

# Title: Q2 Performance Report 2024/25

**Date: 27th November 2024**

| **Purpose** | Decision |
| --- | --- |
| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | This paper presents Q2 progress towards delivery of our corporate priorities as laid out in our Business Plan, A Nature-Rich Future for All: Year 3. |
| **Summary:** | At the end of Q2, performance for all 15 of our Corporate plan objectives are rated as green ‘on track’. There is a small overspend forecast on the Resource and Paybill budgets reflecting in year surrenders to be made and an increase to the paybill Forecast. Capital is currently on track whereas an overspend is showing in Indirect Capital with the intention of achieving full spend on funding programmes. There have been no changes in the corporate risk scores this quarter, and one potential new risk. In the People Report, six indicators are green with one, Internal Movement, rated as amber. |
| **Actions:** | To agree the recommendations below |
| **Recommendations:** | Board are asked to:   * + Note the overall performance of the Corporate Plan objectives (Performance Report)   + Note the position of the resource and capital budgets (Finance Report)   + Note the performance of corporate risks (Risk Report)   + Note the overall performance of the People Measures (People Report) |
| **Report Author(s):** | Authors – Directors, Deputy Directors, Outcomes Managers, Finance, Planning and Performance Team, POD Team |
| **Sponsor:** | Jane Macdonald, Stuart MacQuarrie |

## Purpose

1. This paper presents NatureScot’s performance for the second quarter of 2024/25. It addresses delivery of our corporate priorities by reviewing: the alignment of performance against our Business Plan, A Nature-rich Future for All: Year 3; progress towards maximising our available budget; assessing risks for delivery; and people information supporting the resourcing of our work. These all support delivery of our Corporate Plan 2022-26, A Nature-rich Future for All.
2. This year the corporate plan priorities were further refined through the identification of our 4 areas of focus for 2024-25 which stimulate the key actions towards delivering our 2030 and 2045 targets to reduce biodiversity loss and restore nature. These areas of focus align most closely with the objectives identified in parentheses although work is being taken forward in preparation for next year’s business plan to identify how they align with the other 11 objectives. We are currently refining the 4 Areas of Focus for the start of the new business planning year (2025-26) as we improve our understanding of how they are helping to guide our activity. In summary, the Areas of Focus are:

* Agricultural transformation and land use change (Objective 8).
* Directing effort into nature expanding out from land and marine Protected Areas, safeguarding 30% of Scotland’s special nature locations by 2030 (Objective 1).
* Creating the conditions for increasing public and private nature finance in Scotland, essential to stopping nature’s decline by 2030. (Objective 10).
* Strengthening approaches to species management such as deer, beaver, and invasive species for positive nature outcomes. (Objective 2).

## Summary

1. Our neutral reporter role in support of new National Park is being challenged with discord building within the public debate. This is being addressed through a number of meetings with key stakeholders and dissemination of information to the local communities. The formal consultation is now underway and there are a large number of events organised to gather views to inform our advice to Ministers.
2. Additional resource from Scottish Government has allowed us to expand our specialist marine staffing to respond to the increased demand for advice on offshore wind casework. However, it is unclear whether this level of additional resource will be continued for future years or if we will have to absorb these costs and deprioritise other areas of work. We are in discussion with Scottish Government on this.
3. Work to finalise the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan has gathered pace in Q2 and we expect publication in Q3. We are engaging with officials and Ministers to finalise the detail of 30x30.
4. New licencing duties are up and running to underpin Grouse Moor management but challenges to the interpretation of licensable area has required a revisit of our approach. We continue to implement and iterate our new duties, balancing the intent of the Act with on-the-ground delivery.
5. We are seeing an increase in deadline extensions in order to manage our statutory consultee casework load, with the likelihood that the pressure of increased renewables generation and electricity generation consultation year on year will maintain this pressure.  Strategic work is ongoing with Scottish Government and the sector to manage this work and the issue is a shared one across all the statutory consultees.
6. We continue embedding new ways of working but both scale and pace are constrained by budgetary pressures, not least uncertainty on future year funding for multi-year initiatives, and wider capacity to absorb change alongside busy workloads. Previous pulse surveys have highlighted workload management as a significant source of stress and actions are being undertaken to counter this through the roll-out of the Health and Safety Executive stress management tool following a successful pilot.
7. The spectre of in-year budget constraints has been a mark of the quarter. The introduction of tighter spending controls and the ongoing AO template process have required us to be nimbler in our delivery and in places, adjust our risk appetite.
8. Whilst this report for deliverables in-year largely reports progress on track, the above headwinds have deeper impact on our wider strategic corporate outcomes to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2030. Collective will across Government will be essential to ensure the medium-term ambition of strategy is realised.

| PRIORITY PERFORMANCE | NUMBER | CORPORATE RISK | NUMBER |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Objectives | **15** | **Corporate Risks** | **10** |
| On Track | 15 | Increased Score | 0 |
| Minor Slippage | 0 | Decreased Score | 0 |

| FINANCIAL METRICS | STATUS | PEOPLE METRICS | STATUS |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Resource Budget | **Minor Slippage** | Health, Safety and Wellbeing | **On Track** |
| Capital | **On Track** | Attendance | **On Track** |
| Indirect Capital | **Major Slippage** | Workforce Profile | **On Track** |
| Paybill | **Minor Slippage** | Employee Relations | **On Track** |
| Project Allocation | **On Track** | Internal Movement | **Minor Slippage** |
|  |  | Retirement Profile | **On Track** |
|  |  | Employee Engagement | **On Track** |

