Scoring criteria

This is an old version of the page

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page .

Note – the scoring criteria for Improving Public Access
Note: For 2021 applications please refer to the 2021 scoring guidance

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Agri-Environment Climate Scheme scoring criteria

This section describes the scoring criteria we will use to assess all Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications.

The slurry storage element of applications will be scored separately. Targeted slurry storage scoring criteria, agreed with SEPA, can be found below.

Slurry storage scoring criteria (MS Excel, Size: 14.1 kB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Slurry-storage-scoring-criteria---score-sheet----30-May-2017.xlsx Criteria for slurry storage

Where applications are purely for organic options, we will assess them in the first instance using the ‘scale of delivery’ and ‘national priorities’ criteria for comparison against other stand-alone organic applications.

The score sheet template is available separately for download (see below).

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme score sheet (PDF, Size: 228.1 kB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS--UPDATE-2018-AECS-Scoring--Sheet---10-January-2018.pdf Agri-Environment Climate Scheme score sheet

Scale of delivery

In-bye and moorland management

The more land on your holding that you propose to manage under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme in comparison to the total area of your holding, the more points you will be allocated.

We will separately assess the proportion of in-bye and the proportion of moorland being managed in your application in relation to the total areas of in-bye and moorland on your holding.

We will allocate points on a sliding scale depending on the percentage managed.

Diffuse pollution risks

Where diffuse pollution risks are identified within the Farm Environment Assessment, the more of these you address through Agri-Environment Climate Scheme management, the more points you will be allocated.

We will only carry forward the highest score between either in-bye, moorland or diffuse pollution risks.

National priorities

We will allocate extra points for applications which help to deliver at least one of the following national priorities:

National priorities
Protected nature sites: enhancing the condition of designated features of SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites
Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species
Climate change: enhancing carbon stores through peatland restoration
Water environment: contributing to the ‘good status’ of water bodies under the Water Framework Directive
Organic farming: maintaining or increasing the area of organically managed farmland in Scotland

Protected nature sites: Enhancing the condition of designated features of SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites

You will be allocated points if you meet all of the following requirements:

- your application includes land on or adjacent to a designated site
- the proposed management is likely to benefit the features of the designated site:
  - a 'feature' is a habitat, earth science interest or species population which has been identified as of particular importance in the citation for the designated site
  - 'benefit' means maintaining the features in favourable condition, or helping the features to recover if their condition is unfavourable, for those parts of the features that are under your control
- the application includes the management of your land, which is on or adjacent to a designated site, which is required to benefit the features present on the designated site, and which is within your control

Information on sites and features can be found using Sitelink. You are strongly advised to contact Nature Scot to discuss your designated site proposals, before preparing an application.

Biodiversity: enhancing biodiversity in the wider countryside by conserving vulnerable priority species (VPS)

You will be allocated points if your application will directly benefit the population of at least one of the following vulnerable priority species (for farmland waders, your application must benefit at least two species in the table below).

Additional points can be scored if the management proposed will benefit additional vulnerable priority species.

You must refer to the Vulnerable Priority Species supporting guidance pages to ensure you meet the species specific criteria .

You must submit a Vulnerable Priority Species recording form (PDF, Size: 137.8 kB) containing the information requested below with your application. Failure to do so will result in no points being awarded in this category.

Farmland waders – the application must directly benefit at least two of the following wader species. The species selected must include curlew and / or lapwing. • curlew • lapwing • oystercatcher • redshank • snipe
Other species with significant Scottish population declines which depend on appropriate management. • corncrake • corn bunting • chough • twite (on in-bye only) • black grouse • hen harrier • marsh fritillary • great yellow bumblebee • great crested newt • freshwater pearl mussel

In order to score points under this criterion, you must

- confirm that the management option / capital item proposed is within the appropriate mapped zone for the vulnerable priority species or, in the case of freshwater pearl mussel, associated with one of the key rivers named
- include management options and / or capital items in your application which will benefit the species, located appropriately within the holding, as indicated in the Supporting guidance for each vulnerable priority species

Climate change: enhancing carbon stores through peatland restoration

You will be allocated points if you meet both of the following conditions:

- your application includes management to restore peatlands using one of the following capital items:
  - Ditch Blocking – Peat Dams
  - Ditch Blocking – Plastic Piling Dams
- the management will be undertaken within a peatland area

Peatland area map (PDF, Size: 2.4 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Maps-for-website---national-priorities---peatland-map-area.pdf Peatland area map – national priorities

If you are unsure whether your holding is within this area, please contact your local RPID office for advice.

