



**Title: Draft Communications & Engagement Strategy**

**Date: 12 June 2024**

<b>Purpose:</b>	Decision
<b>How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:</b>	The Strategy will support delivery of Corporate Plan strategic objectives and the key themes set out in the annual Business Plan.
<b>Summary:</b>	A refreshed Communications Strategy (the Strategy) has been prompted by the appointment of a new Chair, the Business Plan identifying four key themes, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan and the heightened debate about a just path to 2030 and 2045 biodiversity objectives.
<b>Actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with staff to promote insight and develop activity plans</li> <li>• Review of language</li> <li>• Develop narratives for key themes in Business Plan</li> <li>• Ensure Governance with Board Communications subgroup</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To approve the Communications &amp; Engagement Strategy or provide conditional approval subject to the advice it provides.</li> <li>• That the four-theme Board sub-groups act as reference group for framing and narratives.</li> <li>• Board to establish a small advisory group to help steer Strategy delivery, provide a bigger picture for that delivery and to give assurance to the wider Board.</li> </ul>
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<b>Appendices:</b>	Communications & Engagement Strategy

**Purpose**

1. This paper sets out a draft NatureScot Communications & Engagement Strategy. We seek strategic advice on the proposed approach and consideration of how Board members can support delivery of its objectives.
2. A refreshed Communications Strategy (the Strategy) has been prompted by the appointment of a new Chair, the Business Plan identifying four key themes, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan and the heightened debate about a just path to 2030 and 2045 biodiversity objectives.
3. This draft Strategy (see Appendix) started to take shape once we had confidence in the detail of the NatureScot Business Plan for 2024 and 2025. We started with a workshop in March with managers of the Communications Activity. Drafting also benefited from a deep dive from the Audit & Risk Committee into strategic media management. It was then reviewed by SLT before submission to Board.
4. The Strategy will work towards delivering on our four key themes set out in the Business Plan, whilst laying down our red line: that action to restore nature is not negotiable. We will develop positive framing around those themes to establish a common ground, occupying that space and building support for nature positive action.
5. Past communication strategies have been drafted to support prioritisation by the Communications Activity team and were not intended for wider use though they no doubt proved of interest to colleagues. Whilst this objective holds, this draft is also for wider use and once approved and finalised will be subject to internal engagement.
6. The draft strategy in the Appendix sets out the wider context in which it has been developed. As this document is for internal use, the author does not anticipate proactive engagement with external stakeholders on its proposed approach.
7. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and its Delivery Plan (DP) has implications for the delivery of this draft Communications & Engagement Strategy. This is mainly because the SBS and DP will prompt Communications activity in NatureScot. On that basis there might be interest in our plan.
8. The Communications Activity bids for operational budget every financial year. This draft Strategy will help steer those annual bids but does not itself incur any additional cost implications in terms of paybill, resource or capital. Whilst we do allocate budget to two specific campaigns, the rest of our resource is dedicated to supporting NatureScot Delivery Plans.

**Conclusions**

9. This Communications & Engagement Strategy aims to strengthen the NatureScot Brand and narrow the gap between those who have a concern for nature loss and those able to do something about it.

10. The latest NatureScot opinion Survey is nearing reporting stage. This will provide insight into the performance of the NatureScot Brand as well as attitudes towards biodiversity loss. We will analyse those results and check against the approach set out in this Strategy.
11. Following the receipt of Board strategic advice, the Communications & Engagement Strategy will be finalised. After which, engagement with the Communications Activity will commence with a series of workshops, supported by the managers. These workshops will look to develop activity in support of the strategy delivery with a focus on the four key themes of the business plan. We will develop an activity plan for each of the four themes, as well as overarching activity.
12. There will also be a period of wider staff engagement, with a particular focus on language and the framing of the four key themes. We also plan to test our language with facilitated focus groups.
13. The author would also ask the Board what level of strategic involvement it would like in the ongoing management of the Strategy (see recommendations). This may include input to the four Board sub-groups looking at the key themes in the Business Plan and in particular narratives around those themes and establishing a communications and engagement Board subgroup.

