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# TWO HUNDREDTH and THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE BOARD OF NATURESCOT

## MS TEAMS – 12 JUNE 2024

## CONFIRMED MINUTES

## MEMBERS PRESENT

Colin Galbraith Chair

Margaret Davidson Member

Ian Gambles Member

Jaboury Ghazoul Member

James Harrison Member

David Johnstone Member

Colin McPhail Member

Heather Reid Member

Jill Robbie Member

Nikki Yoxall Member

## IN ATTENDANCE

Francesca Osowska Chief Executive

Nick Halfhide Director of Nature and Climate Change

Robbie Kernahan Director of Green Economy

Jane Macdonald Director of Business Services & Transformation

Stuart MacQuarrie Deputy Director of Business Services & Transformation

Claudia Rowse Deputy Director of Green Economy

Jason Ormiston Head of External Affairs

Graham Boyle Chief of Staff

Sara Lewis Governance Support Manager (minutes)

Ben Ross Head of Protected Areas, Innovation and Data (item 7)

Marie Hernandez Head of People and Organisational Development (item 8)

John Uttley Principal Adviser – Nature Finance (workshop)

Graham Neville Head of Operations (North) (workshop)

## APOLOGIES

Peter Higgins Member

Wayne Powell Member

Eileen Stuart Deputy Director of Nature and Climate Change

# AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the two hundred and thirteenth meeting of the Board of NatureScot. He formally congratulated Jill Robbie on behalf of the Board on her appointment as Deputy Chair, which took place on 01 May.
2. Apologies were noted from Pete Higgins and Wayne Powell (members), and Eileen Stuart (Deputy Director of Nature and Climate Change). Nikki Yoxall would join later in the meeting.

# AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. There were no new declarations of interest.

# AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS

1. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the Board of NatureScot Meeting on the 14 May 2024.

## Action Points

5. The **actions points** were reviewed:

**Action Point (03/206)** (Board Members to be consulted on advice to Scottish Government on recommended statutory nature targets.) Members acknowledged that staff are currently providing further information to support the SBS Programme Advisory Group. Therefore, this action is **ongoing**.

**Action Point (06/206)** (Next Steps/Draft Plan for Kinloch Castle to be Presented to the Board.) Members noted output from the Minister’s commission to Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services division will not be available until later in June 2024 at the earliest. This action point is therefore **ongoing**.

**Action Point (03/208)** (Board wider discussion on the core purpose and role of NNRs to take place during 2024.) Members noted that a workshop session had been scheduled for the October meeting, which will be followed by a paper at the November meeting, therefore the action point remains **ongoing**.

**Action Point (05/208)** (A paper to be prepared for the Board regarding gaining evidence through systems thinking and innovation in the environmental arena.) Members noted that an update paper was expected during Q1 2024/25, therefore this action point remains **ongoing**.

**Action Point 03/209** (Board sub-group to develop refreshed narrative on resilience to climate change.) Members heard that the Chief Executive and Nick Halfhide had agreed that a paper would go to the Board meeting in August. The action point therefore remains **ongoing**.

**Action Point 06/209** (Risk appetite scenarios to be prepared for the Board, and then a ‘futures thinking’ discussion to be arranged.) Members received an update that risk appetite had been discussed at the ARC meeting on 06 February, where it was agreed that further work needed to be done before the full Board had another discussion. It was expected that the full Board would discuss risk appetite again after March 2024. This action point is therefore **ongoing.**

**Action Point 04/211** (Consult SG and the National Access Forum regarding consideration of the need for a review of the Access Code.) Follow up on this is expected in Q3 due to the limited number of meetings of the National Access Forum. **Ongoing**.

**Action Point 01/212** (Chief Executive and Nick Halfhide to discuss next steps for Action Point 03/209: Board Sub-group to develop refreshed narrative on resilience to climate change) A discussion had taken place and a way ahead agreed. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point 02/212** (Circulate the Terms of Reference and Commission from the Scottish Government for NatureScot’s licencing review.) The information had been sent to the Board. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point 03/212** (Circulate a list of the confirmed attendees for the Chair’s round table discussion on food and nature, and information on the planned next steps) This information had been sent to the Board. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

# AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

6. Members asked whether National Nature Reserves could be used to contribute to the plans for 30% of Scotland’s land and sea to be protected by 2030. Nick Halfhide confirmed that this was the case, and that in the unlikely situation where any of these areas did not fulfil Protected Area criteria, they could be given Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measure (OECM) status.

# AGENDA ITEM 5: ITEMS FOR AOB

7. No items were requested under AOB.

# AGENDA ITEM 6 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

8. Board members noted the contents of the Chief Executive’s report, in particular the following key themes:

* UK general election.
* Change of Scottish Government (SG) ministers leading to change in timing of the publication of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and Delivery Plan to autumn.
* First Minister priorities.
* Briefing meetings with Cabinet Secretary Net Zero and Energy, Ms McAllan.
* Achievement for the first time, the restoration of over 10,000 hectares of degraded peatland in one year.
* Success of Structural Funds.
* NatureScot involvement in Public Services Reform work.
* Engagement with the Youth Committee of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, attendance at the European Network of Heads of Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA), and Cabinet Secretary Net Zero and Energy visit to the Claypits Local Nature Reserve.
* Chair’s hosting of Food and Nature Roundtable.