Water environment: contributing to the 'good status' of water bodies under Water Framework Directive

You will be allocated points if your application will contribute to improving water quality in one of Scotland's diffuse pollution priority catchments or focus areas.

Diffuse pollution priority area for SRDP (PDF, Size: 1.3 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/87332-AECS-Review---2018-map---WQ-Diffuse-pollution-priority-area.pdf National priority: water environment

Applications should:

- be supported by a Farm Environment Assessment to identify diffuse pollution risks and target options appropriately

- include measures needed to address all diffuse pollution risks on the land holding (or justify why not)

Organic farming: maintaining or increasing the area of organically managed farmland in Scotland

You will be allocated points if at least 25 per cent of your permanently held land will be managed under the ‘organic conversion’ sub-option, or at least 75 per cent will be managed under the 'organic maintenance' sub-option.

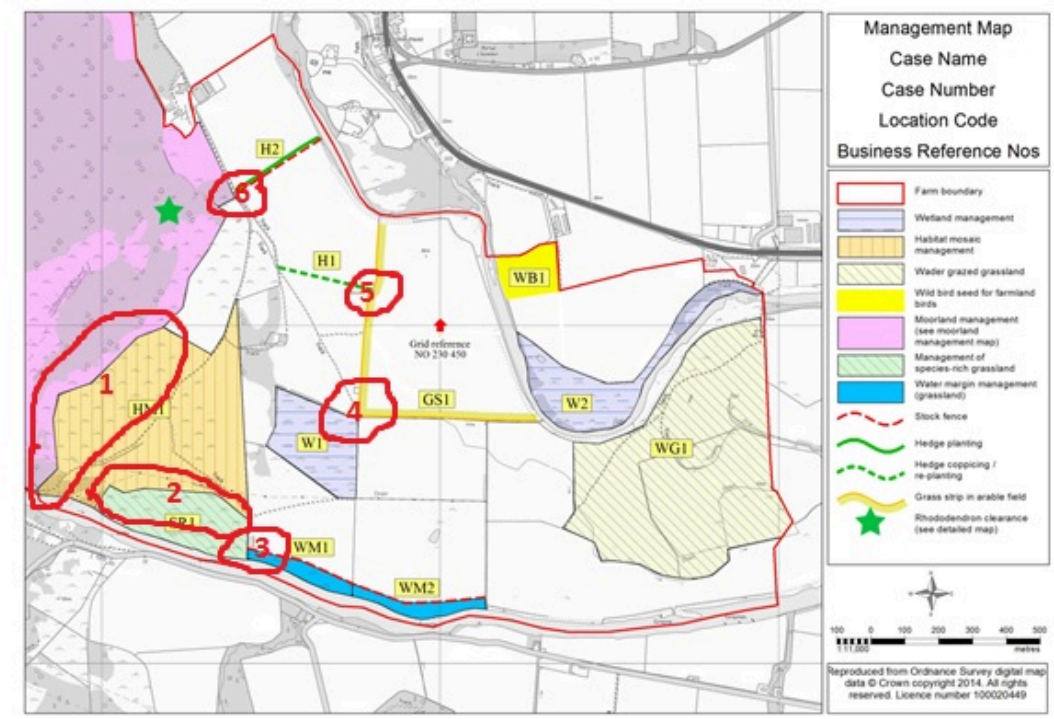
Habitat linkage

This recognises that managing habitats across a holding where there is linkage between them can provide additional benefits, for example by creating wildlife corridors.

We will assess that linkage across the holding and allocate points accordingly. The greater the linkage across the holding the more points will be allocated.

The habitats may already exist and not be proposed for specific funding under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme but so long as the habitats are marked on the farm environment assessment map and an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme option links those habitats together, then a score may be justified. See further guidance below.

For example,



In this case example, there are 6 habitat linkages as a result of habitats proposed for management in the application (noting that there could be other linkages with existing habitats which would be taken into account as well).

They include the following examples;

- moorland linked to inbye habitats such as habitat mosaic, species rich grassland
- habitat mosaic linked to species rich grassland linked to water margin
- wetlands linked by grass strip in arable fields
- grass strip in arable fields linked to hedgerow management

While this criterion is about the creation of physical linkage of sites, if you can make a fully justified case for site linkage across a holding where the sites are not physically linked then points may be allocated.