**PERFORMANCE REPORT**

| WE HAVE PROTECTED NATURE | | | |
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| CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVE | SLT LEAD | RAG SCORE | Q2 UPDATE |
| 1. Lead the delivery of 30% of land and sea being protected by 2030 | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * NNRs - Completed Audit of opportunities for landscape-scale working. Drafted strategic plan for NatureScot NNRs. Progress - Audit in progress, due for completion Q3. SLT papers on future priorities discussed and will support development of strategic plan in Q3. * National Parks - Commence reporting following Ministerial proposal. Progress - Report plan published and initial engagement completed (portal, leaflet, stakeholder and community meetings held). * First draft of new OECM criteria produced and sense-checked with working group. Progress – Achieved. * InformedInsight (new Monitoring data system) launched and roll-out commenced Progress - Achieved – ‘Pre-Commercialisation’ phase complete. * Beta version of Big Biodiversity Layer ready for testing (moved from Q1). Progress - Achieved for initial layer. * Habitat Transitions framework approved by Scottish Government (moved from Q4 23/4). Progress - Not achieved. After discussion with Scottish Government over a pilot approach in Cairngorms National Park we have agreed to broaden this to a national approach and seek approval in Q3. * Commence Data Analyst work on Metrics, Targets and Tools. Progress - Achieved - will commence at end of quarter. |
| 2. Build stronger collaboration reducing the impacts of deer and modernise our wildlife management and underpinning licencing functions to enable a net zero and nature positive future | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * The First Minister’s Programme for Government announced the Natural Environment Bill with deer provisions to modernise legislation. Progressing Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders; restoration and enhancement through amended S7 and S8 Deer Act provisions and female close seasons with stakeholder input. * Pilot deer incentive schemes launched in Central Scotland and South Loch Ness; confirmed funding for the Cairngorms National Park (CNPA) scheme. Control agreements being progressed in Northern Deer Management Group. The Loch Choire S8 proposal awaits Ministerial decision. * The Species Licensing Review is considering licensing of lethal control, charging and cost recovery options. First year review of Hunting with Dogs licensing underway. * Following Act commencement in July, guidance and online licensing in place in advance of the grouse season. Published Code of Practice for Grouse Moor management. Over 220 active licences in place. Continued discussions with SLE and BASC on nature of scheme. * Revision of the Muirburn Code to fit the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Act. New Moorland Forum Chair. * Beaver management report (2023 -24) shows significant progress with reduced lethal control, more trapping, translocations into new catchments and ongoing mitigation across the expanding beaver range. * Initial development of goose management delivery plan with RPID. Undertook stakeholder consultation sessions for Sea Eagle Management Scheme review. * Reached agreement with Iceland on Greenland barnacle goose bag under the European Goose Management Platform. |
| 3. Engage and influence planning and other regulatory systems to ensure they deliver for nature and climate | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * Development Planning - input to Local Development Plans and support for those passing through Gate Check and on to Proposed Plan. * Biodiversity Metric - consultation report produced in agreement with SG. New project plan agreed with SG. * Engagement with Renewables Sector – Peatland Expert Advisory Group guidance subgroup nearing an agreed approach. Phase 1 outputs produced on data repository requirements. Discussion ongoing on ownership and hosting of any repository. * InformedDecision - AO template approved by Scottish Government. Improvements and additions to the testing platform, setting up governance ahead of rollout. * In fulfilling our statutory Development Management duties in Q2 we have been consulted on 171 planning applications, 112 pre-application requests, 22 Section 36 Electricity Act applications, 97 Forestry consultations and 41 Environmental Impact Assessment screening and scoping applications. |
| 4. Influence the transformation of marine management through new marine planning, protection and fisheries management frameworks, and working with the marine renewable energy sector | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * Comms - Marine protection communications strategy with Marine Directorate signed off. * Marine energy - Advice provided on Salamander and Ossian applications - biggest floating Offshore Wind Farm to date - and numerous scoping responses. Charging contract awarded and phase 1 work completed, with phase 2 begun. Service Level Agreement still being finalised. * Enhancement - Contract let to investigate seagrass declines and initial native oyster opportunity mapping has been undertaken. * Marine survey - Biosonics equipment tested at Rosemarkie and data collated. Lamlash (South Arran MPA) scallop and biodiversity survey completed in mid-August. * Marine planning - Provided advice to SG on a range of issues * Marine protection - MPA and HRA assessment guidance complete, awaiting SG Legal review. Tender evaluation for assessments complete and data collation underway. * Marine reporting - Marine data supplied to JNCC to support Reporting. “OSPAR convention” MPA management effectiveness reporting completed. Results will inform 2024 MPA Report to Scottish Parliament. * Marine and coastal development - Continued input to aquaculture Public Sector Reform streamlining and to SEPA's new sea lice risk framework. * Marine fisheries - Further conservation advice provided to inform Fisheries Management Plans. |

