

APPG for Wetlands – Minutes of the 4th Meeting

Committee Room 7, 24 October 2022 at 5 pm

Attendees (MPs and Peers)

Siobhan Baillie MP (Chair)
The Earl of Leicester (Officer)
Sally-Ann Hart MP (Officer)
Lord Blencathra
The Earl of Caithness
Douglas Chapman MP
Lord Lucas
Lord Taylor of Holbeach

Opening remarks from the Chair

Introduced the role of blue carbon in addressing climate change and introduced the meeting's topic of the funding and policy framework needed to support blue carbon. Spoke about the Blue Recovery Leaders Group of businesses WWT is coordinating and about the role of businesses in moving this agenda forward.

Presentations from outside speakers

Angus Garbutt, Senior Ecologist; coastal specialist, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology Angus

Angus began the presentation by speaking about the saltmarsh that exists already. He presented maps of the saltmarsh distribution in the UK, Europe and globally, emphasising the fact that saltmarsh restoration is not just a local issue it is a national and global one. He emphasised the importance of creating a framework for investment in saltmarsh that is scalable to have the maximum impact.

He then spoke about saltmarshes in culture. He spoke about saltmarshes in fiction, particularly their role in providing a refuge for those marginalised in society. He also painted a picture of how they are associated with mystery and suspense. He highlighted the following books: Heart of darkness by Joseph Conrad, Great Expectations by Charles Dickens, Secret Water by Arthur Ransome, and Manka the Sky Gypsy by Denys Watkins-Pitchford. He spoke about lyrical ecology and how this positively impacted the perception of saltmarshes, although saltmarshes have been in the public perception for years. He emphasised that saltmarshes provide cognitive restoration as well as habitat restoration. They symbolise wellbeing, freedom and meaningfulness.

He explained they are an investable product as they provide a multitude of services: carbon storage, fisheries, erosion control, culture, water purification (filtering out nitrates), biodiversity, coastal protection.

He closed on the topic of seascapes, saying saltmarsh is connected to oyster beds, mud flats etc and we should see them as a seascape rather than an individual habitat.

Annette Burden, Wetland Biogeochemist, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology

Annette gave background on her work including working on a peatland carbon code as well as saltmarsh. She explained the evidence on the carbon storage benefits of saltmarsh

restoration: current data is highly variable and limited so there is a need for better data to determine a more reliable average figure for carbon storage by saltmarsh. Carbon storage highly depends on where you are, how long post-restoration you are etc. We need to know the core driving factors for the variation.

She spoke about inclusion of saltmarsh in the UK Greenhouse Gas Inventory (GGI). In 2020, BEIS commissioned a report which outlines key evidence gaps which hinder the inclusion of coastal wetlands in the UK GGI. We need to fill these gaps to allow us to bring saltmarsh creation into the GGI. They have recently brought peatland into the inventory so there is scope to do the same with saltmarsh. She explained that the UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership is looking into carbon storage rates as well as the multiple benefits of saltmarsh. The group will produce an evidence statement that will outline all the evidence gaps that needs to be addressed.

She spoke about the UK Saltmarsh Carbon Code, which is being support by the UK Government Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. It is a voluntary code to attract private funding but both the code and GGI have an evidence based approach.

She explained another piece of missing evidence is that we don't currently have a unified map of where saltmarshes are. In particular, we have six times more data on natural saltmarshes than on restored. Lack of consistent terminology around saltmarshes also makes it difficult to estimate the carbon burial rates (sequestration, storage and accumulation are some of the terms used).

She explained that the UK Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement has a commitment on adaptation through coastal wetlands but not they are not mentioned as a mitigation element.

Tom Dyke, Corporate Finance Manager, Triodos Bank

Tom gave the group background on Triodos Bank; 'The bank's mission is to tackle climate change and social inequality through the positive use of money'. He noted the Bank measures the results of projects in terms of the impact on emissions and they are one of the only banks to publically report on their emissions.

He explained why wetlands are important for the bank: their net emissions are 360,000 tonnes and their target is net zero by 2035. They are unable to reach their target through reduction alone so they must use a combination of reduction and offsetting.

He explained the evidence that they have seen on saltmarsh restoration is promising. He highlighted the need to develop revenue models that help create projects that are ready to start investing in. He spoke about the need to pin down the timing of ecosystem services being delivered after restoration, so investors have confidence to invest, and to establish the range of services being delivered.

The immediate challenge is to provide evidence of where the challenges are and how we can deliver saltmarsh through private finance. WWT, Jacobs, Triodos and National Grid are working together to deliver a project demonstrating a commercial model. It hopes to demonstrate how projects delivering long-term ecosystem services as well as ongoing management can work. Currently, the market isn't mature enough for investors to be able to understand the risks so they can't move capital into the space. Potential areas that need to be addressed are design, governance and operation. He also stressed ultimately we need to improve demand side appetite.

He explained the saltmarsh carbon code is important to establish approved accreditation mechanisms so that investors can have confidence in what they are investing in.

Questions

Lord Taylor of Holbeach: asked to what extent the panel considered the Wash as a model for restoration. He explained there is a proposal to use the Wash for energy generation and he believes it is better to protect the natural resources of the Wash.

Angus Garbutt replied: he has worked on the Wash. He would be surprised if a barrage was built due to the importance of the Wash for wildlife and heritage. The Wash is muddy so there are also huge stocks of carbon around there.

Lord Blencathra: asked how you bring about the creation of saltmarsh. Asked what the obstacles are e.g. farmers and landowners. Asked how much carbon is already locked in natural flood management projects.

Dr James Robinson (Director of Conservation, WWT) replied: managed realignment is the best way to do it. We need a coalition of the willing to show that this is very investable product that can solve many issues at once.

Sally-Ann Hart: asked if it would help if we had more wetland ponds around towns to help with surface run off?

Angus Garbutt replied: saltmarsh plants take up nitrates and phosphates. The whole landscape should be considered, with a series of freshwater wetlands around catchments and then saltmarshes around coastal areas.

Annette Burden replied: there has been some work on freshwater wetlands. To be an investable product they need to demonstrate stacked benefits.

Sarah Fowler (Chief Executive, WWT) replied: we need an interconnected conversation with water companies, developers etc so we can develop that proof of concept for urban wetlands.

James Merchant (Marine Natural Capital Analyst, MCS) asked: what is needed to develop funding mechanisms.

Tom Dyke replied: there are 3 pillars in terms of design, governance and operation. We need to begin with the carbon code so that people actually having confidence in it as an investment. From a system and standards perspective, we can't just focus on carbon, it needs to be multiple benefits. There needs to be a business case, if we are not going to mandate net zero what other mechanisms are there to motivate that investment.

Sarah Fowler replied: we need to look at how we create unlikely alliances to drive wetland creation.

Concluding remarks from the Chair

Asked parliamentarians to follow-up by asking parliamentary questions on blue carbon. Also noted that once we have the ministers in place we will have further follow-ups to do. Thanked everyone for attending and thanked the speakers.

Event concluded 6 pm