

Soil Action Plan Advisory Forum Newsletter

Issue 17: May 2007

SUS (Sustainable Soil Management)

1. The Environment Agency has published a report examining the [total external environmental costs and benefits of agriculture in the UK](#). This includes a number of useful valuations of soil issues, including the impacts of poor soil structure, soil erosion and soil cultivation.
2. A couple of Parliamentary Questions have recently been asked on peat bogs and the role Defra is taking to mitigate losses of carbon from these. Full questions/answers are [available](#) (please note that the answers go onto the “next section”). It should be noted that the issue of halting the decline of soil carbon will form a key part of the forthcoming Soil Strategy for England.
3. Issue 11 of this newsletter brought your attention to the Environment Agency/WRAP consultation on a quality protocol for the production and use of quality compost from source-segregated biodegradable waste. The quality protocol has now been [published](#) and has three main purposes:
 - i) to clarify the point at which waste regulatory controls are no longer required;
 - ii) to provide users with confidence that the compost they purchase conforms with an approved standard;
 - iii) to protect the environment (including soil) and human health by outlining acceptable best practice for the use of quality compost.

Producers and users are not obliged to comply with the quality protocol, but if they do not, the compost will be considered to be a waste and waste regulatory controls will apply to its handling, transport and application.

BUI (Soils in the Built Environment/Planning)

1. As mentioned in Issue 11 of this newsletter, a Topsoil Standards Working Group was established to review BS3882 (Specification for Topsoil). A draft revised Standard was presented to the British Standards Institute (BSi) and is now out for public comment. Full details of this consultation are available on the [Defra website](#). Please note that the deadline for comment is **30 June 2007**, however, the Committee responsible for the draft is meeting on **6 June 2007**, so it would be helpful if comments could be submitted to the BSi before this date.

EVI (Evidence and Access to Information)

1. A project to describe the potential threats to organic soils in England and Wales, estimate their likely magnitude, occurrence and impact, and indicate the policy and management implications of these future threats and impacts, has reported: [Final Report](#).
2. The final report from research examining the feasibility of monitoring soil sealing (the permanent covering of the soil surface with an impermeable covering such as concrete) in the built environment using satellite remote sensing is now [available](#).
3. In response to reports that organic farming practices benefit a wide range of above-ground taxa through increases in abundance and/or species richness, a project was carried out to collate evidence on whether management practices that contribute to this effect above-ground similarly effect below-ground biodiversity. A report is now available addressing the question "Do farm management practices alter below-ground biodiversity and ecosystem function?": [Final Report](#).