



Climate  
Catalyst

M E S S A G E   G U I D A N C E   P L A Y B O O K

# Unleashing the power of neuro and behavioural science to safeguard and restore peatlands

J U L Y   2 0 2 3

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# Introduction

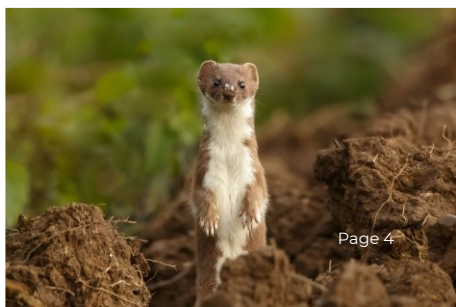
Peatlands are one of our biggest climate champions. Yet awareness of their impact is low, and attitudes towards them are poor. This presents a major communication challenge.

Historically, peatlands PR may not have been the most positive. Often used as the setting for horror films and thrillers, portrayed as remote and isolated places, ideal locations for criminal activity and hiding evidence. They are depicted as eerie or foreboding landscapes, associated with fear and danger. This contributes to negative perceptions peatlands receive...

...let's change that!

In fact, far from desolate environments, peatlands are vital ecosystems for biodiversity, as well as bringing a range of benefits to humans. They're also critical carbon stores – playing an important role in tackling the climate crisis. People deserve to know about this.

Climate Catalyst partnered with Walnut Unlimited, a market research agency who specialise in unleashing the power of neuro and behavioural sciences, to understand how to best communicate and shape positive perceptions around peatlands. This playbook acts as a summary of what we found.







# Our challenge

**What would truly motivate  
people to support Peatlands?**

# Overview of our research

We conducted a mixed methodology approach: a quantitative survey and qualitative focus group. Our aim was to identify aspects with the highest potential to drive or motivate people to support peatlands.

We spoke to 406 people across Germany and Finland. These countries represented two different but common contexts in Europe, while being the two largest emitters of emissions from drained peatlands across the continent. We hope the learnings will be helpful for other countries with similar contexts.

We targeted participants who were concerned about climate change. 90% of those we spoke to were already aware of peatlands. We also used a priming task to educate the survey participants on peatlands, and create a baseline of knowledge.



406 individuals from Germany and Finland



All concerned about climate change



49% male | 51% female



47% younger (18-45yo) | 53% older (45+yo)

# How did we do it?

Working with environmental experts, we developed a list of overarching themes important for Peatlands communication. Each theme was then represented by six statements that would make people support peatland restoration and protection. Half of the statements used positive language, and the other half employed negative language, aimed at testing what frame would encourage people to take action.

## Positive vs. negative language examples:



Degraded, destroyed, risk, contamination, bomb, endanger, disappearance, poor, lose...



Healthy, protecting, restoring, ensuring, securing, home, conscious choices, important...

## Some examples of positive statements:

- Climate change mitigation: **Healthy** peatlands are a sponge for carbon dioxide emissions
- Clean water: **Protecting** peatlands ensures **safe** drinking water
- Human benefits: Peatlands are a **vital part** of our country's rural economies

## Some examples of negative statements:

- Climate change adaptation: **Destroying** peatlands increases flood **risk**
- Support for wildlife: **Destroying** peatlands could lead to the **extinction** of rare animals
- Identity & Heritage: Peatland **destruction** leads to the **disappearance** of archaeological sites