| WE HAVE RESTORED NATURE | | | |
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| CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVE | SLT LEAD | RAG SCORE | Q2 UPDATE |
| 5. Co-lead the production of the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and develop targets to include in a new Natural Environment Bill | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * Working with SG on refining SBS Delivery Plan targets ahead of publication in Q3. * Focusing on agricultural and land use change through our work on revising the SBS and delivery plan. Many of the agriculture priorities are set out in SBS and we are ensuring alignment across all areas of work on agriculture. * Worked with SG on the development of statutory targets for the Natural Environment Bill. Mapped existing measures, data sources, indicators and their legislative drivers and timescales to identify gaps. |
| 6. Scale up Peatland Restoration by delivering Peatland ACTION funding to projects | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * Committed over £12m to support 66 projects that will exceed our target of 6,800 hectares of peatland restoration. We are currently working on allocating the additional £850k received from SG. This will increase our target to 7,400ha. * Revisions to Peat and Development guidance for the Onshore Wind Sector Deal Peatland Expert Advisory Group to balance conservation and development interest. * Promoted the benefits of Peatland restoration at Black Isle Show. * Developing a Peatland Standard and commissioning surveys for project delivery. * Contributed to the SG Deep Drive on skills. Provided demonstration events on forest to bog restoration techniques. * Submitted bid for over £0.85m from Shared Island Initiative. * Published updated monitoring strategy. |
| 7. Lead, enable and convene others around the development of ambitious and coherent actions to restore nature. Deliver a major Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) targeted at high impact nature recovery projects and seeding greater investment from the private sector | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * Expanding protected areas on land and sea through landscape scale nature restoration – Project Initiation Document agreed with SG; database built and being populated. Links made to all relevant areas of policy and Governance Group established. Input to Environment and Economy Leaders Group place pilots. Presentations prepared for Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management conference. * Wildlife management - Initiated a project on capercaillie in the Cairngorms which looks at potential predation by other protected species. Undertaking training to further develop our capacity to assist with the national species reintroduction forum. * FIRNS evaluation the case for a terrestrial based project that could accept funding from private businesses to undertake nature restoration. |
| 8. Demonstrate how agriculture can be transformed with new approaches to deliver targeted outcomes for nature and climate | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) - case officers have completed their initial assessments of cases allocated to NatureScot. * Farming with Nature (FwN) - Circa 250+ farmers and crofters have completed or begun a biodiversity audit of their holding using NatureScot's Biodiversity audit app. * Helped SG develop options for amending the Basic Payment Greening scheme to deliver greater climate and biodiversity outcomes on participating farms. |

| THE VALUE OF NATURE IS RECOGNISED | | | |
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| CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVE | SLT LEAD | RAG SCORE | Q2 UPDATE |
| 9. Inspire people to connect with nature, increasing appreciation of nature’s value through impactful delivery and communication of our work | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * Nature Discovery Map - app developed with soft launch agreed with SG for end of September including initial engagement with 6 local authorities. * Future Roots Fund - 9 grants offered following assessment by youth panel totalling £20k and all projects commenced. * SPANS (Scotland’s People and Nature Survey) - Headline and Technical reports published in September with launch webinar to be held in October. * Scottish Outdoor Access Code - summer campaign delivered and plans for celebrating SOAC 25th anniversary scoped. * Access and visitor management - new National Access Forum convenor appointed and national and NNR RAG reporting undertaken. * Community-led engagement in landscape change - successful adaptive governance workshop held and local landscape monitoring programmes being delivered * NHS greenspace, biodiversity and green health - 1st phase of NHS greenspace mapping completed and interim report being finalised for publication in October by Public Health Scotland. Final draft of the report on the GHP pilot programme circulated for comment. |
| 10. Influence the regulatory, policy, market and institutional infrastructure needed to stimulate private sector investment into nature | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * The Flow Country - First pilot (Farm) underway and second to start by end Sept. Cashflow finance secured through social investment in both projects. Under Nature Investment Partnership, securing finance to build pipeline of projects for aggregated impact investment; ESG call for short-term support not showing any leads. Increasing investor interest now that WHS inscribed. * CreditNature/CivTech - All Pre-commercial Agreement (PCA) deliverables secured. * PINC Peatland programme - Shortlist of 3 models for peatland investment vehicle being assessed. * Nature Investment Partnership - Revised MOU to include Abrdn (investment managers) signed. No plans to publicise until finance attracted to a real project. Robust lines in place over Abrdn investment in fossil fuels. * Public land pilots - Rum feasibility progressing with survey work undertaken. South of Scotland cluster contiguous with Wildlife Habitat Education Programme (WHEP) and reported above. * Priority locations for investment in landscape scale projects - Work underway with data collection. PID agreed with SG and Governance structure in place. |
| 11. Drive the establishment of Natural Capital as an integral part of public and private business planning and investment decisions at national, landscape and landholding/business scales | Robbie Kernahan | **GREEN** | * Discussions with the Environment Agency over development of their toolbox. * Ministry of Defence starting a UK wide natural capital register for their land (Cranfield University). Opportunity for us to contribute re natural capital tools. * Discussed plans with SG for Natural Capital Asset Index update this year. This will be a priority for new economist. May have to delay and re-instate for next year. * Internal ecosystem service workshops held to help target data and metrics used by the tool. Outputs currently being compiled. * Economic valuation appraisal being used to improve the models used in NC tool. Will require further support from University of Exeter. |
| 12. Promote understanding and awareness of skills and capacity needs for the nature-based sector | Nick Halfhide | **GREEN** | * Research commissioned with partners on why numbers of Rural Skills and Game and Wildlife Apprenticeships are so low. * Green Finance Practitioner, Peatland Contractor and Regenerative Farmer pathways completed. * Online "Nature-positive management for public sector estate managers" delivered in partnership with University of Highlands and islands. Over 100 attendees. * Workshop held to scope the proposed SBS delivery plan framework for volunteering and citizen science. * Cohort of STEM ambassadors recruited and going through process of induction and checks required. |

