Policy

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Send us your writing if you would like it reviewed.

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Questions?
Dr Cristiana Vagnoni

Biological Sciences and Health adviser at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

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How to write for a parliamentary audience

Dr Cristiana Vagnoni
Biological Sciences and Health Adviser

12th February 2021
UK Parliament and Government
What is a parliamentary audience
Who uses research in Parliament
What makes a good briefing
Targeting your briefing at Parliament
Research Impact
Parliament ≠ Government

UK Parliament

- Commons, Lords and Monarch
- Holds Government to account
- Makes laws
- Enables the Government to raise and spend money

UK Government

- Some MPs and some Peers, chosen by the Prime Minister
- Runs Government departments and public services
- Is accountable to Parliament
Who are you writing for?
(and why should they care?)

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influence policy/planning
decision makers
don't specialists
People with the purse strings
Funding councils
the less informed
Non-experts
environmental and industry
implications of geoscience
aim to remain in their position

Dare I confess my ignorance except just that non-experts
people who will decide how to spend money
our info will help in taking wise decisions

agencies and stakeholder
(for responsible mining and environmental protection)

responsible to constituents
political agendas
*spelling!

City planners
Decision and policy makers

They should care because they make the policy/frameworks for science and the public (and direct funding).

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The parliamentary audience

- Parliamentarians and policy-makers are busy people
- Members do not necessarily have scientific or technical background on the topic
- Research is just one type of information that gets considered when making policy decisions - consider the impacts to people as well as the science
- MPs are elected to represent a particular constituency – can you connect the topic to local or regional areas that they are likely to be interested in?
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Who uses research in the UK Parliament?</th>
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<td><strong>House of Commons</strong></td>
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<td>select committees</td>
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<td><strong>House of Lords</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Individual MPs and their researchers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Individual Peers and their researchers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>All Party Parliamentary Groups</strong></td>
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Research and information teams

- POST (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology)
  - Bridges research and policy to ensure that the best available research evidence feeds into Parliament
  - Horizon scanning briefings (POSTnotes), events, fellowships

- House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries
  - Impartial information and briefing services for MPs and Peers
  - Reactive and responsive to questions from Members, business in each House and current affairs
Select committees

• Both Houses establish select committees to conduct inquiries and to produce reports on a range of matters, from the conduct of Government to specialist subject areas
• Committees can be departmental (House of Commons) or more cross-cutting
• Use written evidence and oral evidence from witnesses
All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

- Informal groups of MPs and Peers focused on subjects or countries
- Some meet regularly, hold events, produce reports and run inquiries
- Allow Members to:
  - develop their knowledge
  - meet other interested Members
  - show their interest
  - raise awareness on a topic
Disentangling a POSTnote

- How is it structured (length, layout, paragraphing...)?
  - What voice does it use?
- How often does it use (and explain) technical terms?
  - How often does it reference?
    - Is it biased?
- Does it use pictures, tables, formulae and figures?
Managing Land Use


Dr Rowena Fletcher-Wood, PhD, MChem (Hons Oxon)
Managing Land Uses for Environmental Benefits

Overview

- Fragmented land management approaches have failed to protect the biodiversity that underpins the provision of multiple benefits essential for human health and well-being.
- There have been initiatives to integrate management choices across landscapes to provide environmental benefits.

A key challenge is encouraging partnerships between organisations, communities and landowners, to deliver multiple desired benefits from the same areas of land.

The Environment and Agriculture Bills contain measures that may provide opportunities to support benefit provision at the landscape scale, such as the Nature Recovery Network and the Environmental Land Management scheme.

Background

Understanding the combined impacts of land use on environmental benefits could better inform decision-making and land management frameworks. This POSTnote summarises the challenges of managing landscapes on a large scale to deliver multiple environmental benefits, the evidence needed, and the policy approaches that could be used to achieve this.
**Background**

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) 2019 Global Assessment Report identifies changes in land and sea use as the largest driver of biodiversity loss. Increasing pressures such as climate change, population growth and habitat fragmentation (driven by human land use) are affecting the natural environment and the benefits it provides to society. For example, many small patches of UK semi-natural habitat are isolated within land intensively used for agriculture, which is 72% of total land area. Isolated habitat patches are the most vulnerable to damaging events and degradation, and species may be unable to readily migrate between them (PN-300). The 2010 Lawton review highlighted that such fragmented approaches to managing the UK landscape are insufficient. The UK will fail to meet most of the Convention on Biological Diversity global 2020 targets, including halting the loss of species and degradation of land (PN-617). Without changing current land uses the UK’s 2050 net-zero emissions targets may also not be met.

In England, the planning system applied by local government regulates development, but not wider land management. Land use is shaped by individual attitudes and values, market demands and policy incentives. Management responsibilities can sit with individual or multiple parties, making coordination between public, private and government sectors difficult. The Natural Capital Committee (an independent government advisory body) states that fragmented approaches to managing land without coordination contribute further to environmental degradation.\(^9,10\)

Safeguarding the benefits of natural systems will require a shift from policies that have fragmentally managed land use and its impacts on nature to more integrated approaches. For example, delivering the aims of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) will require integration across land uses, including the provisions relevant to land use set out in the Environment and Agriculture Bills. The UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 have also identified the importance of integrated approaches to "achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". Several relevant terms exist in the literature on integrated approaches to managing land, including the widely used "ecosystem approach" (PN-377). For instance, there is an ecosystem approach checklist for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnerships to aid integrated delivery of benefits.

**Managing land for environmental benefits**

Delivery of environmental benefits, such as clean water, carbon storage and provision of food, depends on the number and variety of animals (biodiversity) and their physical habitats, such as soil. Interactions between these sustain the structure, functions and processes of ecosystems (PB-26). These benefits can be assessed using a natural capital framework (Box 1), where stocks of capital deliver flows of ecosystem benefits.
Managing Land Uses for Environmental Benefits

Overview
- Fragmented land management approaches have failed to protect the biodiversity that underpins the provision of multiple benefits essential for human health and well-being.
- There have been initiatives to integrate management choices across landscapes to provide environmental benefits.
- A key challenge is encouraging partnerships between organisations, communities and landowners, to deliver multiple desired benefits from the same areas of land.
- The Environment and Agriculture Bills contain measures that may provide opportunities to support benefit provision at the landscape scale, such as the Nature Recovery Network and the Environmental Land Management scheme.

Background
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The 2010 Lovelock Review highlighted that such fragmented approaches to managing the UK landscape are insufficient. The UK will fail to meet most of the Convention on Biological Diversity global 2020 targets, including halting the loss of species and degradation of land if current land use in the UK's 2050 net zero emissions targets may also not be met.

In England, the planning system applied by local government regulates development, but not wider land management. Land use is shaped by market attitudes and values, market demand and policy incentives. Management responsibilities can lie with individual or multiple parties, making coordination between public, private and government sectors difficult. The Natural Capital Committee (an independent government advisory body) states that fragmented approaches to managing land without coordination contribute further to environmental degradation.

Safeguarding the benefits of natural systems will require a shift from policies that have fragmented land use and its impacts on nature to more integrated approaches. For example, delivering the aims of the 2050 Environment Act target (25% NPL) will require integration across land use. Including the provisions relevant to land use set out in the Environment and Agriculture Bills. The UK Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 have also identified the importance of integrated approaches to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Several relevant terms exist in the literature on integrated approaches to managing land, including the widely used "ecosystem approach" (Box 2). For instance, there is an ecosystem approach checklist for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnerships to aid integrated delivery of benefits.

Managing land for environmental benefits: Delivery of environmental benefits, such as clean water, carbon storage and provision of food, depends on the number and diversity of species (biodiversity) and their ecological habitats, such as soil. Interactions between these sustain the structure, function and processes of ecosystems. These benefits can be assessed using a natural capital framework (Box 1), where stocks of capital deliver flows of ecosystem services.

What makes a good briefing?

Content: Does the briefing cover what you would expect it to?

Structure: Do the sections make sense and are they in the right order?

Accessibility: Is it easy to read? Is it concise?

Impartiality: Is it politically and scientifically impartial? Are all statements balanced and objective?
A briefing should tell the reader:

- **What** is the key issue(s)?
- **Why** is it of interest to policymakers?
- **Who** are the main stakeholders? Who is affected? Who are your sources?
- **When** are the major impacts and policy decisions likely to happen?
- **Where** is this happening (e.g. local, national, international)? What regions are affected?
- **How** will the stakeholders be affected? What are the cost implications?
The ‘5 Ws 1 H’ rule applies to single studies too

- **Where** did the study take place? (e.g. Which country? In a lab or in the ‘real world’?)
- **When** did the study take place?
  (e.g. What year? What season, if relevant?)
- **Who** took part in the study? (e.g. Who were the participants? What number of individuals were involved? How were they chosen?)
- **How**? (e.g. How were the measures taken in the study?)
- **What** were the results?

Example:
A 2019 survey of 2,000 women aged 25–40 in the UK found that 60% used social media at least once a day
Structure: General

**Past:**
Background and context. What is the issue and how did we get here?

**Present:**
Explains the current situation

**Future:**
What are the challenges and opportunities? How could the present situation change?
Structure: General

**Past:**
Background and context. What is the issue and how did we get here?

**Present:**
Explains the current situation

**Future:**
What are the challenges and opportunities? How could the present situation change?

- Make it easy to scan by using **headings and sub-headings** to break up large blocks of text
- Start with an **overview** that outlines the key points of the briefing
- Use **figures, charts or diagrams** where suitable to help your briefing be more eye-catching and appealing
Managing Land Uses for Environmental Benefits

Overview
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- The Environment and Agriculture Bills contain measures that may provide opportunities to support benefit provision at the landscape scale, such as the Nature Recovery Network and the Environmental Land Management scheme.

