

# Soil Action Plan Advisory Forum Newsletter

## Issue 12: June 2006

### Actions

1. All AF members to let [Becca Taylor](#) know their availability for the next AF meeting, to be held in November 2006.
2. Please send any information to be included in the next newsletter to [Becca Taylor](#) by **Monday 24 July**. It is our intention to circulate the newsletter at the end of each month unless the volume of material is insufficient.

### EVI (Evidence and Access to Information)

1. A policy workshop on Soil Carbon was held in May to discuss the robustness of current evidence suggesting that soils in England and Wales have lost significant quantities of carbon over the last 25 years. Implications of this apparent trend for policy areas across Defra and the Devolved Administrations were considered and agreement reached on the need to address this issue.
2. A POSTnote on UK soil degradation has been produced by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, in liaison with colleagues from across Defra and UK industry. This is a briefing note intended for MPs and Peers, with a remit to provide 'independent and balanced analysis of public policy issues that have a basis in science and technology' – it therefore does not make any recommendations but rather gives an overview of the topic. Copies of the POSTnote can be obtained via the [POST website](#).

### AWE (Awareness and Education)

1. There are a number of forthcoming CIWEM conferences that might be of interest to AF members:
  - Groundwater Protection Policy and Practice: 17 October 2006.
  - Farming and Water: 22 November 2006.
  - World Wetlands Day: 31 January/ 1 February 2007

Further details can be obtained from Bob Earll: [bob.earll@coastms.co.uk](mailto:bob.earll@coastms.co.uk) or 01531 890415.



## SUS (Sustainable Soil Management)

1. It was previously reported that the Soil Thematic Strategy package was due to be adopted on 7 June 2006. This date has slipped and it is now expected in “third quarter 2006”. We are considering our options over the next few months in terms of further influencing the package to be adopted.
2. As mentioned at the May 2006 AF meeting, a workshop was held between 4 MS (Austria, Germany, Portugal and Spain) and European representatives (e.g. European Environmental Bureau, European Composting Network) on 31 May – 1 June to draw to the attention of the Commission the growing concern they perceived over the unwillingness of the Commission to specifically address the use of biowaste in the EU. The meeting illustrated the strong sense that the Commission’s decision to ‘shelve’ the plans to develop a Biowaste Directive were opposed to the opinions and wishes of a number of MS. A number of themes came through in discussion including that the recycling of biowaste must be environmentally sound; the management of biowaste requires a range of treatment options to be considered and evaluated; consumers must be assured of the product quality; there is increasing public support for the reuse of appropriate waste materials, need for further education; implementation of the Landfill Directive is a key driver in the use of biowastes; and management of biowaste needs to be viewed in the context of a broad range of strategies beyond the specifics of a possible Biowaste Directive.

## BUI (Soils in the Built Environment/Planning)

1. The second meeting of the Topsoil Standards Working Group took place in June. At this meeting it was reported the BSI had been receptive to the proposal to revise BS3882 which was presented to them at their meeting in May. Members of the Working Group are therefore to produce a revised draft of the Standard in fitting with the following Terms of References which were produced at the Working Group meeting. A revised version of “BS3882: Specification for Topsoil” should:
  - encompass all natural and manufactured topsoils which are sold or traded;
  - be based on the current edition of BS3882;
  - encourage suitable reuse of natural and manufactured topsoil;
  - revisit the current Standard’s grading system;
  - encourage a “fit-for-use” approach to sourcing and utilising topsoil;
  - place natural and manufactured soils on an equal footing, recognising that manufactured soils may be as or more appropriate for use in given circumstances;
  - acknowledge but not specifically treat soils for specialist applications;
  - consider a requirement for the origin of all natural soils to be specified;
  - revisit current sampling and testing protocols;
  - adequately consider potential physical, chemical and biological contaminants and indicators of good quality;
  - be easy to use by non soil scientists; and
  - be mindful of contemporary legislation.

In order to ensure that the revised Standard will be fit for the variety of purposes it will serve, we are carrying out a quick consultation exercise. If you have any comments on the above

Terms of Reference or on the current BS3882 in general, please send them to [topsoil@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:topsoil@defra.gsi.gov.uk) by **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August**.

2. DCLG have recently published for consultation revised circular and guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment. The consultation ends on 22 September 2006 and the [letter](#) inviting comments, as well as both the [circular](#) and [guidance](#) are available from the DCLG website. We shall be responding to the consultation in attempt to include additional information on soils in Appendix E of the guidance.
3. A seminar to promote the consideration of soil issues in the planning system was held in May. This event was mainly for the Government Offices, but there was also representation from Defra's Planning Policy Team, DCLG and the bodies that will comprise Natural England. This seminar was an important step in strengthening links between these various partners. Whilst soils are required to be considered in the planning system, principally through the provisions of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and a number of Planning Policy Statements, they have largely been omitted, or mentioned only very briefly, in documents such as Regional Spatial Strategies. Earlier discussions had identified a lack of soils expertise within Government Offices as a significant issue so the day served to identify partners for future work as well as highlighting the importance of soil protection.