

Cross-Institute Programme for Sustainable Soil Function

SoilCIP

Newsletter for November 2008



Disbanding of the Soils Research Advisory Committee

From an e-mail from Karl Ritz, Chair of SRAC: A joint letter has been sent from NERC and BBSRC to all members of the Soils Research Advisory Committee informing them that the Committee has now been disbanded. The rationale for this is given in some detail and essentially relates to the mechanisms by which BBSRC and NERC have now developed – and wish to develop - their strategies.

Paraphrasing, for NERC *“Theme leaders are based in the research community, where they are well placed to forge appropriate links with and between providers, users and other funders of research, and work flexibly by obtaining advice from a wide variety of sources in a timely manner”*. With respect to BBSRC, *“the Council’s delivery structure is about to change with the introduction of four new responsive-mode committees, each with a broad remit and a wider pool of expertise to draw upon in order to assess appropriately all of the applications it is asked to consider. In addition, the role and mode of operation of the Council’s Strategy Advisory Board (previously Strategy Board) is being refreshed to provide greater clarity of focus.”*

There is thus a joint move away from standing bodies towards the greater use of ad hoc groups to carry out specific, time-limited tasks. In these circumstances, *“SRAC is becoming increasingly anomalous, and BBSRC and NERC believe that the time has come when the Committee’s role can be carried out effectively within - and between - their new structures without the need for a standing body”*.

Countryside Survey 2007 published

From the website:

Countryside Survey is a unique study of the natural resources of the UK countryside involving a detailed field survey of habitats, vegetation, freshwater and soils across England, Scotland and Wales. A separate study of habitats is undertaken in Northern Ireland and where possible results are brought together to report for the UK. The findings are used in scientific research and to inform policy development for the management of the countryside. The first Countryside Survey was in 1978 and it has been developed and expanded every time it was repeated in 1984, 1990, 1998 and 2007. Data is collected using rigorous scientific methods so that the results from successive surveys can be compared with those from previous years. The collection of data over time enables the gradual and subtle changes in the UK countryside to be detected, studied and related to possible causes. In 2007, the survey teams collected data from 591 sample squares (1.0km x 1.0km) in Great Britain and 288 sample

squares (0.5km x 0.5km) in Northern Ireland. This field data was recorded electronically using new, specially developed digital data capture technology. The UK level findings of the latest survey are being published in two reports:

- Countryside Survey - UK Headline Messages from 2007
- Countryside Survey - UK Results from 2007

The Survey can be downloaded from:

<http://www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk/reports2007.html>

British Society of Soil Science Spring 2009 meeting

Details of the BSSS Spring 2009 Conference 'Predicting the future for highly organic soils' at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, from 5-9 May 2009, are in the flyers below. A double-click on each will bring up the full weblinked document (I think!). They contain hyperlinks for further information and registration.



All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development

The 'All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development' will bring together those Parliamentarians concerned with the science of Agriculture, its impact on sustainable development and the overarching aim of the alleviation of poverty. In this context, 'science' refers to both technical and social sciences.

The Group will approach these broad issues from a stand point that the Millennium Development Goals and the problems posed by environmental challenges such as climate change and issues surrounding Food Security will only be meaningfully addressed by the much fuller, and more skilful, use of Agriculture [including agricultural science] as an engine for development. In this respect, the term 'Agriculture' is deemed to embrace farming (crops and livestock), forestry, agro-forestry, fisheries as well as wider rural development and conservation issues.

The Group sees agricultural research as a vitally important aspect within this matrix, with special reference to the disciplines of Agriculture, agronomy, biology, soil science, crop protection, agricultural engineering, agricultural economics, rural sociology, geography, environmental science, ecology, animal health and production, fisheries, water resources and related spheres of study.

The APPG aims to develop and apply its influence at Westminster to increase effective support for these objectives via engaging with Parliamentarians and the

various mechanisms of Parliament itself to improve the support given by the British Government, and the international community more generally, to supporting farmers and other stakeholders in developing countries. This would also include the wide use of agricultural research outputs as a means to contribute to the elimination of poverty.