## Overarching themes:

### Climate change mitigation

- Causes of climate change
- Carbon emissions
- Carbon sponge vs bomb

### Climate change adaptation

- Flood
- Draught
- Wildfire

### Clean water

- Safe drinking water
- Swimming and fishing
- Water supply and quality

### Support for wildlife

- Rare animals
- Rare plants
- Wildlife

### Human benefits

- Better future for next generation
- Rural economies
- Food security

### Identity & heritage

- Natural heritage
- Products I buy
- Archaeological sites





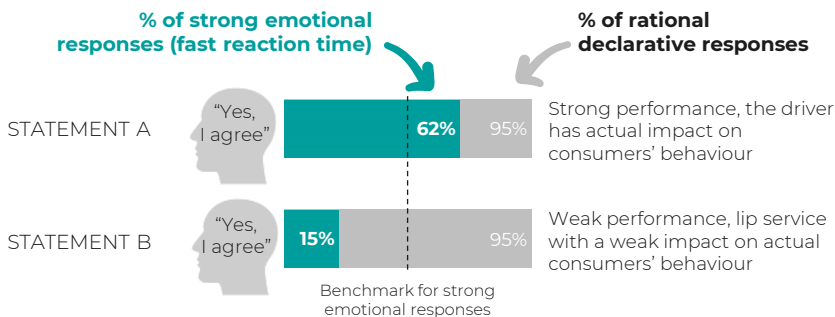
# Effective communication

**should aim to emotionally connect with people**

# Going beyond verbal declarations

Effective communication should aim to emotionally connect with people. Neuroscience reveals the majority of our decisions are made intuitively and emotionally. We are also not good at articulating our own attitudes. What we say at an explicit level doesn't always represent how we truly feel. Asking people straightforward questions wouldn't be good enough to tackle this issue, so we applied implicit testing.

We tested our 36 statements through an online survey enhanced with Reaction Time methodology. This allowed us to more effectively uncover the genuine emotional attitudes, which proved to be a crucial component for this study.



As we see from the example, even when on a rational level both statements receive the same level of support (95%) the impact they have on actual behaviour could be very different. Adding the reaction time score, we see statement A receives much stronger emotional support than statement B. Statement B does not resonate with our audience on an emotional level reaching only 15%, while statement A goes way above the strong threshold hitting an impressive 62%.

What have we found?

## The results prove we need to treat communication as a journey

All the messages we have tested can be motivating and appreciated when used at the right stage – but it is crucial to know when to use them.

The world of communication is a cruel place where every message fights for attention. We have only a few seconds to grab attention and start to forge an emotional bond. Therefore, we need to start with more emotional messages. The time to slow down and deliver all the interesting facts or impactful statistics comes later. With different channels.



### **There is a time for immediate, emotional messages**

To grab attention and forge emotional bonds



### **There is a time to slow down and deliver more detailed information**

To develop knowledge and understanding

We propose to start this journey with the following four steps.



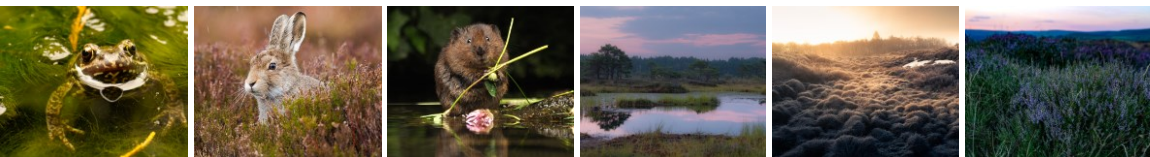
# Learning one

## Catch attention with something that resonates emotionally – for example, rare animals & plants

In a crowded world of communication, our messages need to fight hard for attention. We need to quickly make an emotional connection with our audiences. Our Reaction Time results show the 'wildlife' theme connects emotionally with our audiences, making peatlands tangible and adds relevancy.

### Things to remember:

- Your audience needs something tangible to care about.
- People love animals – focusing on this has the highest potential to drive engagement.
- Positive language works better than negative.
- Talking about peatlands in generic terms won't work.
- Just like forests or oceans people care about the wildlife in peatlands.



