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Strategy for the protection and sustainable use of soil

Last updated in October 2009

Latest Developments

On 24 September, the UK environment department, Defra, published a new strategy for soil protection in England. England's goal is to "significantly reduce" the rate of loss of stored soil carbon by 2020. In addition, other measures in the strategy include the development of a new action plan on peat protection in 2010 and code of practice for soil use on construction sites will also be addressed by next year.

The report sets out how the government plans to halt and reverse the degradation of England's soil over the next 20 years, working with farmers and other land managers, planners and construction companies to manage soil sustainably.

By 2050 the world will need to double current food production to feed a growing population. This would be possible only with healthy soils. Future sustainability of the UK's food supply will depend on maintaining the natural resources, including soil, on which production depends.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn announced that measures must be taken to protect and improve the United Kingdom's soil to meet rising demand for food and to combat climate change. Hilary Benn said: "Soil is one of the building blocks of life. Good quality soils are essential for a thriving farming industry, a sustainable food supply, and a healthy environment."

The strategy sets out how the government will:

- Support farmers in managing agricultural soil, and address the threats to it;
- Reduce the rate of loss of carbon in soil to tackle climate change, and use soil to help adapt to the impacts of climate change;
- Provide a framework for action to protect peat habitats;
- Protect soils in urban areas during development and construction;
- Value soils in the planning system;
- Prevent pollution of soils, and deal with the historic legacy of contaminated land.

Measures include:

- Guidance and training
- Advice for the agriculture industry on protecting and increasing soil organic matter
- Incentives and regulation to prevent soil degradation
- Monitoring of levels and threats to the soil

The UK was one of the countries that [blocked an agreement on a draft EU directive on soil protection](#). The country argued that the proposed directive was overly prescriptive, and [the issue could be better addressed at national level](#).



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[Video: Hilary Benn talks about the importance of soil](#)

[Defra Press Release](#)

The importance of adopting a [Strategy for the protection and sustainable use of soil](#), which remains blocked at the European Council level, was stressed during the European Union Green Week 2009 session on the biodiversity aspects of adaptation to climate change, which took place in Brussels on 24 June 2009.

Impact for golf management

- Course management
- Prevent soil degradation

Background

The European Commission published a Press Release on 5 March 2009 following a new report in which the **crucial role that soils can play in mitigating climate change** is underlined. The Commission indicated that soils contain around twice the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and three times the amount to be found in vegetation. Europe's soils are an enormous carbon reservoir, containing around 75 billion tonnes, and poor management can have serious consequences. According to the report, a failure to protect Europe's remaining peat bogs, for example, would release the same amount of carbon as an additional 40 million cars on Europe's roads. The report, a synthesis of the best available information on the links between soil and climate change, underlines the need to capture carbon in soils. The technique is cost competitive and immediately available, requires no new or unproven technologies, and has a mitigation potential comparable to that of any other sector of the economy. In line with the Thematic Strategy for soil protection, the current trend of soil degradation needs to be reversed, and soil management practices must be improved if a high rate of soil carbon capture is to be achieved.

Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: "Properly managed soils can absorb enormous quantities of carbon from the atmosphere, buying us valuable time to reduce emissions and move towards sustainability. But Europe's soils urgently need better protection, and the answer must be a coordinated solution. I welcome this report, which reinforces the message of the June 2008 Commission conference on Soil and Climate change, and gives a clear indication of the direction we need to take."

This Press Release which emphasizes the essential link between soil and climate change is in fact a political move and indicates the European Commission's desire to revive the 'Soil Quality Directive', which has been blocked at European Council level due to discrepancies between Member State positions.

Links



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Link to DEFRA website and "Save our Soils" Press Release:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2009/090924b.htm>

[Link to the "Green Week" homepage.](#)

Link to EC Press Release: "Climate change: Commission dishes the dirt on the importance of soil"

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/353&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for the protection of soil and amending directive 2004/35/ec

Environment: strategy for the protection and sustainable use of soil (amend. direct. 2004/35/EC)

Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection