**SOIL STATUS & PROTECTION project**

*Summary document of the Stakeholder Workshop of the 24th of March 2015*

**The Soil Status Project**

The withdrawal of the proposed European Union Soil Framework Directive highlights the strong need to think differently about soils and their functionality to secure sustainable development and food production. This project aims to evaluate the status of soil protection in Ireland by; 1) reviewing the available research done in the last 10-15 years; 2) inform the major soil stakeholders of the importance of soil; 3) developing an options document for a soil monitoring strategy. Such a framework will provide support to future policies at national and European level.

**The Stakeholder Workshop**

The Stakeholders Workshop took place in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conference room, Johnstown Castle estate, county Wexford on the 24th of March 2015. The focus of the workshop was to discuss and review soil knowledge and research in Ireland to date, to prioritise research and knowledge transfer of soil science and related topics, in the coming years. The target audience for this meeting was compiled during a review of soil stakeholders in Ireland. This database has been used to invite Irish and International key speakers and a wide range of National stakeholder attendees (i.e. policy makers, governmental representatives, researchers, education officers, local authorities, parks and wildlife, farmers, gardeners etc.).

On the day 75 attendees from very different organizations and stage of their careers, contributed to the workshop. Few opening words of welcome from Dr Arwyn Jones, scientific officer of the European Commission touched upon the outstanding soil and land debate at European level.

The morning agenda was included the following:

a. a presentation on the EPA research programme focused on soil, given by Dr Jonathan Derham;

b. a presentation on the main Soil Status & Protection project findings - the soil metadata catalogue, the monitoring system recommendations and the knowledge transfer approach of the project- given by Dr Bampa Francesca;

c. a roundtable discussion with 12 invited soil stakeholders chaired by Dr Rogier Schulte on the key priorities for Irish soils.

In the afternoon three different workshops ran in parallel and brought the attendees to share and discuss their experiences on soils metadata, on monitoring soils and on soil education.

**The Roundtable Discussion**

The roundtable discussion consisted of 12 stakeholders approaching the issue –*How to move forward: what are the key priorities for soils in Ireland?* - from different perspectives and backgrounds. Dr Rogier Schulte chaired the panel and boosted the discussion with a short presentation on the intrinsic value of soil and its multi-functionality, defined as Functional Land Management.

The group of panellists consisted of: Paddy Browne from Teagasc; William Considine from Nicharee Farm, Tom Dunne from Blackwater dairy farm; Dr Deirdre Fay from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM); Dr Reece Hill from Waikato Regional Council, New Zealand, Prof. Nicholas Holden from the UCD School of Biosystems Engineering, Dr Einar Eberhardt from the German Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR), Hannover; Dr Arwyn Jones from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre; Kate Knights from the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI); Grace Maher from the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA) and Dr Alice Wemaere from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

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1 Soil Status project is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency. More info on [www.teagasc.ie/soil/soil_status/](http://www.teagasc.ie/soil/soil_status/)
The panellists were invited to debate on the applicability and gaps of this conceptual framework to agri-environmental policies across different scales (Picture 1). Their contribution was built on their own experience, on the early morning presentations and on a summary document of the project raising the following questions:

- What are the main research gaps?
- What are the current policy requirements? Do we have data and information to support policy? What data and information is likely to be required by future policies?
- We need to provide a consistent framework to integrate the outcomes from different research projects both current and future. Can we define a spatial, temporal and methodological template that will facilitate such integrated assessment?

![Figure 1. Three scales of soil information and the relative impact pathways and instruments.](image)

As a summary of the panel discussion, all the attendees agreed on the keywords shown in the first row of Table 1, representative of the knowledge gaps discussed.

**Parallel Afternoon Workshops**

During the afternoon workshops, attendees worked together in order to develop new critical thinking and concrete recommendations to support Soil Status objectives.

- Soil metadata workshop was held by Dr Peter Mooney and Dr Eberhardt Einar
- Soil Monitoring workshop was held by Dr Rachel Creamer and Dr Reece Hill
- Soil education workshop was held by Dr Francesca Bampa and William Considine

Table 1 summarizes the key outcomes and recommendations of the workshop for the future soil research agenda for Ireland. These findings have been presented during the session - Environmental policy and Communications- of the Environ 2015 conference² held in Sligo in April 2015.

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² [http://www.esaiweb.org/environ/](http://www.esaiweb.org/environ/)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>STAKEHOLDERS PANEL DISCUSSION - Knowledge gaps to better manage our land</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOIL METADATA</td>
<td>Forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metadata has a different meaning to different users and stakeholders.</td>
<td>• Metadata for objects (e.g. research projects, research papers, reports) versus metadata for data - as in the INSPIRE Data Specification Soil. Urgent need to provide better support for understanding.</td>
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<td>SOIL MONITORING</td>
<td>Forthcoming monitoring network designs should build upon existing data and systems in place.</td>
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<td>SOIL EDUCATION</td>
<td>Stakeholders interested in raising soil awareness and soil education were: teachers from primary and secondary level, farmers, scientific policy officers from governmental national bodies, researchers, Irish Charities, NGOs, private consultancies, environmental journalists and soil supporters.</td>
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