#### **Recommendations**

14. To approve the Communications & Engagement Strategy or provide conditional approval subject to the advice it provides.
15. That the four-theme Board sub-groups act as reference group for framing and narratives.
16. Board to establish a small advisory group to help steer Strategy delivery, provide a bigger picture for that delivery and to give assurance to the wider Board.

## Appendix

# Communications & Engagement Strategy

## Introduction

The Communications Activity exists to demonstrate our value and the value of action to protect, restore and value nature. If we do that, we strengthen our reputation and enhance our influence. Our influencing is not a one-way street. Our ideal model is symmetrical where NatureScot listens, and our work is shaped by the audiences we seek to reach. This is the basis of what our Chair describes as a renewed partnership with our stakeholders.

That ideal cannot always be achieved. Therefore, we see additional risk from people with an interest in our work who disagree with how we go about things, the positions we adopt, advice we provide or the decisions we take. NatureScot has indicated an open risk appetite to this in line with a need to move fast and at large scale to secure an effective response to the nature-climate crisis.

That being the case, Communications has a key role in managing that risk by limiting the impact on our reputation in line with ethical PR practice.

This Communications Strategy is shaped by our insight and experience and works to deliver our Corporate Plan and annual business plans objectives. We believe that we will be successful when we have established a common ground on what needs to be done to secure a nature rich future in Scotland, occupying that space and building broad support for nature positive action. Our focus will be the four key themes set out in the 2024/25 business plan.

## Brand

The NatureScot brand is defined by how we are perceived. A strong, irresistible brand, points to a healthy reputation. Stakeholders and the public will have a view of why we exist, colleagues also. We have a story we want to tell about NatureScot. This strategy will frame that storytelling.

Our Communications Strategy will work towards strong awareness of NatureScot and a clear understanding of our purpose and goal. This reinforcement is critical. Occasionally, feedback and data tell us that something is not working, and we can act upon it. In 2023, we refreshed the logo to include a Gaelic language rendition of our name.

## A global interest

It is also important to recognise the international perspective. Much of Scotland's nature-related policy and activity has a strong international dimension whether that's with the intergovernmental biodiversity body IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), the International Union for Conservation of Nature, European Union regulations, other European institutions or both the climate and biodiversity global conference of the parties (COPs). It's important we have a clear view on what we can realistically influence and take a proportionate approach to our engagement. As many of the discussions internationally are technical or academic in nature, the lead largely sits with other Activities in NatureScot though Communications should support and promote where appropriate, especially if it allows us to reach new audiences.

## **Data**

We can draw on data that can both measure our impact and help design our strategies. The following regarding public opinion will be of interest.

### **Rebrand**

NatureScot rebranded in August 2020 and in 2022 we surveyed opinion about it. Just under half of respondents were aware of NatureScot with a smaller minority confident in knowing what we do. Those that were aware of NatureScot were then asked an open question about what we did, a majority then had an accurate idea of what we do.

The survey found that:

- Just under half the population had heard of NatureScot (47%), lower than for SNH in 2019 (78%). 12% were aware of what the organisation does. A larger proportion (35%) had heard of the organisation but were not sure of what it does.
- Overall, 20% of people recognised one or both of the NatureScot logos shown in the survey. By comparison when a similar question was asked in 2019, 37% recognised the SNH logo.
- The majority of respondents had a fairly accurate idea of NatureScot's role, with most people indicating they believed the organisation's role to involve looking after Scotland's nature, protecting wildlife, and preserving the environment. This was a much higher rate of correct responses than were provided about SNH's role in 2019.

### **Biodiversity**

The NatureScot Opinion Survey undertaken in November 2022, concludes:

Most people agree that biodiversity loss is an immediate urgent problem (76%) and that taking action on biodiversity loss will help us to tackle climate change (70%). However, fewer than half of respondents indicated that they worried about loss of diversity in everyday life (42%), that only 37% felt optimistic about our collective ability to stop biodiversity loss, or that they knew what actions their household could take to stop biodiversity loss (34%).

