WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM IUCN UK PEATLAND PROGRAMME

Summary
Peatlands have been identified as vitally important in the global carbon cycle and could potentially have a significant role in national greenhouse gas (ghg) targets. Scotland supports the majority of the UK’s deep peat and much of this is in a damaged state, resulting in stored carbon being lost to the atmosphere.

Peatland restoration is an urgent biodiversity priority. Restoration action is a form of preventative spend, contributing to carbon targets and biodiversity objectives for the one cost. It is also cost-effective in reducing carbon emissions compared to the price of carbon and other carbon abatement technologies. Early spending avoids higher costs later on by avoiding the need for more expensive repairs as peatland degradation becomes more extreme.

There has been limited peatland restoration under current funding structures, mainly through SRDP. Identifying a specific peatland restoration fund under an enhanced climate change budget would signal leadership in delivering action and help lever in other resources.

Increased spending on peatlands under the 2012-13 budget will ensure Scotland is well placed to make the most of proposed international accounting guidelines for including peatland restoration in national ghg reporting.

The IUCN UK Peatland Programme welcomes this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on the Scottish Spending Review 2011 and Draft Budget 2012-13.

A recent IUCN UK Commission of Inquiry on Peatlands has been completed and the findings will be presented at the Scottish Parliament in November 2011. The evidence and reports for the Inquiry are available at: www.iucn-ukpeatlandprogramme.org/resources

“Restoration of peatlands is a low hanging fruit, and among the most cost-effective options for mitigating climate change.” Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Internationally, peatlands have been identified as a priority for action in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The UK is among the top ten countries in the world for its peatland extent, with Scotland holding over 70% of the UK’s deep peat soils1. The best available evidence suggests that the majority of Scotland’s peatlands are not peat forming, with over a third of blanket bogs in an eroded state. Even in the best protected sites, around 40% of blanket bog is in an unfavourable condition. When damaged, peatlands become major sources of carbon emissions. Restoring peatlands reduces these losses. Even taking account of temporary high methane emissions in some rewetting work, the benefits of restoration clearly outweigh the carbon losses from damaged peatlands. Research is ongoing to quantify these gains for different peatland restoration circumstances; however, indicative figures are available from recent research in the UK and Europe.

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1 http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5861#download
Guidance on accounting for the greenhouse gas savings from peatland restoration is being developed through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In the meantime there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that conserving and restoring peatlands provides climate change benefits. Investing now in peatland restoration is a ‘no regret’ option. Early action will provide ongoing emissions reductions which will be available to contribute towards Scotland’s climate change targets, even if they are not included in this current year’s greenhouse gas accounting. There are also the additional benefits of making progress against biodiversity targets to restore 600,000ha of blanket bog in Scotland; required by 2020 to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy. For the one cost, peatland restoration can help deliver these two sets of objectives. Delaying spending on peatland action will result in higher annual costs, as the time available to deliver the required level of restoration get shorter the closer we get to 2020.

**Peatland restoration and conservation is cost effective.** Blanket bogs are worth £226 million per year to the UK economy in terms of climate regulation and other services. The cost of restoring peatlands (£6 to £13/tonne CO$_2$e for drain blocking) compares favourably with other carbon abatement measures such as anaerobic digestion, forestry sequestration and renewable biomass or biogas heat generation. Delaying restoration action after a peatland has been damaged results in further deterioration, eventually leading to severe erosion, with a tenfold increase in restoration costs. Eroded peatlands also incur greater costs on society with higher levels of carbon loss and more severe problems for drinking water quality, which requires expensive treatment to resolve.

**Current public funding** for peatland management in Scotland is estimated to amount to between £2 million and £4 million per year, largely through payments under the Common Agriculture Policy, SRDP. Even applying mid range restoration costs (£250 per ha), this would only deliver around 15,000ha of peatland restoration per year. This is around a quarter of what would be required annually to meet 2020 targets. A total spend of nearer £15 million per year would be more realistic. Investment in promoting peatland restoration elements of the SRDP and making them more accessible would help increase uptake.

Not all of the funding would have to come from the SRDP, as for example money for peatland restoration may also be available under the Scottish Water Sustainable Land Management fund (£3 million pa from 2010-2015). The opportunity for private investment under carbon markets is still in its infancy for peatlands and will require some form of peatland code, standards and protocols to be developed. In the meantime, public funding for peatland restoration combined with effective monitoring of the carbon benefits will help inform the developing private markets, as well as national accounting.

Assuming that improvement to the take-up of payments under the SRDP resulted in a doubling of spend and that public bodies could contribute another £2 million pa would leave a shortfall of around £5 million pa that would be needed to deliver peatland restoration targets. Creating a specific peatland fund under an enhanced climate change budget could support a variety of activity aimed at ensuring the right level of partnerships and capacity to speedily implement restoration.

“**Peatland conservation is a prime example of a nature-based solution to climate change but we urgently need to switch from aspiration to action to secure the benefits that peatlands provide**” Julia Marton-Lefevre, IUCN Director General.

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2 [http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/resources/146](http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/resources/146)


4 [http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org](http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org)

Peatlands are included in the Government’s *Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP)* as a ‘Supporting and Enabling Measure’. While there is ongoing discussion about how and when to include the carbon savings from peatland restoration in the Scottish ghg budget, spending now on peatlands will speed up the process of delivery when an official accounting process is put in place. Identifying a core fund for peatland restoration would help support the rapid development of peatland restoration partnerships to prepare for action and enable the structure to be put in place to make best use of the range of other funds available, including attracting EU grants. Early investment in restoration pilots together with a coordinated programme of research to quantify the benefits for carbon, water and biodiversity, will also allow more accurate accounting at an early stage. In this way Scotland can show leadership beyond aspiration, by announcing clearly funded action on peatlands. This would be a welcome and powerful signal for other peatland nations to follow.

**Recommendations**

- Early action on peatland restoration should be supported through core Scottish Government funding, in the order of £5million, under an enhanced Climate Change budget for 2012-13.

- Peatland funding under SRDP and other potential sources from Scottish water, SEPA and SNH should be maximised and coordinated to ensure delivery against peatland restoration targets.

- Peatland restoration pilots should be supported with funding to allow effective partnerships at project level, national coordination through a peatland stakeholder hub and research/monitoring to better quantify the benefits of peatlands.

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6 [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21114235/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21114235/0)