Rural Policy Centre

SRUC

Draft Climate Change Plan RPP3

10 February 2017

Consultation Response

Leading the way in Agriculture and Rural Research, Education and Consulting

Environment, Climate Change, and Land Reform Committee
Submission from SRUC
Draft Climate Change Plan (RPP3)

Introduction

SRUC (Scotland's Rural College) welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government's Draft Climate Change Plan (RPP3), and values the opportunity to comment on the proposals for the agriculture sector. SRUC is an innovative, knowledge-based organisation that supports the rural sector through research, education and expert consultancy services. SRUC wishes to see, and contribute significantly to delivering, a sustainable agricultural and rural land use sector in Scotland.

SRUC staff work in a broad range of areas[1] and our response to the call for evidence to review the third Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP3) for the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan reflect this broad expertise drawing on research and consultancy knowledge and experience where appropriate. Several SRUC staff members have contributed to this submission[2] which has been coordinated by SRUC's Rural Policy Centre.

We recognise that the ambitious targets set for national GHG reduction will require significant efforts from the agriculture sector to reduce emissions and increase carbon sequestration. This is an area in which SRUC is heavily involved in research and consultancy activity, and we outline how this can support changes required in agriculture to deliver lower environmental impacts alongside an economically and socially sustainable industry. Indeed, SRUC have been heavily involved in providing scientific evidence on climate change mitigation to the Scottish Government[3] and the Committee on Climate Change[4] directly, and in collaboration with other Institutes in Scotland through the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme, and through the Centre for Expertise on Climate Change (ClimateXChange)[5] and through the new Centre for Knowledge Exchange and Impact.

In a similar vein to the Doing Better Initiative[6] to reduce red-tape in farming and land management, undertaken by Brian Pack, we are keen that the Scottish Government exhaust voluntary, or incentivised approaches (i.e. linked to support measures) to encourage wider uptake of mitigation measures before any regulated measures are introduced. This approach will give the industry time to promote the virtues of mitigation measures and facilitate voluntary uptake, against the backdrop of the threat of regulated actions.

Specific Policies and Measures

Forestry

Policy Outcome 1: SRUC is generally supportive of plans to upscale annual woodland creation rates. However, the plans as outlined, are overly reliant on making grants available for new planting and increasing the planting targets. As highlighted in Rural Scotland in Focus 2016 (Section 1.3), this alone will not be enough, and these are expanded upon below:

[1] For more information see www.sruc.ac.uk
[2] Vera Eory, Klaus Glenk, Davy McCracken and Joshua Bird
[3] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/01/5347
[4] www.theccc.org.uk/publication/scotlands-rural-collage-sruc-ricardo-energy-and-environment-2015-review-and-update-of-the-uk-agriculture-macc-to-assess-abatement-potential-for-the-fifth-carbon-budget-period-and-to-2050/
[5] http://www.climatexchange.org.uk/
[6] http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/doingbetter

