Invitation to Tender

January 2024

An evaluation of the ability of existing policies to achieve nitrogen-reductions within national statutory targets and international commitments

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance, chaired by the Soil Association, is advocating for an integrated approach to nitrogen policy across all relevant government departments. To do so requires systems thinking to implement effective cross government working by integrating policies to achieve statutory targets.

While the Government has a range of policies in place to reduce nitrogen lost to the environment in its many forms, they have a narrow remit relating to specific impacts. Some evaluation of the Government's ability to reach various targets has been carried out,[1] but there has been no analysis of the ability of the Government to achieve all of these nitrogen-related targets in the round without producing unintended consequences, for example through pollution swapping. An optimal solution for climate, air and water must be identified which balances priorities while identifying the most effective solutions for reducing environmental losses of nitrogen.

Further, the Government has committed within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)Target 7 to reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects. It is unclear how far the Government is from achieving this target, and what national targets would get us there, but recent analysis by Wildlife Countryside Link has determined that some nitrogen-related policies are regressing.[2]

The Soil Association is seeking a contractor to produce a report that:

- Evaluates the ability of existing policies to achieve
  - i) nitrogen reductions as set out in UK statutory targets, and
  - ii) the more ambitious GBF Target 7
- Suggests solutions to enable the Government to achieve these targets, with prioritisation of actions based on the most effective nitrogen loss reductions and greatest value for money and how those reductions can potentially map onto UK Government policy

[1] House of Commons, 2023. Air quality: policies, proposals and concerns. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9600/CBP-9600.pdf ; Climate Change Committee, 2023. Progress in reducing UK emissions - 2023 Report to Parliament. Available at: https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Progress-in-reducing-UK-emissions-2023-Report-to-Parliament.pdf; Office for Environmental Protection, 2024. Progress in improving the natural environment in England 22/23.

[2] Wildlife and Countryside Link, 2023. COP15 one year on - where we are now. Available at: https://wcl.org.uk/cop15-one-year-on-where-we-are-now.asp

targets for reducing nitrogen impacts (e.g. air and water quality, GHG, biodiversity/ecosystem services, soil)

The project is managed by the Soil Association with the support of a steering group including WWF, Plantlife and SEI/University of York. A maximum budget of £35,000 is available to deliver this specification. The work is expected to take 2-3 months to complete.

We're seeking consortia, organisations or individuals to express an interest in tendering for this work.

2. Project context

2.1 Why is nitrogen an issue

Nitrogen is a molecule that is essential for all life on earth. In its stable state, nitrogen constitutes 78% of the air we breathe. In its reactive state, nitrogen is used to create amino acids and DNA, and so is used to fertilise crops to encourage plant growth and greater yields.

But nitrogen cycles through many reactive forms as it passes through the biosphere, atmosphere and the hydrosphere. As a result, it can be hard to control the damaging impacts of nitrogen pollution. Pollution from excess nitrogen can have serious impacts on human health and the environment including on air, soil and water quality, biodiversity and ecosystem services and climate change.

2.2 Complementary work

Recent work commissioned within the Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance has produced a UK-wide nitrogen balance sheet to quantify the stocks and flows of nitrogen across the environment and the economy. This work has identified the strongest signals of wasted nitrogen, allowing prioritisation of action to reduce nitrogen losses. We envisage this research to complement the UK-wide nitrogen balance sheet by identifying the policies that will enable us to achieve the target of halving nitrogen waste by 2030.

3. Specification and Scope

We are seeking a contractor who can write an evidence based and semi-quantitative analysis report, drawn upon context from across the U.K. No modelling is required and the report should be based on existing publications in the public domain. We are open to multiple organisations collaborating to complete the work.

This report will be used by the Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance to develop our policy advocacy strategy to demonstrate to the Government the key tools for reducing nitrogen losses.

The scope will be an assessment of the UK wide situation regarding the suitability of existing policy instruments to tackle the major nitrogen losses to the environment. In depth analysis of each devolved nation is not expected but statutory instruments in devolved nations should be

considered and used as case studies for how particular nitrogen flows are being assessed. Analysis should include the impacts, sources and policy instruments (as specified in the annex).