Understanding the combined impacts of land use on environmental benefits could better inform decision-making and land management frameworks. This POSTnote summarises the challenges of managing landscapes on a large scale to deliver multiple environmental benefits, the evidence needed, and the policy approaches that could be used to achieve this.
Structure: Boxes

- Long lists of necessary (but quite boring) things
e.g. definitions, legislation, “bodies”, approaches in four nations
- Complex technical concepts
- Case studies

Box 1: Benefits from the environment
- An ecosystem is a community of living organisms (plants, animals and microorganisms) interacting with each other and the physical environment. An ecosystem is a community of living organisms (plants, animals and microorganisms) interacting with each other and the physical environment. A healthy ecosystem produces a valuable service to society. Natural capital includes ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans. Natural capital includes ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans. The value of a natural capital asset is the overall benefit it adds to society; determined by both the extent and the quality of the asset.
- Natural capital is the "elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans". Natural capital stock, such as the amount and quality of soil, provide flows of benefits such as nutrients and water. Benefits are either produced by the living system (pollination), by the physical environment, (minerals) or by interactions between living and physical systems (water quality). The value of a natural capital asset is the overall benefit it adds to society; determined by both the extent and the quality of the asset.
- Ecosystem services are the benefits provided by ecosystems that contribute to human well-being. There are four categories: supporting (e.g. soil formation), regulating (e.g. climate regulation), provisioning (e.g. food) and cultural services (e.g. recreation).
- Nature’s contribution to people is a new international framework that builds on the ecosystem service concept, with a more central focus on social and cultural aspects of the natural environment. Defined as “all the positive contributions, losses or detriments” from nature for the quality of life for people.
- Nature-based solutions are defined as “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.”

Box 2: Examples of planning natural capital
- Liverpool City Region Natural Capital Working Group: the creation of a Natural Capital Baseline helps to understand the services provided by its natural assets. This spatial modelling approach (EcoServ-GIS), creates an asset map and ecosystem service map based on available data. The outputs help to target areas of interest, monitor changes and provide economic valuation of the services. Local Natural Capital Plan (LNCP): the Oxford-Cambridge Arc was created to promote economic growth in the area linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. The 25 YEP commits to LNCP. Biocentric and territorial approaches are needed to plan for and deliver local and regional benefits. Biocentric approaches are needed to plan for and deliver local and regional benefits. Biocentric and territorial approaches are needed to plan for and deliver local and regional benefits.

Box 4: Environmental Land Management Scheme
The ELM scheme will provide financial incentives for farmers and landowners to provide environmental benefits, which will be underpinned by natural capital principles and payment for outcomes. Defra is proposing a tiered scheme: Tier 1. Encourage environmentally sustainable farming and forestry through delivery of environmental benefits. Tier 2. Incentivise land management that delivers locally targeted environmental outcomes. Tier 3. Secure environmental outcomes by delivering land use change projects at a landscape scale. This approach was suggested through working closely with stakeholders, and reviewing report recommendations such as the Dame Glenys Stacey review, and Glover review. Trials are being undertaken in North Devon, Cheshire and Greater Manchester ahead of the ELM roll out in 2024.
Backwards planning

**Writing**
- key point -> 5W + H -> context
- focus on a key message / give evidence 5W / structure to give importance to the key message

**Content**
- Impact: What the new future might look like if we agree to the change suggested; Content: rationale for why the proposed actions will lead to the new future; Writing: snappy

**Impacts**
- some benefit to society or people -> evidence that an action will cause that benefit -> argument for that action

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Accessibility

Anyone should be able to pick up your briefing, read it over a coffee and be able to explain what they read afterwards.

This is really tough!

“It is estimated that a Western European dairy cow can produce around 117 kg of methane each year, which is roughly equivalent to driving 12,000 km in the average petrol car.”
Accessibility Tips

The general principles we follow:

1. Say it with fewer words
2. Say it with less complex language
3. Use objective, precise language
4. Use the active voice where possible
5. Be consistent with language, punctuation and definitions
6. Jargon and acronyms: only use the essential ones and define them before discussing
7. Include handy facts and figures

Parliamentarians can make use of

“It is estimated that a Western European dairy cow can produce around 117 kg of methane each year, which is roughly equivalent to driving 12,000 km in the average petrol car.”
"The speed of development of new DNA sequencing and analytical technologies is bringing down the price tag for whole genome sequencing at a vertiginous pace."

