

Aligning Policy Instruments for Biodiversity, Soil and Water

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**This summarises the longer report - 1.4.2biD2 “Report on Aligning Mechanisms” for RESAS
SRP WP1.4 “Integrated and Sustainable Management of Natural Assets”**



¹ This report is also available at: <http://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/analysing-how-policy-instruments-shape-soil-water-and-biodiversity>

Summary of Aligning Policy Instruments for Biodiversity, Soil and Water

Purpose of the Research

We explored the governance and management of Scotland's natural assets of biodiversity, soil and water. These assets provide us with multiple benefits that are essential to our social and economic development; however, they are sometimes in poor condition or at risk of degradation. Several policies have goals related to protecting or improving the condition of our environment: however, each policy has been separately designed, has different objectives (usually relating to single assets) and also specifies different means by which these should be achieved (e.g. different policy instruments).

Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand if and how policy instruments currently interact, and to help identify opportunities to align policy instruments through coordination or integration. Realising these opportunities offers the potential to better deliver multiple benefits and to make policy delivery both more effective and more efficient. The findings relate to the 'public funding for public goods' ideas that are part of discussions on potential post-Brexit environmental and agricultural policies. They are interim findings that will evolve and be updated as we explore new governance opportunities in the next few years.

Focus of the Research

We analysed ten policy instruments designed to safeguard or improve the condition of natural assets in both rural and urban Scotland, as shown in Figure 1 on the next page. The total set of instruments operating in Scotland is much longer; we purposively choose these ten to represent the diversity of different types of instrument e.g. voluntary, regulatory, incentive-based or hybrid (combining one or more of the other categories) and to explore the effects on different types of natural asset (e.g. water, biodiversity and soil). The focus was on interaction and alignment within the environmental policy domain, though the data and analysis often illustrate the interplay of environmental instruments with other policies, projects and partners.

Methodology

The research used a two-phase approach. Firstly, a desk-based analysis of the ten policy instruments, used official documentation to answer common questions encompassing the objective, content and implementation of the instruments. We then carried out interviews with those who had designed or implemented the instruments. Our sample of 17 interviewees came from Scottish Government or its agencies. In some cases one individual was interviewed about more than one instrument. The interview participants were given an opportunity to comment on the draft findings; and these were also shared with participants at the Soil Engagement Group meeting (16/3/18).