*Nikki Yoxall joined the meeting.*

9. The Chief Executive updated members on the latest situation on Structural Funds. The final amount of successful drawdown of EU funding was still to be finalised. This was acknowledged as a good result, not just for nature, but for the Structural Funds team who had achieved EU approval for drawdown of the majority of the funding, through rigorous evidencing and auditing procedures. The Board offered their congratulations to the team on achieving this.

10. The Board were also updated on the Chair’s Food and Nature Roundtable, which had shown an appetite by land managers and others to openly discuss issues over sustainable food production and nature recovery.

11. Members asked whether SG had confirmed the peatland restoration budget for the current financial year, however this information had not yet been received by NatureScot. They also asked whether NatureScot was involved in Scotland’s economic strategy to increase jobs and income generation. The Chief Executive informed that NatureScot was involved through the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, particularly regarding private investment in natural capital. She agreed that further information would be sent to the Board on how NatureScot is contributing to the 4 priorities set out by the new First Minister, Mr Swinney.

12. In a further query from the Board, the Chief Executive was asked whether conversations on the SBS were interrelated with the National Environment Bill (NEB). It was confirmed that this was the case, and that the SBS Delivery Plan was expected to be a product of the NEB.

# AGENDA ITEM 7: DELIVERY OF 30X30

13. Nick Halfhide introduced this agenda item to the Board, which provided an update on progress and forward look to delivery of 30x30 in Scotland. It was noted that this work was still subject to Ministerial approval. The Board were asked to consider the proposed approach, and:

* Confirm the information in this paper provides sufficient clarity and update on approaches to delivery of 30x30.
* Identify actions that the NatureScot Board and Protected Areas Committee can undertake to help mitigate each of the risks presented in this paper.
* Provide any further comments on this work, including opportunities or risks.

14. Ben Ross gave the following updates:

* A workshop had taken place in the previous week to discuss how 30x30 could be achieved by using a ‘bottom-up’ approach.
* Use of recognising additional areas of land as Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) to deliver towards the commitment for 30x30, and the need to ensure that favourable conditions are maintained.
* Supporting restoration to contribute towards 30x30.
* Crucial to establish a narrative around 30x30 and the Board’s role in supporting this.

15. The following key points were made during discussion:

* The opportunity for non-arable land to be declared OECMs as well as agricultural.
* How 30x30 communications to land managers could also include targeted engagement with landowners within biodiversity hotspots.
* Clarity on the planned delivery of 30x30 – of the 12% shortfall.
* Ecologically Representative Networks – to consider how this target is built into the selection process for land contributing to 30x30 and to develop clear criteria for OECMs.
* Site monitoring costs –showed these going down due to reducing overlap and repetition, and better strategic use of monitoring staff.
* Consider stakeholder engagement, and the opportunity to map a process to engage with those who have the ability to influence or enact change on protected areas.
* It was noted that the Protected Areas Committee are holding two deep dives later in the month to consider both terrestrial and marine contributions and implications for 30x30.

16. The Chair informed that James Harrison will join the Protected Areas Committee from w/c 17 June.

17. Members were content to agree the recommendations.

# AGENDA ITEM 8: ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

18. This paper presented the Board with an update on organisational design work, which forms part of the Organisational Development journey. The new operating model went live on 1 Apr 2023, and the design part (phase 1) of the programme ended on 30 Jun 2023. Action Learning Sets will continue into a phase 2 of Organisational Development project work to review the implementation to ensure that the new operating model is properly embedded. The Board were asked to note this work, scrutinise, and to support SLT and the extended leadership community as it progresses.

19. Jane Macdonald asked the Board to specifically consider any risks or opportunities from their perspective, based on the update in the paper.

20. The Board asked what was needed to change in the organisation. Jane Macdonald informed that the 3 Corporate Plan objectives were still valid: to develop new ways of working, to develop a resilient and happy workforce, and to transform individual and collective leadership capability. There was however more that could be done to achieve a flexible and agile workforce and embed the new operating model changes to make them sustainable in future years, as well as recognising that the organisation is on a journey of cultural change.

21. During discussion, the following points were made:

* Communications to staff are crucial to achieve flexibility and agility. Practical examples are easy to use.
* The importance of local area staff who are ideally placed to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders.
* The Board noted their enthusiasm for the programme of change and asked how they can maximise their collective support this work in future.