A larger majority of people (83%) also agreed that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem, and that climate change and biodiversity loss are linked (74%) and can be tackled together. However, comparing responses to each of the crises it is clear that levels of concern and understanding of actions which can be taken are higher in relation to climate change than for biodiversity loss.

## **Issues management**

Inevitably, the political landscape shifts, and debate waxes and wanes. It is important that we anticipate shifts and manage any issues that occur. Agility is no doubt vital, as is being confident and assertive in our approach. Often moving quickly with key stakeholders can mitigate risk. In responding effectively to these issues, the working relationship between the Communications Activity and the Executive Office, which supports Board and SLT engagement, will be important.

We will also develop Influencing Plans to address the opportunities and risks associated with strategic issues. Engagement around these strategic issues will be led by senior staff in NatureScot, focused on a specific issue targeting a limited number of important influencers. We prioritise the stakeholders we should engage with, known as tiering. We apply tiering in the following way:

**Tier 1:** The key players we must engage with on a regular, high-level basis - usually tackled by SLT, Chair and Board. Can be a mix of firefighting and strategic. Supported by an Influencing Plan.

**Tier 2:** The important players essential to the success of our Delivery Plans. Everyone can be involved in this. This engagement would normally be supported by a plan.

**Brand reinforcement:** That we engage in line with NatureScot values - the NatureScot Way - whilst we network, provide services and just generally go about our business. Products like our Brand Story, Corporate Plan and Business Plan should support that contact.



# Avian flu

## Background

Since 2022, we have powerfully told the difficult and quickly moving story of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak using a combination of news releases, social media posts, paid articles, media interviews with key staff, and timely, informative responses to media queries. We provided media training for the avian flu team, as the high number of requests for media interviews meant we needed greater numbers of staff ready and able to speak to reporters.

Throughout the outbreak, we:

- promoted the establishment and continuing work of the NatureScot-led Avian Flu Task Force
- gave regular updates on how different species and areas of Scotland were faring
- promoted the research work of NatureScot and our partner organisations
- publicised precautions taken on our NNRs, particularly in summer 2022, when we needed to close Noss and the Isle of May and advise on other islands stopping public landings to limit the spread of HPAI.

## Actions and results

Since the HPAI outbreak began in 2022, we have issued 21 news releases mentioning HPAI, received 116 media inquiries, and placed a number of stories with key journalists. The result was over 650 news articles and broadcast stories mentioning HPAI and NatureScot, for a total reach of 435 million, worth an equivalent of £12.7m in advertising value. We earned these strong readership numbers through the main news sources for many Scots, including BBC online with the most reach, as well as the Times, the Daily Express, the Guardian, and the Daily Record.

As can be seen in the word cloud above showing the most common words used in press coverage, NatureScot was mentioned more often than 'flu', 'bird' or 'avian' in these stories – an impressive sign that the organisation was central to reporting results, giving advice and taking part in important research. This has not only boosted our reach enormously in the last few years, but also very likely improved NatureScot's visibility and reputation.

## What next?

We continue to promote the vital research that NatureScot staff are undertaking with the University of Edinburgh, RSPB and BTO to capture and test geese, as well as precautionary measures on our NNRs to stop any return of HPAI or other future viruses. We will also be looking at feature pieces exploring this scientific work further.

## **Behaviour change and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy**

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and its Delivery Plan (DP) identify nature positive behaviour change as a condition of success for stopping the decline in biodiversity by 2030 and substantially restoring nature by 2045. The DP sets out several key actions which can help achieve these, including raising public awareness, and mainstreaming through education and other public sector bodies. The Communications Activity's main interest will be in raising awareness and promoting positive action. In effect narrowing the gap between the proportion of those who are concerned about biodiversity loss and those prompted to act in a nature positive way. Core NatureScot campaigns to promote behaviour change are Make Space for Nature (referenced in the SBS DP) and the promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Working closely with colleagues in the People and Places Activity these campaigns play their part in a wider nature sector effort to promote positive action for nature, including encouraging volunteering and citizen science. They are also important elements of one of the NatureScot priority objectives to "Inspire people to connect with nature, increasing appreciation of nature's value through impactful delivery and communication of our work".