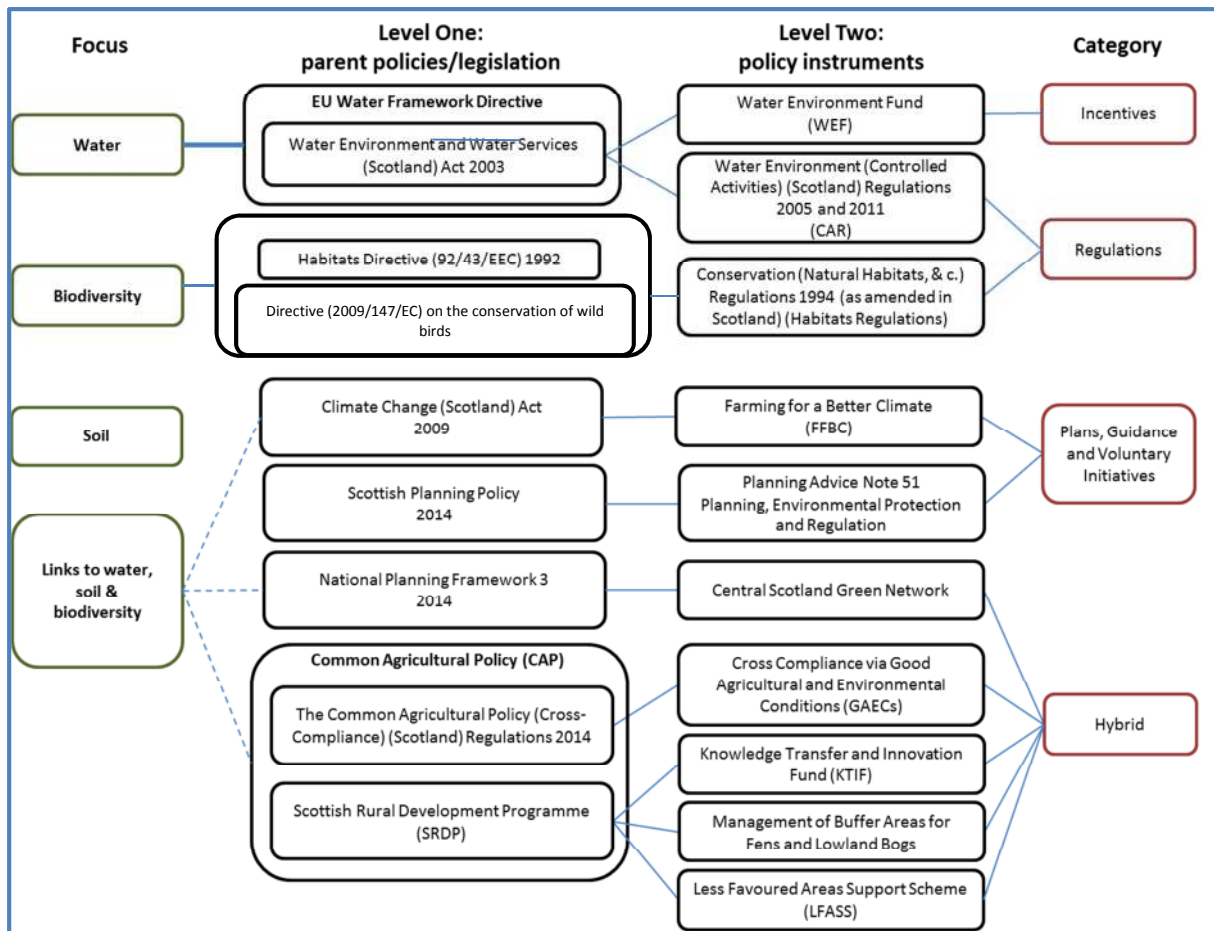


Figure 1: Policy Instruments chosen as the focus of this study

Are existing policy instruments delivering multiple benefits?

Our data suggest that most instruments do affect more than one natural asset, even though each has been created to help protect or manage one natural asset. For example, the Natural Heritage Regulations are targeted at terrestrial or aquatic biodiversity, but are implemented in ways that try to also protect soil and water quality where possible. This is good news as it shows that current policy delivery already shows some signs of coherence or integration. However, there are opportunities to do more, particularly in terms of protection of soil health, air quality, climate mitigation or increasing habitat and biodiversity gains. There are often relatively few instruments explicitly designed to manage these assets. Furthermore, the mix of instruments tends not to provide comprehensive coverage of settings and activities that can affect the asset. For example, biodiversity protection is mostly achieved by regulatory instruments applying only to specific designated areas, whilst soil management is expected to be achieved almost entirely by voluntary or hybrid measures. Imbalances in the mix of instruments available to achieve different policy goals could make it harder to achieve balanced delivery of multiple benefits. When considering if the mix of instruments should change, our interviewees showed more appetite for using voluntary rather than regulatory instruments.

Are there opportunities for better alignment? Does this mean coordination or integration?

We found no evidence of conflict between instruments and many layers of alignment. Many of our instruments are already complex and require working within or across organisations, and linking up diverse stakeholders. Most instruments already have formally recorded lists of other instruments

that they complement. There is considerable effort, often invisible externally, to avoid duplication or conflict by those charged with implementing different instruments. In addition to these efforts, our interviewees did identify opportunities for better alignment between instruments: including an opportunity for cross-compliance to achieve more for soil and climate change, and making more formal connection between CAR or GAEC and the PEPFAA code. Whilst there was debate about the exact definition of coordination and integration, our data suggests that most participants were in favour of closer coordination - meaning deliberate but informal working together for common outcomes - but were less keen on formally integrating instruments or organisations.

What are the challenges and opportunities for using policy instruments to deliver multiple benefits? Many of the challenges relate to the difficulties of partnership working in economically constrained contexts. Thus the challenges and desired changes closely correspond. Our interviewee's main ideas for changes can be categorised as: Capacity building; Implementation change; Different focus (on other natural assets or other problems); Resources; Attitude; Change in instrument; and Better evaluation. Furthermore, some participants noted that it is not always possible to achieve multiple benefits and some prioritisation, tailored to local circumstances, may be required.

There are gaps to fill, and changes desired, in order that policy instruments can help deliver balanced and coherent management of all of our natural assets, in order to deliver multiple benefits for society. Stakeholders that we have spoken to recognise challenges to achieving this, but also feel positive. Many felt that there were already strong relationships between the main actors (Scottish Government and their agencies) and that there is an increasingly business friendly approach that can help increase engagement with land and urban businesses. Brexit was seen as creating uncertainty around future environmental standards and agri-environmental funding, but it was also seen as an opportunity to reflect and realign and also to champion the importance of the environment to Scotland.

For further information or to discuss the findings in more depth, please contact Kirsty.Blackstock@hutton.ac.uk.

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