

Natural England Position Statement: *Climate Change*

1.0 Key Issues

- Natural England’s position on climate change is shaped by our statutory duties and our purpose to conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Climate change represents the most serious long term threat to the natural environment because of the damage it will cause to ecosystems, the biodiversity, landscape value and services to society which they support.
- There is an urgent need to reduce global greenhouse gas pollution if we are to avoid potentially catastrophic impacts on the natural environment.
- There is an equally urgent need to develop strategies to enable the natural environment to adapt to the impacts of “locked in¹” climate change over the coming decades.
- Natural England is therefore committed to action on both mitigation and adaptation; and without adequate and timely action, adaptation will be increasingly challenging.
- Adaptation supports and adds value to many mitigation measures e.g. reducing the erosion of upland peat to enhance its resilience also reduces its emissions of carbon to atmosphere, a key mitigation measure.
- Some forms of adaptation, including ‘soft’ engineering measures to prevent and manage flooding, are more sustainable than others and do not limit the capacity of other areas or natural and man-made systems to successfully adapt – this is the essence of sustainable adaptation.
- Climate change will impact on the natural environment both directly and indirectly through society’s responses to climate change: action is needed to ensure that the resilience of the natural environment is increased and protected.

2.0 We believe

- A healthy, resilient natural environment, hallmarked by a rich diversity of habitat and species, is the bedrock of successful adaptation; and in protecting this, we also safeguard ecosystem services vital to society and the economy.
- Proper valuation of natural assets, including ecosystem services, will greatly assist decision makers faced with difficult choices in the decades ahead.
- Timely and sustainable adaptation will prove to be good value for money.
- There is a need for an integrated statutory framework and adaptation programme for cross sector action on climate change adaptation with the adaptation of natural environment as a major underpinning element.

¹ The climate change that will occur as a result of past and current patterns of energy production and consumption and other greenhouse gas producing activities

- The programmes of action should be informed by rigorous assessments of risk to and vulnerability of the natural environment.
- Assessments, plans, action and evaluation should take a fully integrated approach, recognising the inter-connectedness of our natural systems.
- In the future, land use designations need to become more dynamic to enable species to move to more suitable habitats, without damaging the vital levels of protection current designations offer.
- Peat land restoration should be a priority action in mitigating climate change, as should conservation of permanent grassland, woodland and other carbon-rich habitats.
- Land managers have an important role to play as carbon managers and should be offered incentives to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and improve ecological resilience.

3.0 We call for

- The Climate Change Act to provide a statutory basis for successful and sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- The Climate Change Act to provide the power to the Secretary of State to require public bodies to carry out an assessment of the risks and impacts of climate change and develop, implement and report on programmes to adapt to climate change.
- Statutory guidance to inform and shape adaptation strategies by public bodies in line with known adaptation principles.
- An EU White Paper on adaptation to climate change which provides an EU-wide framework for adaptation which is integrated with other EU legislation and programmes (including the UK's Climate Change Act and framework).
- New legislation and fiscal measures to be 'climate-change-proofed' to prevent significant new legislative barriers to adaptation arising in the future.
- Robust measures of the adaptation of the natural environment to be included in the Climate Change Public Service Agreements (PSA).
- A planning system which anticipates climate change and provides for the adaptation of the natural environment, in urban and rural areas.
- Carbon trading and carbon offset schemes which provide incentives for land management practices that deliver measurable savings in greenhouse gas pollution.
- Marine and coastal management proposals to be designed in anticipation of the impact of climate change and the need for adaptation.
- Environmental protection legislation which requires effective adaptation to climate change, without compromising current levels of protection, safeguarding present and future site value.
- High, demonstrable levels of achievement by local authorities against their new performance indicator on climate change.
- Land managers who contribute to carbon management to have access to domestic offsetting and other incentives.

May 2008