Elsewhere, and in line with the Just Transition, behaviour change will be required if objectives set out in the SBS around the transformation of agriculture and land use, safeguarding 30% of land and sea by 2030, and the establishment of a new National Park are to be successful. The Communications Activity should support efforts in all these areas.

### **Strategy**

The NatureScot Communications & Engagement Strategy (see Figure 2 for strategy on a page) has at its core the corporate objective of securing a nature rich future for all. This recognises the journey people and organisations are on. Initially we set out to inform people about the benefits of action to protect, restore and value nature. Having done that, we hope to encourage support for action – most effectively through peer-to-peer storytelling. And finally, being informed and supportive, people and organisations act in a nature positive way.

There is growing evidence of anxiety about the impacts of the nature-climate crisis impacting mental health, especially if reporting emergencies offer little by way of solutions. Whilst still a relatively new area of research stories that talk about solutions are likely to resonate and encourage more nature positive activity.

### **Framing our key themes**

There is a large amount of material and advice on how to tell stories. One area that we can strengthen our approach is thinking about how we frame not just the stories we tell, but to help the tactics and strategies we design.





# Make Space For Nature

## Background

Make Space For Nature (MSFN) is NatureScot's most high profile campaign. It dovetails with and amplifies the strategic aims and objectives of the Scottish Government's Let's Do Net Zero campaign and has had an extremely strong performance to date.

Using a range of media platforms, the campaign aims to help address the societal disconnect with nature (one of the seven key pressures on biodiversity, identified as part of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy), drive behaviour change and raise awareness of the twin crises of nature loss and climate change.

By simplifying complex messages into jargon free 'top ten ways to help nature', the campaign provides achievable and accessible ways for everyone to take action each season and make space for nature everyday - physically, emotionally and mentally.

## Results

- During 2022-23 the campaign encouraged 2.5 million people (45.44% of the Scottish population) to take action by following '10 ways to help wildlife'.
- Social media activity achieved high average Click Through Rates (CTR) ranging between 2-6% (1% is considered good).
- 30-50k people visit the website each season, with a high 98% web engagement rate (70% is considered good).
- New audiences were reached through collaborations with targeted social media influencers, including LessWasteLaura and Chris Lawlor, with one influencer's MSFN videos reaching 500k views.
- The podcast series has over 40 episodes and 16k downloads.

## What next?

In line with key actions in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, expanding the campaign, and to particularly target less engaged audiences using relevant communication channels, will show that making small changes can make a big difference.

Measuring behaviour change is a key component to this campaign. Questions have been added to existing NatureScot public surveys to measure behaviour change, therefore future results will go beyond digital measurements.

We have taken this approach with the four key themes set out in the 2024 and 2025 Business Plan. Whilst there is value in framing each of the key themes, and we set out that detail below, it should also be recognised that they are linked and can up add up to a substantial whole. We are increasingly seeing resilience as a powerful framing for NatureScot's work to address the nature-climate crises. That resilience can be the common ground across upon which many different groups, individuals and opinions can converge. It is in this space that the Chair's call for a renewed partnership could have greatest impact.

This framing will help shape the stories that we tell around these key themes. These are set out below and constitute our key areas of focus.

### **Agriculture transformation & land use change**

Framing: 'food and nature'.

#### *Build support on common ground*

We often see food security and nature recovery posed as incompatible. The evidence of those practicing nature friendly farming shows that they can go together. We think the common ground is likely to centre on resilience, especially to the impact of climate change. Supporting landowners to plant trees and restore peatland will also be an important part of building resilience.

### **30x30 on land and sea**

Framing: 'nature heroes.

#### *Peer to peer encouragement to expand and safeguard sites*

There is international agreement that to reverse biodiversity loss more safeguarding of naturally special places on land and at sea is needed. The opportunity – or challenge – is to persuade thousands of landowners and those that work the sea to support this change. We believe peer to peer communications will have the greatest impact.