### More...

- Captivating animals & plants
- Motivational language
- Shorter & simpler messages
- Iconographics
- Messages with clear calls to action

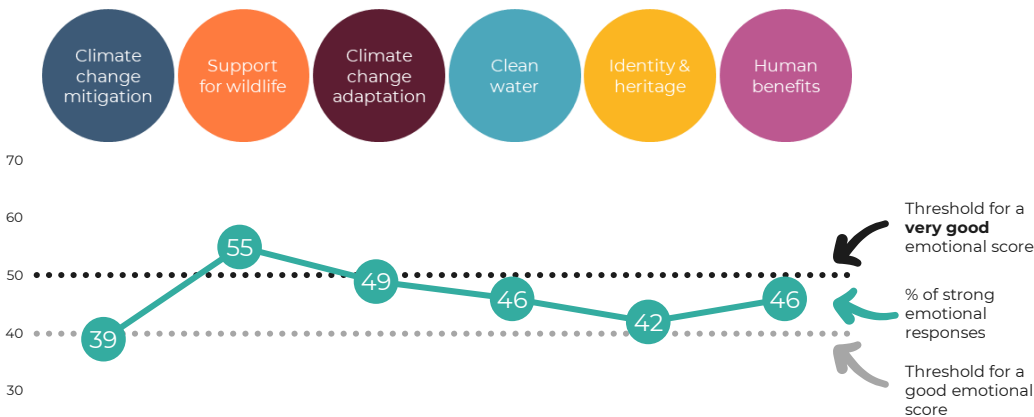


### Less...

- Generic landscape pictures
- Fearmongering
- Long & text heavy messages
- Encyclopaedic descriptions
- Knowledge based take aways

The 'support for wildlife' theme is the only one that reached above the 50% threshold on the implicit level. The messages related to rare animals and plants generated the strongest emotional responses. Suggesting these messages have the highest potential to effectively motivate people to support peatlands and their restoration. It is not surprising as this theme makes the message more tangible, adds substance and gives people something specific they can focus on, rather than thinking about peatlands in general.

## Q: Which would make you support peatland restoration and protection?



## Top 5 emotionally performing statements:

- 1) Peatlands are home to rare animals
- 2) Healthy peatlands help protect us from drought
- 3) Destroying peatlands could lead to the extinction of rare animals
- 4) Peatlands are a vital part of our country's natural heritage
- 5) Peatlands are home to rare plants



# Learning two

## Use secondary motivators that are tailored to your audience

Within our data we saw some motivators came out on top no matter the market tested, suggesting their key role in shaping audience perception. Of the top 5 emotional drivers, 4 out of 5 statements are the same for both countries. Highlighting the importance of hooking people in with strong emotional messages.



Germany



Finland

Support for wildlife	Peatlands are home to rare animals		Support for wildlife
	Peatlands are home to rare plants		
	Destroying peatlands could lead to the extinction of rare animals		
Identity & Heritage	Peatlands are a vital part of our country's natural heritage		Identity & Heritage
Support for Wildlife	Destroying peatlands could lead to the extinction of rare plants	Healthy peatlands help protect us from drought	Climate change adaption

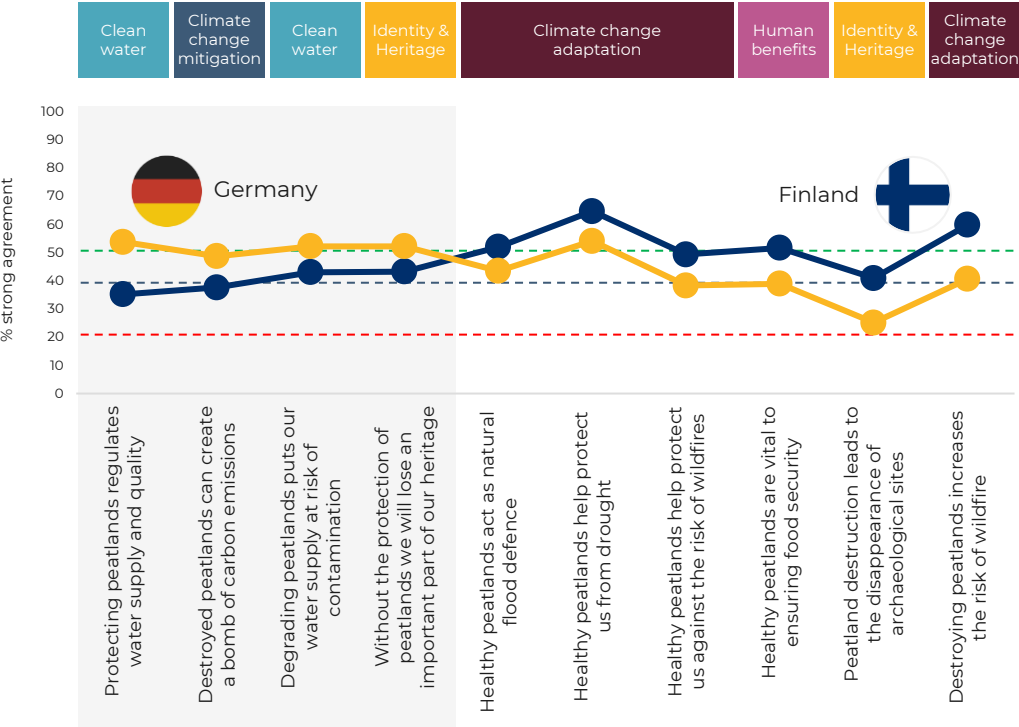
However, we also need to ensure our messages are relevant to our audiences. Relevant messages engage our brain more strongly. They make us feel closer to a topic. As well as our universal drivers, we saw other aspects tailored to the regional and cultural difference between Germany and Finland.