| WE HAVE TRANSFORMED HOW WE WORK | | | |
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| CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVE | SLT LEAD | RAG SCORE | Q2 UPDATE |
| 13. Deliver new ways of working to stimulate achievement of our ambitions | Jane Macdonald | **GREEN** | **Estates**   * Clydebank – SG leased property Atlantic Quay is now the preferred option and relocation will take place in November 2024. * Battleby – In August Perth and Kinross Council approved plans to purchase Pullar House. Work has now commenced on a timescale to move. * Galashiels - The options appraisal has recommended a move to the Scottish Public Pensions Agency-owned (SPPA) office in Tweedbank.   **Information Technology Implementation Programme**   * FrontierConnect (Office Connectivity Redesign): the migration of old SWAN circuits and consolidation of office connections under the new SWAN2 framework has seen good progress.  All line orders have been placed and rollout will begin in Q3. * GIS Transformation Programme is making steady progress, work on the Quick Wins and the Foundation Building workstream underway. Projects are in place to prepare the User Stories/ Personas to support the next phase of market testing and to document enterprise and systems architecture requirements. * M365 Technical Architecture: Exchange migration is complete, and all mail flow has now been moved to the Cloud. * Data centre resilience: test environment is complete and a new approach to backup and replication has been endorsed by our external experts.   **Information and Cyber Security**   * FOI/EIR Disclosure log is now live on our external website, reducing staff time on responses. Q2 FOI performance at 95% compliance. * Migration of helpdesk functions to Freshdesk in line with other teams to reduce administrative effort and track demand more easily.   **Digital Delivery Programme**   * Licencing tackling long-standing issues around GDPR and had a successful roll out of Grouse application. * Standing waters database project has shifted from a full internal redevelopment to a more efficient approach using tools from our GIS suite * Work has commenced on updating the APIs from MIDAS to sitelink, improving the connectivity with Informed Decision and Informed Insight, and laying the foundation for better access to Protected Areas data across our application suite   **Communications**   * Development of a communications and engagement strategic plan, with support and advice from Board. * Accessibility: progressing work to meet legislation and ensure NatureScot’s platforms and content meet accessibility requirements. * SOAC and Make Space for Nature campaigns: rollout of summer promotion, continuing to deliver extended audience reach and penetration. * Scotland’s Climate Week (23-29 September 2024) Internal and media promotion   **Data**   * Development of workflow for new projects to consider data use and management, will feed into Project Management Office (PMO) toolkit. * Guidance on use of drones and how to manage data published on Intranet and shared via (UK Environmental Observation Framework) UKEOF.   **Net Zero**   * GGH received an A+ performance rating in relation to building emissions. |
| 14. Transform our individual and collective leadership capability | Jane Macdonald | **GREEN** | * The Global Leadership for Sustainable Development (GLSD) programme concluded. A paper will be submitted to SLT for a workshop on leadership. Inner Development Goals (IDGs) will be included in the staff conference in December. * The Strategic Workforce Planning (SWP) project is amber, although progress was made by the three teams piloting the new approach. The project is working through feedback and adjusting timescales to align with business planning. |
| 15. Sustain our focus on developing a happy and resilient workforce | Jane Macdonald | **GREEN** | * The recruitment sprint has driven some significant success with the Fusion Optimise project. The planned improvements are now receiving user testing. * The automation of the rebooking of compliance and regulatory training has not been achieved and will carry over into the next 90 days. * The Career Conversation pilot has ended. The People Programme Board has agreed rollout to the wider organisation. * The HSE stress management tool pilot has taken place and will be rolled out in 2025/26. This will include questions specific to hybrid working. * The “continuous improvement forum” has implemented improvements including outsourcing right to work and reference checking and additional staff benefits. |

# PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD For more information please click on the measure title that will take you to the source data.