### **Increase nature finance**

Framing: 'invest with integrity'.

#### *Enhance reputation of nature finance market in Scotland*

The need for the right blend of public and private nature finance is understood, but there is concern that communities could be left behind, investment is not nature positive and that it enables greenwashing. The Scottish Government's principles for responsible investment will be key as will our application of them. Communicating the widespread benefits of nature investment will be important in enhancing the sector's reputation.

## **Strengthened species management**

Framing: 'a shared approach'.

### *Build consensus around protecting and restoring nature through wildlife management*

The regulations supporting species management in Scotland have been well established, but with new legislation they are changing. Many practitioners are concerned about their impact. With NatureScot's lead role in applying the regulations a shared approach to design and delivery is key, especially if regulations are to support nature recovery. Celebrating effective partnerships will be important.

### Audience

Different people and organisations are at distinct stages of that inform, support and act journey. That is why understanding the motivations and aspirations of different audiences will be important. As will deploying storytelling techniques that use an appropriate tone of voice and create engaging content. With the key themes in mind, farmers, and crofters; land managers and workers; fishers; community groups; eNGOs; Scottish Government and the public sector; our own staff; the finance sector; and MSPs will be important. Further segmentation of these audiences will be required, and we will rely on NatureScot expertise to work that through. Wider behavioural change campaigns will target the public, though content will at times be targeted on audience segments that are considered particularly important.

### Stakeholder engagement

How we engage with these audiences is central to our approach and must reflect where they are at in their own journey. Through effective engagement, especially listening, we build awareness of our work and ensure that our objectives align with, reflect and influence those around us. Engaging with individuals, groups and organisations and responding to them enables us to perform better. We engage with key audiences in both direct and indirect ways, with each serving to reinforce our key themes and messages. Organising and sponsoring set-piece events; hosting sector or thematic roundtables; communicating through national and local media; and engaging with MSPs and the Scottish Parliament, are some of the ways in which the Communications Activity supports NatureScot's stakeholder engagement.

### Colleagues

The risk of focusing on external engagement is that the especially important internal audience can be forgotten. It's vital we do not fall into that trap. That is because the staff of NatureScot are powerful ambassadors of the NatureScot brand through their own stakeholder engagement, often based on their expertise and where they work. At the high level, it is important that they are well informed of what is going on with NatureScot so that they align their own engagement with the organisation's priorities.

Also, and not least, Internal Communications has a vital role in supporting staff to connect with each other. This is important professionally of course, but also for colleagues' wellbeing.

### Language & Storytelling

We are exploring a new approach to the language we use and how we tell stories. We hope to have a transformative, long-term effect on NatureScot communications, as we use less formal and more engaging language across all our channels, reflecting the needs of our stakeholders. This will allow us to target stakeholders we struggle to reach more effectively – landowners, farmers, gamekeepers, fishing communities, and so on. We will find new ways to communicate effectively by reducing formal or scientific language and acronyms whenever possible to reach audiences unfamiliar with scientific or conservation terminology. We will also veer away from corporate language such as management, delivery and engagement and describe more specifically what is happening whenever possible.

To this end, we will use focus group research and discussions with staff across all major streams of work in NatureScot to change the language and messaging we use in our communications channels to make it more understandable, 'speak' to, and better reach and inspire difficult-to-reach audiences, as well as the public. This will mean reflecting both the perspectives and language used by other groups to show we are listening and receptive to innovative ideas.

Just as important as what we say, the tone of voice we adopt and the topics we tell stories about, is who is telling that story. The right person, delivering the right story in the right way can have meaningful impact. This might mean putting that person at the centre of the story, encouraging empathy and making a connection with the audience.

Some of those audiences that we struggle to reach – and we should recognise that the onus is on us to resolve this – have protected characteristics. Ensuring public facing digital output, for example on our website, is in line with legislation and regulation. The NatureScot Communications Activity will continue to deliver accessible output where it has the lead.

