

Press Release

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**Is Payment for Ecosystem Services a route to better environmental management or a policy red herring?**

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) has been touted as a means to enhance the environment by invoking market forces. Academics working in the Rural Economy and Land Use programme agree that it could be beneficial, but call for appropriate safeguards to ensure that harmful trade-offs do not compromise important natural resources such as wildlife.

In a [recent publication from the programme](http://www.relu.ac.uk/news/policy%20and%20practice%20notes/39%20PES/PES.pdf), they conclude that there is a place for these kinds of schemes. Farmers already receive payments from the public purse to compensate them for losses incurred by making farmland more wildlife-friendly. There is the potential for payments for services such as carbon storage in the uplands and evidence to suggest that the public would be willing to contribute to conservation via “payback” schemes for access to wild areas.

However, schemes entirely within the private sector are rare and difficult to define. The academics agree that businesses could have a role to play, if given clear guidance and information from government, with pilot projects to show the way, and some key business players who are willing to promote them.

But they sound a note of caution and would welcome codes of practice on the exploitation of resources such as carbon storage in the UK uplands.

Director of the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme Professor Philip Lowe said: “Payment for Ecosystems Services is very much the flavour of the moment and it may seem attractive to the UK Government as a means of levering in new money to the environment.

“There are some obvious areas where there are benefits to be had. The water industry, for example, provides a vital service. If water companies pay land managers to farm in a way that avoids pollution, this could result in saving money on cleaning up water supplies.

“But Payment for Ecosystems Services is not a universal panacea. It cannot replace regulation and should not simply reward land managers for compliance with that regulation.”

Notes for editors:

1. Further information is available in the latest [Policy and Practice Note](http://www.relu.ac.uk/news/policy%20and%20practice%20notes/39%20PES/PES.pdf) in the Relu series which may be downloaded from the website [www.relu.ac.uk](http://www.relu.ac.uk) .
2. The [Rural Economy and Land Use Programme](http://www.relu.ac.uk/) is an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), with additional funding provided by the Scottish Government and Defra. Follow Relu’s latest news on twitter @Reluprogramme or website [www.relu.ac.uk](http://www.relu.ac.uk)
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