- Genome sequencing is getting much cheaper and quicker.
- New DNA technologies are rapidly reducing the cost of genome sequencing.
- New technology is making genome sequencing cheaper and faster.
- New technology is making it much cheaper to sequence entire genomes.
- DNA sequence development and analysis is rapidly decreasing in price.
Writing in fewer words

‘The speed of development of new DNA sequencing and analytical technologies is bringing down the price tag for whole genome sequencing at a vertiginous pace.’

‘DNA sequencing is getting faster and cheaper.’
Think about your audience!

*The bacterium is microscopic (10 microns wide)*.

The microbe is thinner than a human hair

The bacterium cannot be seen by the naked eye

100,000 bacteria lined up side by side will all fit on a metre stick.

Bacteria are so tiny you can't see them.

The bacteria are 100 times smaller than a full stop on this page.
Think about your audience!

‘The bacterium is microscopic (10 microns wide).’

‘Each bacterium is roughly a fifth of the thickness of a sheet of paper and so cannot be seen with the human eye.’
Impartiality

Key principles:

• Cover the entire range of perspectives
• No opinions
• Attribute and reference
• Be clear about uncertainty
Impartiality

Key principles:

• Cover the entire range of perspectives
• No opinions
• Attribute and reference
• Be clear about uncertainty

Example:

Include ranges and if relevant, the reason for the uncertainty

“IPCC Assessments suggest that sea level could rise 0.26-0.77m by 2100 ... modelling cloud cover is a major source of uncertainty“
Targeting your research at Parliament

Do:
• Send a well-written briefing to any Research and Information team – for the attention of the subject specialist, with an offer to contribute as needed
• Identify APPGs or individual Members with an interest, and send a well-written briefing with an offer to support any work they are doing in this area
• Make sure your briefing is dated and provide contact details

Don’t:
• Send a paper with no context
• Send a briefing to all MPs or all Peers
• Send a paper to a select committee – unless you have written to submit as written evidence
Research Impact and Legislatures

Overview

- Substantive engagement with the UK Parliament was mentioned in 20% of REF2014 impact case studies.
- Research can feed in through direct and indirect routes and can be actively sought out or sent in proactively by external organisations.
- Impacts arising from engaging with legislatures include influencing government policy, external organisations, and legislatures themselves (such as internal processes and skills development).
- Research that provides a persuasive and credible narrative on research impact is more likely to have impact.
- Evidence of impact can include citations, similarities in language, social media data, minutes of meetings and co-produced outputs that show a close working relationship.

Background

Research that is relevant, credible, and independent is essential for good scrutiny and debate. It is used by different people across legislatures and for many purposes including select committee work, constituents’ enquiries, and preparing for debates. This briefing describes the work of legislatures and the ways that research is used. It gives examples of research impact and suggests evidence that can be used to demonstrate impact on legislatures. It is based on a 2017 study of the use of research in the UK Parliament,2 analysis of impact case studies from REF2014 and the perspectives of staff working in research and information services in the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly.

The work of legislatures

The legislatures of the UK are the UK Parliament in Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Legislatures are distinct from the government and one of their key functions is to scrutinise government decisions and policies, its proposals for legislation, and its budget. There are important differences in procedures and terminology across the legislatures of the UK, but many of the principles in dealing with any UK legislature are similar.

How do legislatures use research?

Many types and sources of evidence are essential for good scrutiny and debate. This includes statistics and data, information from think tanks or lobbyists, frontline practitioners’ knowledge, public consultations as well as research-based evidence.

There are different users of research in legislatures:

- Members of Parliaments or Assemblies (Members)
- Staff employed directly by Members (‘Members’ staff)
- Staff working in research units within political parties
- Legislators staff including those based on committees, in libraries or research services, and in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST).

Research can be used to support Members’ work in committees (such as ad hoc, standing, statutory, plenary, bil — see Figure 1), in debates (such as in the chamber), in Cross-Party or All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), in support of constituents, when tabling questions to the Government, or to help prepare for meetings or public speeches.

Members work in a complex and fast-moving environment, often experiencing information overload. They might also specialise in some areas and work as well-informed generalists in others. They often need answers to specific questions quickly.
Q&A
Online resources and ‘how to’ guides: [www.parliament.uk/research-impact](http://www.parliament.uk/research-impact)

@UKParl_Research

Dedicated Knowledge Exchange Unit (Sarah, Naomi and Laura): [keu@parliament.uk](mailto:keu@parliament.uk)
Deep-Sea Mining

Have another go in your own time.

Next time: Summary

Send us your writing if you would like it reviewed.
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Come with questions!

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