Its website is at: <http://www.agricultureandfoodfordevelopment.org/>

Judy Mann attends meetings on behalf of RRes, BBarn and NWRes. Please contact Judy if you have any queries or points you want to raise.

BIOSCIENCES FEDERATION

**Report on science policy
October 2008**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Despite the failings in our science education, it’s still easier for the average Scot to explain the purpose of the Hadron Collider than the Curriculum for Excellence.” (The Sunday Times, 14th September).

RESEARCH COUNCILS & CHARITIES

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council has announced a series of changes to the way it funds and assesses research, with fewer advisory committees and a wider variety of panel members on its boards. Under the plan, the BBSRC will create four new research committees from the existing seven and hire a pool of reviewers who will be drafted in to add their expertise to core committees when required. It will also move forward with a smaller number of research and policy priorities. However, chief executive Douglas Kell denied that this would mean neglecting fundamental science in favour of industry focused research. http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/media/releases/2008/081020_changes_peer_review.html

IUSS Alert – 42 (October 2008) New IUSS Bulletin

IUSS Bulletin 113 has been published. It starts with a poem on mother earth inspired by the International Year of Planet Earth celebrations. The Year has sparked activities and resulted in media attention in many countries across the globe. This is followed by an extensive report of the IUSS Council Meeting in Brisbane, Australia by Stephen Nortcliff. Niek de Wit and Rattan Lal discuss soil legislation in the EU and the USA – important areas of change that show that soils are on the policy agenda. Raphael Viscarra Rossel from CSIRO in Australia reports on proposal to establish a global spectral library – new stuff that will appeal to many soil scientists across the world. I think this uniting call falls under soil science crowdsourcing and it is something that will enhance our efficiency and global impact. The well-known Five Questions to a Soil Scientist are answered by: Yuji Niino (Thailand), Stalin Torres (Venezuela), Eddy de Pauw (Syria) and Selim Kapur (Turkey). Johan Bouma discusses his three favourite soil science books followed by the recent awards and honours to Dan Yaalon (Israel), Noorallah G. Juma (Canada), Amy Brock, Adrienne

Ryan, and Donald Sparks (USA). And much more. Click www.iuss.org to download a high resolution (24 Mb) or low resolution (3 Mb) version of this new IUSS Bulletin.

Anyone want a job in New Zealand?

Scientists – Greenhouse Gas Exchange & Soil Carbon

Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research – is New Zealand's leading provider of solutions and advice for the sustainable development and management of land-based natural resources. Our vision is to develop and share innovative science for a sustainable future. Our Global Change Processes team requires two Scientists with specialist skills in soil carbon and/or agricultural greenhouse gases. These roles will form an important part of our well-funded programmes that focus on the processes regulating the storage of carbon and emission of carbon dioxide and other agricultural greenhouse gases from the soil. Our research covers all land use types including grazed pastures, regenerating shrublands and both native and exotic forests.

The aim is to develop assessment tools and options for both mitigating carbon loss and minimising greenhouse gas emissions in relation to land-use change. The team works closely with government agencies to assist them to develop inventories and policies for minimising greenhouse gas emissions.

For these opportunities we will consider candidates from a range of backgrounds and interests. However it is essential that you possess both a PhD and ongoing work experience broadly relevant to soil carbon research and/or greenhouse gas exchange. You should also be capable in leading research programmes, developing relationships with research users, mentoring other team members and in facilitating multi-disciplinary projects.

Both opportunities are full-time and open-term. We are seeking to locate one person with the team based at Massey University in Palmerston North, and the other will be based at Lincoln, near Christchurch. *For further information please contact David Whitehead on whitehead@landcareresearch.co.nz*

To apply, please lodge your details on our online application form at www.landcareresearch.co.nz/jobs.

Applications close Sunday, 7 December 2008.

Keith Goulding, 30th November 2008