## WE HAVE PROTECTED NATURE

| **Measure** | **Performance Overview** | **Actual** | **Cause** | | **Response** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [**Stakeholder interest in MPA Information**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3962324/details) **(hits on webpages)** |  | 475 | Statistics are unreliable due to a change in the way Google collected stats (to do with cookie agreements) from the end of June 2024. As a result, stats are dramatically down relative to last quarter. This drop in numbers is across the NatureScot website. | | Web team have had this 'fixed' now but it's going to take a while for the numbers to accurately reflect the picture. |
| [**No. of restoration projects for which we’ve provided advice**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3938660/details) |  | 6 | We have responded to increased advice requests related to casework involving enhancement or nature positive elements. Throughout the quarter, we have continued to provide advice to NatureScot and Marine Directorate colleagues and contributed to the work of NRF and SMEEF. | We have also continued our involvement in research, working groups, and ongoing work related to habitats opportunities mapping and developing approaches for capturing enhancement project data. | |
| [**License applications turnaround time within standards**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3972998/details) |  | 964 | Now includes Grouse shooting licences. | As new licence application types can be applied for online the numbers will increase. Numbers will continue to fluctuate due to seasonality. | |
| **[No. and Types of licenses that are processed through the online system](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920276/details)** |  | 249 | Can’t advise whether licences have been issued in accordance with an agreed turnaround time, because the database algorithm does not reflect the turnaround times defined in our service level statement (SLS) and we may have missed the SLS agreed time but met the requested date on the licence application. | | Aiming to look at a work-around to be able to conduct analysis of turnaround in Q3 to then report in Q3. Technical issues or staff resource may prevent this. |
| [**No. of catchments with established beaver populations**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920275/details) |  | 5 | We have approved no applications to date, we are liaising with the Abriachan application on how to progress their application. | | We are aware that the Beauly application is undergoing further decisions outwith NatureScot. Internal Discussions are ongoing about a release on Taynish NNR but this is not imminent and would not lead to a new catchment. |
| [**% of holding objections for formal planning applications**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3918504/details) |  | 4.33% | Up to 16/9 the proportion of holding objections (4.33%) is almost in the GREEN RAG tolerance for Q2 (incudes 1 additional SRN mast application and 3 peatland restoration proposals). But mid-AMBER for Q1 and Q2 combined (6.38%) with 60% of holding objections relating to either SRN telecom masts (10/30) or peatland restoration (8/30). | | Some improvement in the figures but growing number of peatland restoration cases requires some consideration of upstream intervention. |

## WE HAVE RESTORED NATURE

| **Measure** | **Performance Overview** | **Actual** | **Cause** | **Response** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [**No. of individual farm businesses that have completed a biodiversity audit**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920272/details) |  | 244 | 173 farms have completed biodiversity audit maps of their farms in Q2. | The development of the Biodiversity Audit has been tested over Q2 by farmers and crofters across Scotland prior to finalising and then releasing it to the public in 2025.  As part of the test phase 173 farmers/crofters have completed a biodiversity audit of their farm/croft |
| [**No. of marine renewable energy consultations we provide advice on avoiding impacts on nature**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920434/details) |  | 129 | Encompasses summer holiday period. Includes the following significant consultation responses issued: Ossian s36 application, Salamander s36 application, Ayre Scoping. Bowdun Scoping consultation received. | Appointed 3x Marine Sustainability Advisers, 2x Marine Mammal Advisers, 1x Underwater Noise Adviser, 3x Marine Ornithologists and 1x Marine Admin Support. |
| [**NatureScot is in partnership with new**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A4124199/details) **recipients** |  | 7 | 2 new HN recipients (out of 4 new HN grants). 4 new TN Development funding recipients (out of 9 new TN Development grants). 1 new TN Delivery recipient (only new TN Delivery grant). | During Quarter 2 there was one NRF decision panel held for decisions to both Helping Nature and Transforming Nature strands of the programme - the number of new recipients for this round is high with 50% of all awards to applicants who have not received funding from NRF previously. |
| [**External funds raised by SMEEF and the amount allocated to projects.**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3736347/details) |  | £600,000 | £400,000 from SHEPD towards Seagrass Fund; £150,000 received for Seabird Resilience Fund and £50,000 for General Fund | £400,000 expected in Q4 for Seagrass fund and £300,000 for Seabird Resilience Fund |
| [**Area (hectares) of peatland put on the road to recovery**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3736343/details) |  | 950 | Completed projects in this quarter from projects carried forward from previous year. | A total of 66 successful projects, including some carried forward from last year, have been notified and the majority of offers issued. The hectarage target for Scottish Government will be altered dependent on the funds being made available. The target was previously set at 8,600ha when Scottish Government indicated the potential of an additional £2.5million in funding. This has been reduced to 6,800ha based on agreed funding of £10.14million. |

## THE VALUE OF NATURE IS RECOGNISED

| **Measure** | **Performance Overview** | **Actual** | **Cause** | **Response** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [**Engagement Rate on Make Space for Nature (MSFN) webpages**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920259/details) |  | N/A | Web stats skewed due to system errors. High click numbers observed. | Worked with two influencers, Mixing Colours and Libby Penman, with results including 40k views of one video. |
| [**No. of Landscape partnerships that NatureScot is involved in that use a natural capital approach**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3919298/details) | N/A | N/A | Data on hold due to new hire introduction still ongoing. | There has bene staff turnover I n the team responsible for collecting the data. By the next fy a new natural capital tool will be launched that will provide a clearer indication of the number of partnerships that are taking a Natural Capital Approach. |
| [**Nature-restoration jobs and skill development opportunities created through our activity**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3736341/details) |  | 233 | Further Forest to Bog events well attended. Supported SRUC Conference in Dumfries | Better understanding within wider staff of what events we can support and who to contact for resources and support |
| [**Young People that we engage with on Skills**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A4379404/details) |  | 395 | Attending UHI Student Conference, Supporting EY Foundation young students and providing Bairns on Bogs opportunities. Islay High School STEM Event, CLS Rural Employability Event/AGCAS Careers Event. Plan to attend U of E Discover Careers/P and K Youth Climate Conference and run a NatureScot Meet the Professionals Webinar. | Further opportunities to work with EY Foundation and developing STEM ambassadors. Greater momentum because of engagement with DYW, careers advisors and Universities. Partnering with Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities to drive attendance. |
| [**National Nature Reserve online engagement**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3736345/details) |  | 781,246 | Figure is lower than expected for quarter but still showing good engagement for most reserves. |  |

