

Committee on Climate Change
7 Holbein Place
London SW1W 8NR

Huw Irranca-Davies MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

14th January 2016

Dear Huw,

Written evidence from the Committee on Climate Change on Soil Health

On behalf of the Committee on Climate (CCC) and the Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC), I am pleased to submit written evidence to inform your Committee's inquiry into soil health.

We very much welcome this inquiry. The health of the UK's soils is of critical importance for the productive capacity of our agricultural land. A combination of population and economic growth are expected to increase global demand for food in the future. At the same time, climate change could reduce the capacity of the land globally to keep pace with growing demand. It is, therefore, essential that we are doing all we can to protect the long-term productive capacity of our agricultural soils.

It is increasingly being recognised that soils provide a wide range of critical services and benefits to society beyond food production. From a climate change mitigation perspective soils play a key role in storing carbon, but degraded soils are also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. Measures to improve the management of soils and restore degraded land therefore directly contribute to meeting our carbon budgets.

We are also becoming more aware of the vital role that healthy soils play in the water cycle. More water is stored in the UK's soils than is contained in all of our lakes and rivers combined. Ensuring that soils are able to retain water, rather than losing it quickly as run-off during periods of heavy rainfall, can help reduce downstream flood risk. I suggest that your Committee's inquiry considers the possible contribution that degraded soils in the uplands may have made to the devastating flooding experienced in northern England and Scotland in recent weeks.

Despite the importance of healthy soils to the economy and society, the CCC and ASC concluded in our 2015 progress reports that the policy framework for soil protection is relatively weak. A number of key trends in soil health appear to be going in the wrong direction, and it is unlikely that current policy interventions are sufficient to turn these trends around. Your inquiry is timely, as there is an opportunity to strengthen policy with Defra's forthcoming 25 year plan for the natural environment.

As statutory independent advisers to Parliament, members of both the CCC and ASC frequently meet with a range of Select Committees to provide input into their hearings. We will, of course, be more than happy to provide further evidence as your inquiry develops.

Yours ever,



PROFESSOR LORD KREBS Kt FRS
Chair, Adaptation Sub-Committee