### Things to remember:

- Use more tailored messages after covering the “basics”
- Use them as “spices” – consciously and purposefully, but remember they are a secondary factors
- Be precise - get to know your audience first and apply only those elements that are specific and emotionally resonating with them
- Use these unique, secondary drivers to enhance the sense of identity and relevancy

In Germany, for example, respondents care more about water supply and carbon emission, whereas in Finland they are more motivated by messages on wildfires and droughts. Using these secondary messages can make our communication more precise and boost relevancy. Understanding our audience is key here to be able to apply these distinct and unique messages effectively.

The drivers with the highest difference between Germany and Finland:



# Learning three

## **Develop the audience's knowledge and understanding via suitable channels**

While 'support for wildlife' dominated on an emotional level, climate change mitigation dominated the rational responses. The climate change message, therefore, is still important, and shouldn't be discarded altogether. People simply need time to process and absorb them. To maximize their potential, it's best to deliver them through channels where individuals have more time and cognitive resources available, not at an initial stage of contact or standard commercials.

This suggests that the time and channel in which messages are delivered is an important consideration. It is unlikely such messages will land while someone is casually watching videos or scrolling social media. These messages are best delivered a bit later, when viewers are more engaged, have additional time, and are utilizing an appropriate channel to engage more deeply with the message.

### **Things to remember:**

- When delivering more complex information, utilise channels where people have more time available and cognitive resources at their disposal
- Leverage the power of surprise and gaps in knowledge
- Emphasise impactful facts about the scale of the problem, compelling statistics, and intriguing information
- Use these elements via specific channels: websites, brochures, videos
- Make it interactive and let people explore

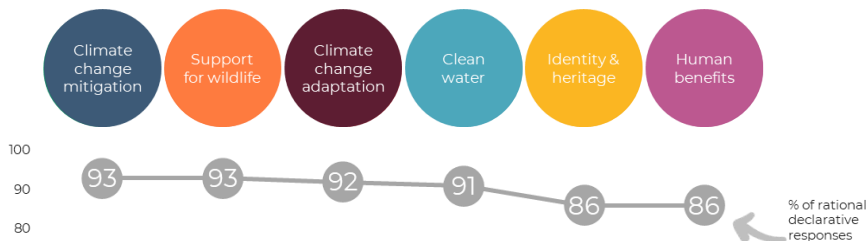


**Wow, forests are not the most important thing in the fight against climate change? Peatlands store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests? That cannot be true!**

When looking at the declarative responses marked grey on the chart below, we can see the Climate Change Mitigation theme is the joint top performer, alongside Support for Wildlife. Moreover, the more questions we asked, the more the Climate change theme emerged as important, with 38% of respondents indicating it as their most important theme.