3.1 Policy evidence gap analysis

Set within the context of public health, soil and water quality management, climate commitments and nature recovery, the report should investigate and evaluate the statutory, regulatory and active policy[3] frameworks across the UK in relation to measures in place to achieve both the statutory targets within each country and also the GBF Target 7.

The analysis should identify and summarise evidence for:

- Major sources of nitrogen lost to the environment and consequent environmental and health impacts;
- Best practice and cost effectiveness in reducing nitrogen flows into the environment; and
- Gaps between existing policies and both national and international targets.

Using the UK-wide nitrogen balance sheet, the report should provide suggestions for solutions that would close any predicted gaps between the governments' frameworks and targets, with prioritisation of the solutions that would be most effective at reducing nitrogen lost to the environment from the biggest nitrogen flows. Particular attention should be given to synergies and tradeoffs between different nitrogen issues.

3.2 Outputs

The required outputs from the contractor are as follows:
i) A semi-quantitative report including elements specified in section 3.1
ii) A presentation/seminar summarising the findings to i)

4. Contract management, timeline, budget

4.1 Contract management

This project is led and managed by Ellie Roxburgh, Convenor of the Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance at the Soil Association. The Soil Association will maintain frequent contact with the contractor to facilitate and monitor the contract delivery. A project Steering Group (chaired by the Soil Association) will advise and support the contractor. Steering group members include representatives of WWF, Plantlife International, and the Stockholm Institute for the Environment.

4.2 Timeline

We are inviting submissions to undertake the specification below with following timeline (2024):

[3] for example, farm payment schemes including the Agricultural Transition Plan update and Environmental Land Management offer announced in January 2024 - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-transition-plan-2021-to-2024/agricultural-transition-plan-update-january-2024

25 January	Invitation to tender (ITT) issue
21 February	Deadline for submissions (by 09:00)
4 March	Evaluation of submissions and meeting with shortlisted candidates
11 March	Contract awarded
18 March	Provisional target date for start of contract
17 June	Provisional target date for completion of contract

Fortnightly updates on progress are expected by email, with monthly progress reviews on an online meeting platform with the steering group.

4.3 Budget

A maximum of £35,000 (including VAT) is available to deliver this project, including any costs beyond the contractor's day rate. There are no travel requirements and therefore no anticipated travel costs.

5. Submissions and supporting documentation

The deadline for submissions is 21st February 2024 at 09:00. Your submission should be returned to the following email address: eroxburgh@soilassociation.org

If you are intending to submit a tender and would like to discuss the project or receive any responses to questions and clarifications, please email eroxburgh@soilassociation.org. We will confirm receipt of submissions within 2 working days.

Your submission should be in letter format with the following elements:
i) The contractor's familiarity with the subject and experience of developing campaign strategies for legislative change in partnership, giving examples.
ii) Proposed methodology for delivering the specification, including strategy development and partner consultation across the four nations.
iii) The day rate (excluding VAT) charged for each team member; this rate should include all IT and office/home working costs.
iv) A clear statement of the number of days needed to undertake each element of the work and timescales or a Gannt chart including team member availability.
v) The contractor should indicate whether they are VAT registered and provide a VAT number if appropriate.
In addition, applicants should supply the following documentation:
vi) CV(s) of personnel who will undertake the work.
vii) Evidence of public liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance.
viii) Details of two current or previous clients who can provide references on request (these will not be contacted without your explicit agreement).

If there are sections of your proposal that you would not wish to share with wider Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance members please divide your submission into the part for sharing only with the steering group members (named above) and the part shareable with wider Alliance members.

6. Evaluation Criteria

The successful candidate will be selected based on the quality of their submission, addressing all elements of the specification, as well as the value of the quote submitted and estimated timescales. A shortlist of candidates will be invited to meet representatives of the Steering Group in an online meeting during w/c 04/03/23 and will be asked to give a presentation of their submission.

Consultants should detail clearly their proposed methodology for developing convincing deliverables.

Soil Association will consider proposals and appoint the successful consultant through an assessment to include:

- Demonstration of familiarity with and understanding of relevant literature
- Quality of the submission and adherence to the brief
- Clarity, quality and effectiveness of the proposed methodology and ability to deliver the brief
- Expertise and skills of staff in relation to the brief
- Cost and overall resource inputs, including value for money