You must demonstrate additional environmental benefit beyond what would otherwise be achieved as individual standalone sites.

For example, pockets of species rich grassland, habitat mosaic or wetland where you have evidence that Marsh Fritillary butterfly has been present in the areas proposed for management. This species usually exists in discrete populations dispersed across pockets of habitat containing its favoured food plant: devils bit scabious. Habitats can be within a 2 – 5km radius e.g. within a glen or coastline containing predominately cattle grazed pasture.

Habitat linkage across neighbouring holdings

If habitat linkages across neighbouring holdings are being claimed then the holdings involved need to be part of a collaborative application that meet the collaboration scoring criteria.

Links with open or running water

Any connection between open or running water and an adjacent habitat, which is being managed as part of the AECS proposal, will count towards the habitat link score.

Where habitat links should not be counted

Hedgerows or woodlands between fields managed as wader grazed or mown grassland do not qualify for habitat linkage points as in these situations shrubs and trees attract wader predators and therefore can be detrimental to waders.

It is best practice not to site boundaries of habitats managed for waders less than 30 metres from a hedgerow or woodland edge and so there should not be a physical link between these two types of habitat anyway.

Habitat linkages should be between different habitats. Where the same habitat is made up of more than one adjoining LPID this would be considered to be a single habitat area and therefore links between the LPIDs making up the habitat area should not be counted.

Long-term benefit

This is designed to recognise that some options deliver environmental benefit for a period longer than the duration of the contract.

Points will be allocated if the following criteria are met.

One or more of the following options or capital items will qualify for long term benefit points:

Managing water quality and flood risk options

- converting arable at risk of erosion or flooding to low-input grassland
- management of floodplains
- creation of species rich grassland
- restoration of species rich grassland
- wetland management, where the proposal is to create a new wetland

For the species rich grassland and wetland options listed above, these need to be adjacent to a water course or water body in order to demonstrate improvements to water quality or flood risk mitigation.

For the avoidance of doubt, fencing to create a water margin will not qualify for long term benefit score.

Structural works

- Hard Standings for Troughs and Gateways
- Livestock Crossing
- Livestock Tracks
- Managing Steading Drainage and Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems
- Pesticide Handling Facilities
- Restoring (Protecting) River Banks
- River Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - Pond
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - sediment trap and bunds
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - swales
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems - wetland
- Water-use Efficiency - Irrigation Lagoon

- Wetland Creation - Field Drain Breaking
- Wetland Creation - Pipe Sluices

Restore dykes: greater than 5% of the dykes on the holding must be restored under the application to score points. This will be an assessment of dykes as recorded on the Farm Environment Assessment maps.

Planting dune grasses: capital item.

Creation/Restoration of wetland or species rich grassland (minimum 1 ha)

Qualifying options/capital items are:

- creation of species rich grassland
- restoration of species rich grassland
- wetland management, where the proposal is to create a new wetland

Capital works benefitting peatlands and moorlands

Qualifying options/capital items are:

- ditch blocking - peat dams
- ditch blocking - plastic piling dams
- heather restoration
- non-native invasive species, rhododendron or bracken control where the entire extent of the species cover in the managed area is proposed to be removed

Value for money

This recognises that management of habitats delivered at a lower capital infrastructure cost provides better public value for money than those applications which require higher capital infrastructure costs. In other words, more money is spent on management of habitats than on associated capital items.

Small unit applications under the value of £20,000 delivering at least one national priority will attract additional points under this scoring criteria in recognition that applications of this size can offer value for money but otherwise not score highly against other criteria.

We will deduct points under this criteria when assessing applications greater than £20,000 on a sliding scale depending on the percentage of capital infrastructure compared to total application costs.

We also recognise that there are some standalone capital options that should not be considered in this calculation as they deliver significant environmental outcomes in their own right.

The only capital items to be included in this value for money calculation are:

- Stock Fence
- Deer Fence
- gates of any sort
- restoring drystone or flagstone dykes

Collaborative approach

This recognises that collaboration between applicants can lead to better environmental outcomes, for example by delivering management at a landscape scale.

To be awarded points for collaboration, the person leading on the collaborative project must correctly complete a Collaborative Management Plan (using the template below) along with a map or maps clearly showing the extent of the collaborative work proposed.

Collaborative Management Plan (PDF, Size: 21.7 kB) .

The Plan must be agreed with all parties involved. it must list all participants and must clearly demonstrate the contribution each participant applying to AECS will make.

