

### **Environment Quality Assessment - an EPC for land?**

EPCs for domestic and commercial properties are a regulatory tool for raising energy efficiency in buildings.

An EQA/environmental quality assessment\* for land could be introduced with a similar regulatory impact on ecosystem services. For example:

- Land couldn't be sold or rented out without an EQA. A minimum level could be set for any land placed on the market
- An incoming owner might be required to achieve a higher EQA within say five years – strengthening the draft provisions in the Act for public interest test and management plan.
- A minimum level of EQA could be required to get government grants/loans and the landowner/manager would have to show how public funding would raise the EQA score.

The standards for the EQA would be contested and require some development. However, there is extensive expertise already in Scotland – eg at Nature Scot, James Hutton Institute - and some bits of land are arguably not as heterogeneous as houses. We already have metrics for carbon, peatland and increasingly for biodiversity and detailed land mapping on IACS.

The requirement initially might only apply to larger areas of land. The cost of carrying out an EQA would fall to the landowner (as with EPCs). The initial baseline assessment would probably be more expensive than subsequent assessments.

Such a system would attach greater value to land delivering greater ecosystem services and provide a market mechanism for investment in ecosystem restoration.

\*a rating using standardised metrics of the land's wellbeing in terms of delivering ecosystem services for land of its type – would include soil carbon, below and above ground biodiversity, water buffering/filtering, tree cover, water quality, soil erosion etc.

The question it's asking 'what % of optimal ecosystem services is this land delivering (given soil type, geography etc) – an updated version of 'good heart' which fits with the ideas about Waygo in the Land Reform Act.