Fundamentally this will produce a style guide and message suite that will help us engage with people. This approach can only be effective if used in stories that put people at the heart of our story telling.

### Timing

We anticipate this strategy will be relevant until spring 2026, the remainder of this Parliamentary session. However, it should contribute towards 2030 objectives as the direction of travel established here will run through to the end of the decade.

## Resource

Figure 3 shows the communications disciplines that we currently hold in house. This is a substantial commitment by NatureScot, reflecting the importance of demonstrating the value of action to protect, restore and value nature. We can enhance that value by coordinating our communications across all the disciplines, so that when we push stories out, we do so across all our channels, and, importantly, internally too.

We benefit from some important resources. Considering frequency and extensive reach, we see as important mainstream and trade media; digital media; targeted influencing plans; events, sponsorship, and stakeholder engagement; internal digital channels and, marketing campaigns. Underpinning these are assets such as our intranet, the Nature.Scot website, FAQs, expert internal advice and film and photography.

## Scoring

There are several datasets and analytical tools available to us to understand the impact we are having. These tools can also support the evolution of tactics and our strategy. They include our reach in media, promotional campaign returns, public attitude surveys (our own and those conducted by others) and the deployment of SMART objectives on projects. The Corporate Plan measures currently assess engagement rates in the Make Space for Nature campaign and mainstream media reach.

**Note on Figure 2 (below):** This graphic summarises this strategy on a single page.

## Conclusion

The output of NatureScot's Communications Activity must show awareness of and talk about the bigger picture. We need to constantly ask ourselves and those we work with the following questions:

- What is the big picture?
- Why is this important to the largest number of people?
- Are we reaching the diverse range of interests across Scotland?
- Are we putting people at the centre of our stories?
- How are we different to everyone else? What can we make of that?
- How do we tell our story in the most engaging way?

Figure 2

# NatureScot Communications Strategy

Objective	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A nature rich future for all</b> To inform, win support and prompt nature positive action and decisions across Scotland</p>			
Strategy	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inform</b> Increase awareness of the benefits of nature positive action</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Support</b> Energise vocal support for nature positive action in Scotland, especially through renewed partnerships and peerto-peer storytelling</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Act</b> Celebrate actions &amp; decisions being taken– individually &amp; collectively– for Project Restore Nature</p>	
Key themes	<p><b>Agriculture transformation &amp; land use change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing: ‘food and nature’.</li> <li>- Build support on common ground</li> </ul>	<p><b>30x30 on land and sea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing: ‘natureheroes’.</li> <li>- Peer to peer encouragement to safeguard sites</li> </ul>	<p><b>Increase nature finance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing: ‘invest with integrity’.</li> <li>- Enhance reputation of nature finance market in Scotland</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strengthened species management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing: ‘a shared approach’.</li> <li>- Build consensus around protecting and restoring nature through wildlife management</li> </ul>
Key Audience	<p>Focused: farmers &amp; crofters; land managers &amp; workers; fishing; community groups; eNGOs; Scot Gov &amp; public sector; staff; finance sector; MSPs Broad: individuals; households; businesses; international</p>			
Implementation 2024-2026	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reach/ Frequency</b> Mainstream media (Print, TV, online), social media, partnerships, events, stakeholder influencing plan, marketing campaigns, internal digital</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Support</b> Website, intranet, core briefs, FAQs, advice, stakeholder lists, film &amp; photography</p>	
Scoring	<p style="text-align: center;">Media reach, campaign engagement rate, MSP survey, SMART objectives, KPIs, NatureScot Opinion Survey</p>			

Being sensitive to the needs and wants of our audience, the people, and organisations we want to have a conversation with will help secure our success. Let us surprise the people of Scotland with the stories that we tell.

**Note on Figure 3 (below):** This graphic shows the variety of disciplines covered by the NatureScot Communications Activity team. They include internal communications, media, digital and website, campaigns, public affairs, stakeholder management and graphic design.

Figure 3

## Communications – in house resource

27 people  
23 FTE  
c£300,000 operating budget