**Action Point 01/213**

22. The Board were content to agree the recommendations.

# AGENDA ITEM 9: DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

23. This paper provided members with the opportunity to engage with the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy, prompted by the appointment of the new Chair, the Business Plan identifying four key themes, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan, and the heightened debate about a just path to deliver the 2030 and 2045 biodiversity objectives. The Board were asked to:

* Comment on and approve the Communications & Engagement Strategy or provide conditional approval subject to the advice it provides.
* Note that the four-theme Board sub-groups act as reference group for framing and narratives.
* Establish a small advisory group to help steer the development and implementation of the Strategy alongside the work to renew the wider Corporate Strategy (beginning in Autumn 2024). The group should also provide a wider perspective for that delivery and provide assurance to the wider Board.

24. The Chief Executive updated that this opportunity had arisen from various Board member views that they would appreciate greater visibility of the Communications Strategy. The Senior Leaders hip Team had already seen and contributed to the draft document and were content with the direction of travel.

25. Jason Ormiston advised that the strategy looked for 2-way dialogue between NatureScot and its stakeholders, and that it had been shaped around the Business Plan key themes.

26. Members were broadly in support of the draft strategy, noting that it would evolve further as outlined in paragraph 23 above, and provided the following key points of feedback:

* The Board particularly welcomed the opportunity for wider engagement with the public, in pursuit of influencing behaviour change as a condition of success for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. It was important for the future to be clear how the Board can support this.
* To achieve wider public engagement, how do activities such as Make Space for Nature fit into the strategy?
* Consider whether there should be separate strategies for public engagement and stakeholder engagement.
* The importance of engagement including all sectors of land users.
* It was noted that storytelling, putting NatureScot at the heart of the story, is a useful tool in communications with land users.
* Continue to focus on stakeholders/land managers who are already committed to responding to climate change and biodiversity loss.

27. Members offered their support to Jason Ormiston in developing the Communications Strategy, agreed to form a small group to assist in the further development of the Strategy and noted that it would return to a future Board meeting for approval.

# AGENDA ITEM 10 – UPDATE FOLLOWING CHAIR’S ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON ‘FOOD AND NATURE: FOR WILDLIFE, CLIMATE AND SUSTENANCE

28. The Chair updated on his roundtable discussion which had taken place on 11 June. A variety of stakeholders had attended the discussion, in which they sought to find common ground on their various positions on using the land and sea for food production and how to improve it for nature. The meeting considered:

* how nature recovery could benefit the economy,
* the role of nature targets,
* the need for a just transition,
* how global issues impact on Scotland.

29. Attendees had agreed that it had been a useful way to start the debate, and that it provided a basis on which to build on and find common ground in the future. The Chair agreed to forward his notes and action points from the meeting to Board members.

**AGENDA ITEM 11: CORRESPONDENCE PAPER – REVISED YOUNG EMPLOYEE INFLUENCE AND ENGAGEMENT APPROACH**

30. Graham Boyle highlighted the recent correspondence paper which members had been sent, which asked for approval of a new approach to how young employees are able to influence and engage with the Board. Several members had provided their approval for NatureScot to apply to offer the opportunity for the Board to host a Board apprentice via the Board Apprentice Programme. The remaining Board members were now asked for their approval.

31.Jane Macdonald informed the Board that Carrie Strong, the People and Organisational Development Manager was working alongside NatureScot’s Young Employee Panel to facilitate NatureScot’s inclusion in the Board Apprentice Programme.

32. The Board provided their approval for the Board of NatureScot to become a host Board on the Board Apprenticeship Programme.

**AGENDA ITEM 12: BOARD DISCUSSION – REFLECTION ON RECENT SITE VISITS**

33. Graham Boyle invited reflections from members on the recent site visits to Roxburghe Estate and Langholm Moor, and associated logistics and arrangements. General comments provided were:

* A long time travelling between sites, but this enabled useful discussion time.
* Would have been good to have got onto the grouse moor at Langholm, which was not possible on the day due to transport arrangements.
* The combination of sites gave a good contrast between private and community enterprises. Also, was well contrasted with last year’s site visit to urban green infrastructure in Glasgow. It was noted that the Communications Strategy is a tool that could be used to lessen the gap between rural estates and urban green infrastructure.
* The differences between both moorland sites in terms of conscious response to climate change, and their abilities to deliver on their strategic plans.

34. Members were thanked for their comments, which will be considered when planning future site visits.

Information Papers

**FORWARD PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

35. The Board Forward Programme of Business was presented to members. Members had no further updates to make to the programme.

**NATURESCOT BOARD MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

36. This paper gave a short summary of Board members’ internal and external engagements with NatureScot related work since the last Board meeting.

AOB

37. The Chief Executive updated that confirmation of the peatland restoration budget for 2024/25 had just been received from Scottish Government.

38. Nikki Yoxall updated on her recent useful visit to the Kildrummie and Glenkindie Estates to look at their rewilding project.

39. The Chair reflected on his first year as Chair of the Board, describing this as a pivotal time for nature. He offered his thanks to members and the Senior Leadership Team for their work and support.

Date of Next Meeting

40. The next meeting of the Board of NatureScot is planned to take place on 21 August 2024 in Glasgow.

41. The Chair thanked all those in attendance. The meeting was closed.

# END