- **Policy 1 & Proposals 1/3:**
  - The economic, environmental and social benefits to be gained from more woodland and forest are clear in Scotland. There are a range of practical and climate change associated challenges, but there is also lots of information and guidance available that address how many of these can be overcome. Furthermore, the work of the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group has considered in great detail the types of woodland or forests that would be most practical or appropriate to create in terms of where (i.e. types of land), and at what range of scales.
- **Policy 2/Proposal 2:**
  - Current woodland expansion targets are not being met despite grant availability. Therefore, more needs to be done to encourage greater plantings across a range of scales so that all types of land managers can see how they can contribute. In addition, simply planting new woodlands is not the entire answer because more needs to be done to ensure that new and existing woodlands can survive into the future in the face of ongoing climatic challenges and the spread of pests and diseases into Scotland.
- **Policy 3:**
  - There is clearly a need for more engagement with owners and managers of existing woodlands and forests to encourage more active management in native woodlands as well as restructuring of forests to make them more resilient. Engagement is also necessary to encourage new planting, at a variety of scales, to meet woodland expansion targets. Clearly there is a need for some more discussion about what range of additional incentives (such as tax incentives or establishing markets for carbon sequestration and offsetting) need to be put in place to allow this to happen in practice.
  - What is needed in particular is a change in land manager attitudes and perceptions to ensure that the necessary on-the-ground behavioural changes actually occur. There is still too much of a "business as usual" approach, not only among foresters, where many still do not see the need to increase the resilience of their woodlands and forests now and into the future, but also among farmers and other land managers, where many still do not see the need to integrate woodlands much more into their farms and estates to increase economic viability and long term business sustainability.
- **Policy 6:**
  - New forestry strategies will require finding ways to integrate new woodlands and forests into, and around, existing valued agricultural land, open space and wetlands. Society must also accept that there are trade-offs and compromises associated with any major land management practice or land use change.
  - This latter point is especially important because most of this expansion will have to occur on privately-owned land. Therefore, land managers' objectives and aspirations for the use of that woodland will also need to be accounted for when decisions are taken on what type of woodland goes where and at what scale.
  - The Scottish Government does seek to influence how and where this happens by providing incentives to encourage the development of woodland in ways most beneficial to society. These can help ensure woodland is created on the most suitable soils, support designs that improve landscapes on degraded urban fringes, and provide habitats for wildlife or mitigate diffuse pollution in watercourses.

Peatland

Policy outcome 1: SRUC welcomes the ambitious plan to restore 10,000 hectares of peatland per annum to good conditions until 2020, and 20,000 hectares thereafter. However, this means that peatland restoration efforts will have to be scaled up considerably. Research

within the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021 on public perceptions and values of peatlands are generally supportive of this ambition.

- **Policy 1:**
    - The research conducted jointly between SRUC, the James Hutton Institute and the University of Leeds investigated the public's acceptance and support in terms of willingness to pay (WTP) for peatland restoration. The research, based on a large scale survey of the Scottish population, **demonstrates widespread support for peatland restoration beyond those citizens that are generally environmentally concerned.**
    - Willingness to pay to restore peatlands, and thus to enjoy the (co-)benefits associated with restoration, are found to vary on average from £127 to £414 per hectare and year, depending on the degree of improvement (from bad or intermediate condition to good ecological condition) and where restoration take places. **Comparisons of benefits with average restoration costs suggest a considerable net welfare gain to society from peatland restoration is possible.**
    - With respect to location of restoration, a preference was found to restore peatlands in relatively remote and inaccessible areas (wild land areas), and in areas in which peatlands make up a large share of the land cover.
    - However, **more needs to be known about the costs of restoration**, both in terms of capital cost for implementing restoration and in terms of income forgone from alternative land use, and the potential private benefits of restoration to land owners. This is the subject of ongoing research in the SRP.
    - There may be economies of scale that help reduce capital costs over time. As a wider benefit, business opportunities for providers of restoration services may arise in rural areas. However, costs in terms of income forgone may only increase as the scale of restoration increases. **It is therefore important to consider the expansion of restoration in the context of the future rural and agricultural policy and associated support mechanisms.**
- **Policy 2**
    - This refers to the need for raising awareness by putting in place tools and information to help develop capacity, skills and knowledge of land managers and others. SRUC, together with other MRPs and the University of Leeds, aim to work together with Scottish Natural Heritage and partners in the private sector to deliver this policy outcome.
    - As part of the SG funded research, and in collaboration with water@Leeds at the University of Leeds, a framework was developed to represent the different conditions on Scottish peatlands and associated benefits. This framework has been developed into communication and awareness raising tools for landowners and the wider public, with support from SNH's Peatland Action team. The tools can be accessed via the links below:
        - Condition Assessment tool (for land managers): http://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/peatland-modules/?type=assess
        - Learning module (for wider public): http://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/peatland-modules/?type=learning