## WE HAVE TRANSFORMED HOW WE WORK

| **Measure** | **Performance Overview** | **Actual** | **Cause** | Response |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [**Sq meterage of floorspace dedicated to NatureScot**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3955829/details) | Decreasing | N/A | Hybrid working has allowed us to flex our office space requirement. | This measures the reduction in office floor space used. Seven office reviews have identified 1900m2 of workstation floorspace that is no longer required. |
| **[Total emission reduction (tCO2)](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3736962/details)** |  | N/A | Annual dataset - not due for reporting at this time | Data being collated for Climate Change Duty Reporting. |
| [**Workforce Diversity**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3724366/details) |  | 49 | The diversity of our workforce remains low but is representative of the population of Scotland. We continue to work in Partnership to tackle reporting rates. | The work of the Inclusive Recruitment project will continue into phase 2 as we begin to mainstream actions into business as usual and other workstreams.  We will also continue to make progress on the Equality Outcomes and their contributory actions which will look at ways to increase opportunities for minority groups. |
| [**% Of Implemented Audit Recommendations**](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3920956/details) |  | 80% | The Priority 1 implementation rate decreased to 71%, and the rolling average across the last four quarters has increased to 84%, slightly below the KPI target of 85%. There are 2 delayed Priority 1 recommendations from the audits of CivTech projects and Learning and Development. | In relation to lower level Priority 2 and 3 recommendations, there are 4 delayed ones which relate to the H and S Framework, Learning and Development and Organisational Response to Pulse Surveys audits. |

**FINANCE**

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| **Financial Metrics (£m)** | **Measure** | **Budget** | **Forecast** | **Variance** | **Rating** |
| Resource Budget | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 65.5 | 67.2 | (1.6) | **MINOR SLIPPAGE** |
| Capital | Outturn within 5% of final budget | 2.6 | 2.5 | 0.1 | **ON TRACK** |
| Indirect Capital | Outturn within 5% of final budget | 18.8 | 20.9 | (2.1) | **MAJOR SLIPPAGE** |
| Paybill | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 41.6 | 42.6 | (1.0) | **MINOR SLIPPAGE** |
| Project Allocation | Outturn outwith 1% of final budget | 18.1 | 18.0 | 0.0 | **ON TRACK** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Peatlands | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 15.8 | 17.1 | (1.3) | **MINOR SLIPPAGE** |
| Farming with Nature | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 0.9 | 0.9 | 0.0 | **ON TRACK** |
| Nature Recovery Fund | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 9.7 | 11.0 | (1.3) | **MAJOR SLIPPAGE** |
| FIRNS | Outturn within 1% of final budget | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0.0 | **ON TRACK** |

\*Resource under 1% - on track, up to 10% minor slippage, over 10% major slippage (\*\* Capital under 5% / up to 10%)

**Resource Budget Performance**

An overspend of £1.628m is currently forecast on the Resource budget (August position was an overspend of £0.078m but we were reporting Peatlands and NRF including the confidence levels. At this point last year, an overspend of £0.355m was forecast).

* We are working with Objective leads to achieve £1.8m of surrenders before the end of this financial year. This has been included in the calculations above (target at the beginning of the year was £2.4m but we have allocated further budget since and therefore the surrenders required increased. Surrenders year to date are £1.7m) – without the surrenders received we would be £3.4m overspent at year end.
* Confidence levels are allocated against the Corporate Plan Objectives to identify financial risk / surrenders. The overall value of expected surrenders based on the latest confidence levels is £1.733m but an additional £0.086m is needed to be surrendered to bring us in on budget.
* Finance meets each Objective Lead monthly to advise and challenge commitments, spend and surrenders. In collaboration with Objective Leads, allocations can then be made to high priority and achievable work during the remainder of the year.

Movement in month includes a significant uplift in Paybill. The Paybill forecast has been updated and has increased to £42.589m. This is a £1m variance on the current budget of £41.6m. An exercise with Directorates to find Paybill savings continues, and a deep dive session with SLT took place, together with decisions being made on FTA positions.

Further amendments in month include:

* The additional funding requested from SG of £0.45m for Goose Schemes was rejected and therefore we are funding this from our Core GIA.
* Additional budget from Marine Directorate for Marine Monitoring was confirmed at £0.1m and our budget increased by this amount. This will be received at SBR.
* The project budget and target are £18.1m with a current forecast of £18m. The Project Allocation Forecast Tracker does not include any ring-fenced funds NRF, Peatlands, FIRNS and FwN are therefore excluded. The JNCC contribution is also not included, the Budget and Forecast for it is £1.157m and will be paid in mid-October.

**Programme funding including Indirect Capital**

Resource Programmes are forecasting an overspend of £0.504m which does not consider the confidence levels for Peatlands and NRF.