You can apply for funding towards the cost of the plan, as explained in the Claims and Payments webpage.

A copy of the completed Plan and map(s) must be submitted by each AECS applicant involved in the collaborative project, along with their AECS application.

Those identified as collaborating partners must be AEC Scheme participants or applicants (unless the collaborative project is to be carried out by a third party – see below*).

The initial collaborators must apply in the same year; however, once they have contracts in place, other land managers may join in later years.

Points will be allocated on a sliding scale according to the number of collaborators. Whilst older AECS contracts can be included in the general information about a Collaborative project, only AECS contracts arising from 2018 applications and applications submitted in 2019 will be considered for collaboration points this year. This is due to the fact that contracts must be run concurrently to ensure activities are being undertaken collaboratively over the lifetime of the contract between all farms.

Simply referencing a neighbouring applicant also managing land under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme will not be sufficient to score points under this criterion.

Collaborative Management Plans must demonstrate that there will be greater environmental benefit than would be achieved if the individuals involved were to act independently.

For example, extra benefit due to creating contiguous and complementary management and improving habitat connectivity.

It is also desirable for the collaborative project to include any of the following:

- involves the sharing of resources (e.g. staff time and machinery)
- contributes to a strategic environmental management plan
- involves an existing group of land managers with a track record of working together

Below are further examples of situations which may be relevant to collaboration, as long as they also meet the requirements noted above.

1. Taking part in an existing partnership project e.g. a wader management project

2. Holding sits within and likely to contribute to a strategic landscape scale planning area e.g. a river catchment management plan

3. Part of a species management plan e.g. Deer Management Group – Deer Management Plan Area

4. More than one applicant working together to increase the area of habitat for a local population of one of the vulnerably priority species e.g. Black grouse or Corncrake

5. More than one applicant managing either side of a single area of habitat like a wetland, species rich grassland or bog

6. More than one applicant collaborating over the same management activity e.g. predator control, shared grazing, muirburn

7. Applications made under a Contractual Licence involving multiple partners. For example, an NGO applying to carry out a catchment-scale project for control of Invasive Non-Native Species on land belonging to multiple RPID registered businesses. Each participating land manager would be considered a collaborator.

*If you are a third party applicant, with a contractual licence to carry out collaborative capital works on a number of land holdings, you will be the sole AECS applicant for the collaborative project. Your Collaborative Management Plan must identify the land holders involved and points will be awarded for each participating land manager provided they are also signed up to the contractual licence and have a valid Business Reference Number.

Additional points

This is a section designed to provide flexibility to allocate points for certain activities that improve the environmental outcomes delivered by an application.

Spatial priorities

Applications for certain management options will score additional points if they are within priority areas, where management will deliver an increased benefit.

The following management options and capital items will score additional points within priority areas for water quality, as shown in the map.

- Water Margins in Arable Fields
- Water Margins in Grassland Fields
- Converting Arable at Risk of Erosion or Flooding to Low-input Grassland
- Management of Floodplains
- Alternative Watering
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Sediment Traps and Bunds
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Swales
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Pond
- Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems – Wetland


Priority areas for water quality map (PDF, Size: 1.3 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/87332-AECS-Review---2018-map---WQ-Priority-area-for-water-quality.pdf Priority areas for water quality map

The following management options will score additional points within peatland areas:

- Moorland Management
- Stock Disposal
- Away Wintering Sheep


Peatland area map (PDF, Size: 2.4 MB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Maps-for-website---spatial-priorities---peatland-map-area.pdf Peatland area map – spatial priorities

The predator control management option will score additional points within the range of the declining black grouse population in the south of Scotland.


South of Scotland black grouse map (PDF, Size: 452.1 kB)
doc_external_url: https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/72748_70563_Black_grouse_data_March_2015_North_South_recreated-2018.pdf South of Scotland black grouse map

If you're not sure whether your holding is within these areas, please contact your local RPID office for advice.

Scheduled monuments

If management through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme will protect or reduce the risk of deterioration to certain Scheduled Monuments, verified by Historic Environment Scotland, then additional points may be awarded to recognise the outcome being achieved.

Applicants will be informed if a relevant Scheduled Monument is present on their holding on the Targeting web page. Click here to visit the Targeting page, where you will be asked to enter your holding code.

Management options may be specified under this heading which can be used to benefit the Scheduled Monument.

You will score additional points if you propose to benefit the Scheduled Monument by undertaking these management options and / or any relevant capital items, as endorsed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Recent changes

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