



Climate Change (Scotland) Act annual targets: carbon savings from peatland restoration

Summary

Repairing damaged peatlands can deliver climate change benefits and help meet Scotland's targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. We support the view that annual targets for 2010-2012 can be more ambitious than originally proposed if potential measures such as peatland restoration are taken into account. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson MSP, has written to the TICC Committee¹ to confirm that he intends to include peatland restoration in the calculation of the greenhouse gas inventory. To deliver such benefits there needs to be a step change in effort to ensure a **clear programme of peatland restoration activity**. Damaged peatlands are a huge cost to society in terms of carbon, water and biodiversity loss and the longer they are left to deteriorate the more costly it becomes to repair them.

Emissions savings from restoring peatlands

Across the world, large-scale degradation of peatlands is causing serious environmental and social impacts². One of the most pressing concerns is the loss of stored carbon that is contributing to climate change. Globally, damage to peatlands is responsible for around 2Gt of carbon dioxide – 10% of all global carbon dioxide emissions. Of the world's 175 peatland nations, the UK is among the top 20 for carbon emissions from damaged peatlands. Scotland supports over 80% of the UK's deepest blanket bog peatlands. Rewetting damaged peatlands reduces the loss of climate change relevant emissions from the peat store and provides a long-term carbon sink. Briefing from the IUCN UK Peatland Programme³ shows that **delivering peatland restoration targets of 600,000ha by 2015 in Scotland could provide at least 2.7Mt CO₂-eq savings per year**. This is equivalent to as much as a third of the total savings originally proposed in the annual climate change targets for 2010-2012 by the Scottish Government.

Scotland's opportunity for peatland restoration

Over 50% of Scotland's estimated 2 million ha peatland area⁴ has been damaged by past activity such as peat extraction, burning, grazing, drainage and forestry planting. The damage affects the peatland ecosystem with losses of biodiversity, archaeology, and of carbon storage and water management functions. Restoration techniques aim to raise water levels to allow the bog vegetation to thrive and return the system to one that is capable of forming and storing peat.

Without restoration, damaged peatlands will continue to deteriorate and in extreme situations this can occur at an alarming rate, with dramatic bog bursts and severe erosion causing costly damage to infrastructure such as water supplies. The carbon consequences can also be high, with estimates of 10 million tonnes of carbon dioxide being lost each year from the UK's damaged peatlands. The longer the damage continues, the more difficult and costly it becomes to restore the peatland back to a functioning system.

The Scottish Government already has a commitment to restore peatlands, in recognition of their climate change benefits⁵, as a biodiversity priority and as an important soil ecosystem. The UK Biodiversity target for blanket bog⁷ equates to around 800,000ha to be restored by 2015. With Scotland supporting over 80% of the resource it is reasonable to apportion around 600,000ha by 2015 for restoration. The Scottish Government has a variety of peatland restoration policies and funding measures available, such as those under the SRDP and payments for management of protected sites (SSSI and Natura 2000 areas). Forestry Commission Scotland has policies to support the removal of trees from peatland on private land and in the national forest estate. In the early 1980s large areas of peatland were planted with trees, resulting in a long-term net loss of carbon as well as damage to the peatland habitat and its important species. Environmental NGOs such as RSPB Scotland have undertaken large-

¹ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/ticc/documents/LetterfromtheMinister-190510.pdf>

² Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change, 2007. <http://www.peat-portal.net/index.cfm?&menuid=113>

³ Peatlands and GHG Emissions Reduction Opportunities in Scotland <http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/resources/47>

⁴ SNH Natural Heritage Trends, Scotland 2001, SNH, Battleby

⁵ Climate Change Delivery Plan: Meeting Scotland's Statutory Climate Change Targets <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/18103720/0>

⁶ Scottish Soil Framework <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/20145602/0>

⁷ UK Biodiversity Group (1999) Blanket bog Habitat action Plan. Tranch 2 Action Plans Vol IV. DEFRA

scale peatland restoration in recent years. The prime example of this is the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland. Probably the largest area of Atlantic blanket bog in the world, this 400,000ha blanket bog is one of the UK's showcase peatlands of international importance. A partnership of statutory bodies, NGOs and private individuals have agreed a strategy to help restore this damaged habitat, secure sustainable development and promote the benefits of a healthy peatland ecosystem. With the benefit of EU Life funding, large areas of drains have been blocked and plantation trees removed to help restore the peatland. Almost 10,000ha have so far been brought under restoration management.

Recently there has also been support for peatland restoration by the business community. In England many water companies, faced with spending millions of pounds for water treatment in damaged peatland catchments, have begun habitat restoration as a long-term cost saving exercise with benefits in some catchments of up to £2.5 million. Scottish Water faces similar problems of damaged peatlands affecting water supplies resulting in costly water treatment. There is potential for Scottish Water to use its priority catchment fund to target restoration of peatlands and reduce water treatment costs as well as help meet climate change and biodiversity targets. Such funding has been allocated by the Water Industry Commission but no action has, to date, been taken.

Several windfarm companies have also undertaken peatland restoration programmes as part of their site management, helping repair previously damaged peatlands.

Delivering peatland restoration

We welcome the Minister's announcement that peatland restoration will be included in greenhouse gas emissions inventory calculations⁸. However, it is essential that this is accompanied by a clear programme of activity to deliver that restoration. We believe that at the same time as making the announcement on the targets to Parliament, the Minister should announce a package of measures on peatlands. Whilst modest additional spending will help more speedy delivery of carbon reductions and reduce the long-term costs, much of the delivery can be achieved through more coordinated and focused activity within existing budgets. Some of the key areas we would suggest could bring immediate benefits are:

- A Ministerial Direction for the statutory agencies to deliver peatland restoration. Furthermore there should be a signal for key agencies such as SEPA, SNH and FCS to work cooperatively to help deliver restoration on both state-controlled and private land. FCS should be asked to review the area of deep peat in the State owned forests and identify areas for restoration. FCS must not be permitted to require replanting elsewhere to compensate for the removal of trees on peatlands, as this will inhibit progress.
- Planning authorities should be directed to enforce peatland restoration conditions associated with past peat extraction permissions and to avoid further consents (or the extension of existing consents) for commercial peat extraction.
- There should be improved targeting and promotion of SRDP funds towards restoring peatlands – existing measures do support peatlands but are often limited in scope and extent. For example, for land currently classified as forestry, payments for tree removal are not available through moorland management options but can only be accessed through the woodland improvement grant. Payments will only be granted to cover the costs of removing trees on 20% of the site, which limits recovery where large areas of bog have been planted. There is a need to introduce a measure covering 100% of the site so full costs of restoring an area of peatland could be covered. This should be addressed urgently.
- Scottish Water should be directed to use its priority catchment management fund to deliver peatland restoration in catchments affected by damaged peatlands.
- Scottish Government should provide pump-priming funds to support internationally important peatland restoration projects which are capable of drawing in additional EU funds such as EU Life money.
- The Central Scotland Green Network should ensure that a major programme of peatland restoration is included in its vision with at least 25% of the funding available being directed towards this.

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⁸ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/ticc/documents/LetterfromtheMinister-190510.pdf>