* In addition to the £14.9m approved by SG for Peatland Action (£10.99m Indirect Capital and £3.91m Resource), we have included a further £0.85m in the budget to be received from the Shared Islands Fund.  The SIF claim has been submitted and projects funded by this money offered accordingly.
* On both Peatlands and NRF, we have over-allocated due to these large programmes having underspent in previous years. We have applied confidence levels which are the value of surrenders we need to achieve to bring us in on budget. We are showing the full forecast for these programmes before the confidence levels are applied. Both programmes are being project managed and have financial support from the Business Support Accountants.
  + We are currently forecasting £17.089m against the budget of £15.75m for Peatland Action. We require surrenders (and/or slippage into 25/26) of £1.4m to bring us in on budget.
  + The total Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) budget is £9.732m, this is split £2.750m Resource and £6.982m Indirect Capital. We are forecasting £10.986m without the confidence levels applied, a total overspend of £1.254m which we expect to receive in surrenders to bring NRF in on budget
  + The Farming with Nature budget is £0.855m. We are currently forecasting full spend on this programme.
  + The Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) budget is £1.5m, £1.2m from SG and £0.3m from our Core GIA. We are forecasting £1.482m on this programme.

**Capital Budget Performance**

An underspend of £0.124m is forecast on the Capital budget.

NatureScot currently leases land at Blawhorn Moss NNR which includes the access road and carpark for visitors to the NNR. The land is being sold, however the purchase value is not available yet so we have not yet included within the number potential acquisitions price (expected to be less than £100k).

**RISK AND AUDIT**

| **Corporate Risks** | **Risk Changes** |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | |  | | Changes to Corporate Risk Scores  ↑ **0** Gone Up  ↓ **0** Gone Down  Change to Corporate Risk Register - proposed  ↗ **1** New Corporate Risks (potential)  ↘ 0Risk De-Escalated |

## Risk

The [Corporate Risk Register](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A4725577/details) holds the high priority risks for NatureScot. There are currently 10 approved Corporate Risks, 7 medium, and 3 high.

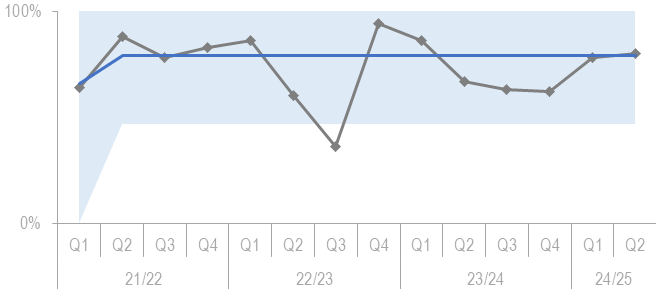
The Corporate Risks have been reviewed to ensure that they still require to be managed at the corporate level. It has been agreed that Corporate Risk no. 253 Peatland restoration target and budget can be de-escalated and to be appropriately managed at the Peatland Programme Board level. A new risk is being developed to capture the risk of NatureScot committing to multi-year expenditure of funding which might not be supported by Scottish Government in future years and would potentially require support from Grant-in-Aid. This would affect Peatland and NRF projects.

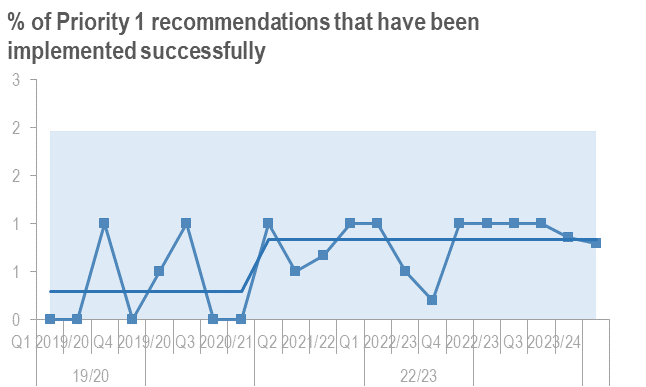
**The Board are requested to note the performance of the corporate risks and the development of a new risk**

## Audit

Whilst the Priority 1 implementation rate has decreased to 80%, it is still above the KPI target of 75%. There are also only 2 delayed Priority 1 recommendations from the Learning and Development and CivTech Processes audits. In relation to lower level Priority 2 and 3 recommendations, there are 5 delayed ones which relate to the H & S Framework, Learning and Development, Organisational Response to Pulse Surveys, Financial Forecasting, and Net Zero Plan audits.

