

**News Release**

**Environmental Standards Scotland: Scotland's soils should be protected in law**

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) is recommending the Scottish Government bring forward legislative proposals to protect Scotland's soils.

A report published today by ESS, [The Risks to Scotland's Soils: A Scoping Report](#), highlights the need for action to safeguard this valuable resource, which provides a habitat for over half of the world's species, helps to reduce climate change and its impacts and underpins the vast majority of Scotland's food.

The report says more must be done to prevent further degradation of the country's soil, which is a non-renewable resource that cannot be replaced, and measures to protect it should be put into law. In Scotland, soil erosion, compaction and reduced crop yield caused by lower water retention, cost the economy up to £125 million per year although the true cost of soil degradation is likely to be significantly higher.

Compacted soils, which are caused by construction, increasingly heavy farm machinery and livestock and recreational activities, retain less water. This increases flooding, further increases erosion and decreases biodiversity and drought resistance. Every 1% rise in flooding as a result of soil degradation could lead to an increase in local authority flood damage costs of £2.6 million per year, in addition to the costs of insurance claims for each property damaged by the rain.

Other countries have legislated to place monitoring and protection of soils on a statutory footing. However, in Scotland the legislative landscape for soils is fragmentary and largely aims to protect other environmental areas (such as water) from poor management of soils, rather than soils itself.

Mark Roberts, CEO of ESS, said: “The Scottish Government, formerly a world leader with the Soils Framework, is now falling behind international best practice with regards to statutory proposals to monitor and protect soils. Our report recommends that the Scottish Government bring forward legislative proposals that reflect developments in Europe – such as the European Union’s (EU) Nature Restoration Law and proposed Soil Monitoring Law – so that it can meet its commitment to align with EU standards where appropriate.”

Roberts added that ESS’ initial scoping report also reveals that there is a lack of research on risks to Scotland’s soil: “A lack of research means that we do not fully understand or know the impacts on several risks to Scotland’s soils. Improving the evidence base on soil will improve the effectiveness of environmental law in Scotland. That’s why today we are also recommending the Scottish Government and the wider public sector, commission monitoring and research on the risks to Scotland’s soils so we have better data to understand and protect this valuable resource.”

**ENDS**

## **Notes to editors**

### **The Soils Framework**

The Scottish Soils Framework was published by Scottish Government in 2009. However, unlike soil frameworks in other countries, it was not developed with the intention of enacting it into law. The main aim of the framework was to promote sustainable management and protection of soils. The framework identified “soil outcomes” and the actions required to achieve them, including proposing the introduction of a soil monitoring action plan. Only a small number of tasks in the action plan have been implemented and there is currently no systematic nationwide monitoring scheme in Scotland.

### **About this report**

A scoping and framing report is used by ESS in the initial stages of problem solving to understand and agree on the nature and scope of the problem in context before carrying out further work. In this context, the report also focusses on the national level rather than the local. ESS plan on using the scoping report to build further work.

### **About Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS)**

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