, which has been used as an exemplar in global efforts addressing the world's 175 peatland nations
- The long term future of peatlands requires that we plan beyond their protection and restoration to ensure they are sustainably managed and that the values of peatlands to society are reflected in the support given to land managers who look after them. We must move away from the situation in the past where peatlands were not appreciated and only valued when attempts were made to turn them into something else
- In Scotland's 1.7 million hectares of peatland, **78%** are damaged and are in need of restorative action
- As a result of past damage, much of our peatland is no longer sequestering and storing carbon and has instead become a significant carbon source through emissions from degrading peat soils. Current emissions of 16 million tonnes of CO₂e from damaged UK peatlands each year are greater than the annual savings made by the UK across all its climate change efforts (13 million tonnes CO₂e saved in 2014)
- Scottish Government Low Carbon Scotland report (2013) suggests that up to **21,000 ha per year** of peatland restoration is technically feasible. Rate of restoration between **1990 and 2012** averaged **1,400 ha per year**; this increased to between **3000-6000 ha per year** in the period 2012-2015 due to funding such as charitable giving from Heritage Lottery Fund, EU Life funding, Scottish Rural Development Programme and Peatland Action. A step change is needed in provision of funding and in the long term security of funding schemes to ensure that restoration is delivered at full capacity

- Peatland restoration brings about significant levels of carbon savings at a moderate cost alongside other carbon reducing technologies and is particularly cost effective, taking into account the wider benefits such as provision of clean water, localised flood prevention through the reduction of peak flows and supporting unique wildlife
- The cost of inaction is huge reaching £billions as our largest natural carbon store built up over thousands of years is exposed to further deterioration and erosion. The most cost effective way to ensure the long term future for our peatland carbon stocks is to take early action to maintain or restore peatlands to functioning peatland ecosystems, resilient to the impacts of climate change. On already damaged peatlands early intervention in peatland restoration is a sensible investment to recover the benefits and reduce the risks of more severe erosion and degradation

Funding is difficult to secure and often short-term to build the momentum needed for restoration.

- EU LIFE has provided over £42 million in matched funding to repair and manage UK peatlands since 1994. The decision to leave the EU will result in the loss of this funding option in the near future and represents a shortfall to find elsewhere
- Funding that has previously been available is typically either short term or restrictive. Short term funding makes it difficult to retain expertise among peatland staff. Boom-bust cycles of funding can also undo the local economic benefits arising from peatland restoration including losing skilled contractors, some having invested heavily in new equipment. Short-termism in funding also makes it difficult to pay for monitoring to demonstrate success or to pay for long-term sustainable management of restored peatlands
- There is a need to build private financing, alongside Government funding in recognition of the public benefits of peatlands for water, carbon and biodiversity. [The Peatland Code](#) has a valuable role to play in providing this private finance.