Climate change also came out strongly within our qualitative groups, where respondents showed genuine shock and surprise at statements such as 'Healthy peatlands store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests'. The element of surprise can play a crucial role in maintaining audience interest. The wow effect of presenting fascinating facts or statistics can significantly boost the "viral potential" of our messages. Allowing individuals to explore these captivating details will help them grasp the gravity of the situation.

## Q: Which would make you support peatland restoration and protection?



## Q: Which would make you most supportive of peatland restoration

(conscious answers only)



## Top 5 declarative performing statements:

- 1) Peatlands are home to rare animals
- 2) Healthy peatlands are a sponge for carbon dioxide emissions
- 3) By restoring peatlands we are securing a better future for our next generation
- 4) Healthy peatlands significantly reduce the effects of climate change
- 5) Destroying peatlands could lead to the extinction of rare animals

# Learning four

## Keep a positive tone & focus on solutions

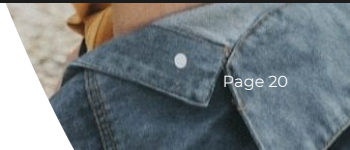
Our study showed positive language consistently scored better almost across the board. By focusing on positivity, viewers are more likely to engage and feel motivated. Psychological studies show that negative information is often slower and harder to process. In marketing communication, where time is limited, and attention must be captured quickly, positive solutions are the way to go. This was particularly evident in themes such as Identity & Heritage or Climate Change Mitigation.

The presence of strong discrepancies between positive and negative language supports what we know about human psychology. That we strive for hope and are built to focus on the positive. It keeps us engaged and provides motivation to support causes. On top of this, when it comes to climate change, people have become emotionally fatigued. People are looking for reasons to stay optimistic and want constructive guidance on actions they can take.



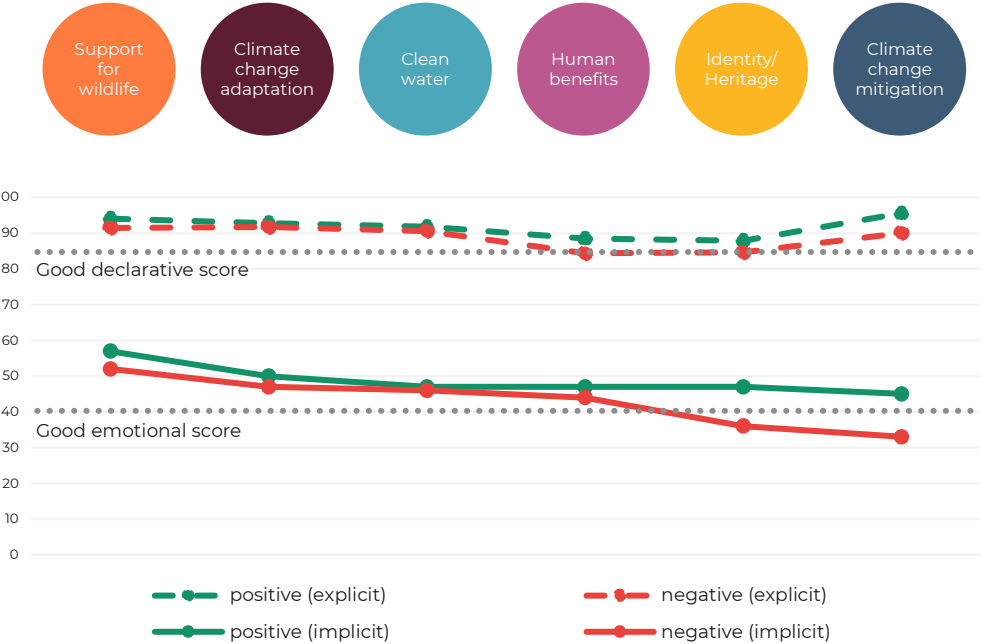
### Things to remember:

- Humans don't want to be faced with unexpected negativity, so stay positive
- Positive emotions are engaging, and people want to associate with them
- Negative emotions lead to withdrawal and disengagement
- In marketing communication, when there is not enough time to explain everything, and where we have only a few seconds to catch attention and spark emotional reaction – positive solutions are the way to go
- There are certain themes where positive language is more important e.g., climate change mitigation or identity & heritage themes.



