

**AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
22 JUNE 2001**

The State of the Environment – Soil Quality Report

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To inform the Committee of the recently published State of the Environment – Soil Quality Report by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

BACKGROUND

- 2 As a result of the increased recognition of the importance soil plays in the environment, the British Government in response to a forthcoming European Directives gave a commitment to produce a national strategy for the protection of soil. This report forms the initial stage in the process of adopting such a strategy for Scotland. The principle aims of the document are to identify the main pressures affecting soil quality, increase awareness to the issue and examine methods to increase protection through the existing legislative framework.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3 This paper focuses on the strategic implications of the report and as such a detailed analysis is not appropriate. However, a number of comments can be made:

- (i) Main Impacts on Soil Quality

The report identifies past and present industrial processes, agricultural and forestry practices, the application of organic waste to land and acid deposition as the main factors affecting the quality of soils in Scotland. Although a number of these practices are now monitored, to date there is no comprehensive system in place to review the previous impacts of these processes. In addition, current monitoring does not cover the extensive range of possible impacts and occurs infrequently.

The Report therefore recommends a quantitative assessment of the Scottish soil resource be undertaken, integrated within a long-term soil monitoring strategy.

This is to be welcomed, as it would build upon the current suite of strategic monitoring data sets held by the Structure Plan team and provide a more reasoned basis for determining land use development proposals within Ayrshire.

(iii) Current Legislative Framework

Current environmental legislation and environmental standards do not specifically seek to protect soils from inappropriate impacts. Rather, they are aimed at mitigating certain aspects or emissions that emerge from either industrial, agricultural or forestry practices. The linkage between water, air quality and soil quality has gained credence and as such greater protection of all three is sought through greater integration of existing legislative.

The Report also recommends that SEPA integrate soil protection within a new Scottish soil strategy developed in partnership with other regulators. In addition, protocols should also be formulated to protect soil from emissions by operations that are within SEPA regulatory control. This proactive approach to the identification of contaminated soil, and monitoring and regulation of potential polluters is to be congratulated. The recognition of soil within this ‘State of the Environment Report’ as a non-renewable resource essential to a sustainable environment is therefore welcomed.

CONCLUSION

- 4 The recognition of the need to protect soil quality has arisen over recent years following greater research into the linkage between air, water and soil. Agricultural practices, acid deposition and the application of organic wastes to land threaten the current long-term sustainable use of soils. The lack of an established monitoring system to inform and regulate these practices further hinders the sustainable use of this resource. Therefore, the decision by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency to introduce a comprehensive monitoring system integrated within a national soil strategy and regulated through the stricter application of existing legislation is to be welcomed and commended.

RECOMMENDATION

- 5 It is recommended that the committee note the contents of this report.

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