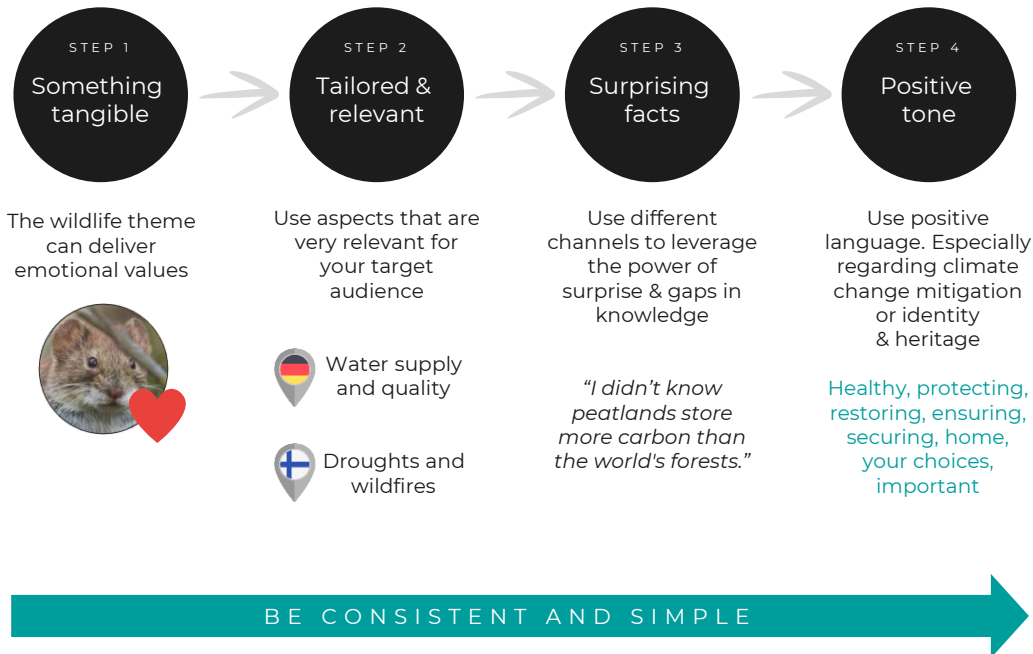


Positive language was stronger on both declarative and emotional levels.



Within our messages that took a positive tone we used words such as 'healthy, protecting, restoring, etc', whereas in the negative orientated messages this was often reflected with language such as 'degraded, destroyed, risk, contamination, etc'. An example of this is the positive statement of 'Healthy peatlands are a sponge for carbon dioxide emissions' and its negative counterpart of '*Destroyed peatlands can create a bomb of carbon emissions*'.

# Take away message



**Prepare for a journey. Be consistent and stay on course. Make communication easy to understand and help the audience to connect the dots.**

# Contacts

**For any questions, please contact our team**

## Climate Catalyst

Climate Catalyst works to strengthen collaboration and mobilise new actors on pivotal climate challenges. We work behind the scenes, bringing together renowned experts and new entrants to identify opportunities where action to date has been limited, the potential for collaboration is high and there's significant potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Together we deliver creative campaigns that build power and secure decisive action by governments to ensure we reach our vision of a just, prosperous world in which global temperature rise is limited to 1.5oC.

Climate Catalyst is a registered and sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. Find out more at [www.climatecatalyst.org](http://www.climatecatalyst.org), on Twitter @climacatalyst or email [info@climatecatalyst.org](mailto:info@climatecatalyst.org).

## Walnut UNLIMITED

We are more than a research agency. We are Walnut: The human understanding agency. We help brands connect with people, by understanding people. We believe that interpreting human behaviour is as much an art as it is a science. Walnut uses market research techniques to understand what we think, how we feel and, most importantly, why. Blending neuroscience, behavioural science and data science, we uncover the truth behind human decision making and shape the strategies that drive long term behavioural change.

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