Implementation Rate





# PEOPLE DASHBOARD

All but one of the People measures are green. There has been a reduction in accident numbers and in sickness absence levels; turnover remains steady at 8%; casework levels are low; headcount is peaking as recruitment in Q1 translated into new starts in Q2; our average retirement age was 65. The recent Pulse Survey achieved a 75% response rate.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Measure** | **RAG** | **Performance Overview** | **Actual** | **Analysis** | **Comment** |
| **Health, Safety and Wellbeing** |  | A graph with a line and a line  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows number of accidents) | 12 | A decrease in accidents has been reported from 18 down to 12 (↓8). A decrease in near misses reported from 6 to 2 (↓4).  Of these, bites, bruises, and strains were the most common reported injury type with 23% of these being investigated.  One minor injury incident on a reserve involving members of the public which may be related to maintenance and will be followed up. No consistent themes identified other than tick bites for staff working in the field. | Continue to promote proactive reporting of accidents and near misses, while monitoring and encouraging investigations to be concluded as a result. |
|  | A graph with a line and a line  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows number of near misses) | 2 |
| **Attendance** |  | A graph with a line and a line  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows the number of sick day taken each quarter per employee from 2020 to date) | 1.43 days | We saw a reduction in our sick days per person from 1.60 days to 1.43 days. The reduction of 0.17 days is consistent with Q2 2023/24.  Short-term absences continue to be the bulk of working time lost. The top reason for short-term sickness remained as respiratory, with 219 days lost (205.5 days in Q1, ↑ 13.5 days). This is consistent with seasonal expectations.  We saw a reduction in musculoskeletal and joint disorders from 182.5 to 142 days (↓ 40.5 days).  The largest increase in days lost by absence reason was stomach, bowel, blood, metabolic illnesses, from 70 to 138 days lost (↑68 days).  Mental health absences reduced, with personal stress seeing a reduction of 67 days, and work-related stress reducing by 21 days lost from Q1. | The recent trial of the Health and Safety Executive Stress Indicator Tool has resulted in approval for this to be implemented in Q4. This will strengthen proactive action around stress to facilitate a continued reduction in this area. |
| **Workforce Profile** |  | A graph with a line and a line  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows the employee turnover) | 8% | Turnover is 8%. Turnover since Q3 2023/24 has been between 8-9%.  Our turnover by contract type was split as follows:  1% Turnover in Permanent Employees  7% Turnover in Fixed Term Employees  There were 18 leavers, of which, 39% were retirements, 28% were colleagues leaving because of their fixed term contract ending and 33% left due to resignation. | Continue to analyse the exit survey feedback to identify any trends in relation to leavers. |
| **Employee Relations** |  | A graph with lines and dots  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows the number of formal employee relations cases raised)  A graph with lines and dots  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows the number of informal employee relations cases raised) | 3 | Formal casework has decreased from 5 to 3 open cases. These include a disciplinary investigation.  Informal casework has decreased from 34 to 15 open cases.  Most Informal cases relate to short- and long-term absences and dignity at work.  There was an increase of 3 new cases relating to dignity at work. | Given the low level of casework, we are shifting our focus for measurement to the duration of casework (end to end), and subject matter. This will allow us to continue to be proactive around resolution. |
| **Internal Moves** |  | A graph of a graph with red and blue lines  Description automatically generated  (This graph shows the trend of the organisation’s headcount and FTE to date including our forecast figures by end of Q4 24-25). | **830**  **and 767** | Headcount is 830 (↑17) and FTE is 767 (↑19). Q1 recruitment increased (70), resulting in 31 new starts in Q2.  24 new starts are on fixed term contracts, while 7 are on permanent contracts.  Our forecast is that our headcount will reduce given the review of fixed term contracts which is currently underway, with 52 employees’ contracts due to end between now and the end of Q4 24/25. In addition, we are forecasting 20 retirements in 2024/25 and 23 permanent leavers. This will reduce our headcount and FTE by 31 March 2025 (this forecast will change depending on the proportion of roles that are backfilled – the graph assumes 40% backfill rate). | A current review of all fixed term appointments will support the proactive management of headcount. Triggers will be built in to ascertain future liability and encourage informed decision making. |
| **Retirement Profile** |  | A graph of numbers and a number of retirements  Description automatically generated   (This graph shows number of retirees and our forecasted retirements) |  | 182 employees are aged 57+ (22% headcount). This is predicted to rise to 202 by Q2 2025/26.  7 employees retired (39% of Q2 leavers). Year to date there have been a total of 15 retirements. This matches the total number of retirements in 2023/2024.  The average retirement age for is 65. | P&OD expect the number of retirements in 2024/25 to continue to increase (forecast = 20). |
| **Employee Engagement** |  | A graph with a line and numbers  Description automatically generated |  | 75% Response Rate for the pulse survey on hybrid working and connectedness (an increase of 9%). | Responses from this pulse survey will feed into our current audit into hybrid working and inform the next steps for the ‘Build the Buzz’ project. |

# PEOPLE – KEY UPDATES

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Employee Engagement** | **Feedback from our August Pulse Survey on Hybrid Working**   * 40% stated they always consider the work they are doing before deciding where to conduct that work * 86% feel their manager trusts them to do their job effectively regardless of where they work from. * 15% stated they feel fully connected to NatureScot. * Below are examples of the responses which will feed into our current audit into hybrid working and the ‘Build the Buzz’ project. * ‘I go into the office at the Frequency of my homeworking preference’: 84% of respondents answered that they did. * ‘I feel socially and/or emotionally connected to my team/NatureScot’: 64% of respondents said they feel fully or mostly connected to their team, 68% of respondents said they feel partially or mostly connected to NatureScot, only 15% of respondents said they feel fully connected. * When asked if NatureScot’s approach to hybrid working supported their work life balance 96% confirmed that it did. 87% said that they felt motivated by NatureScot’s current approach to hybrid working. |
| **Employee Benefits** | * In August 2024 we changed our EAP provider to Spectrum. 20% of the organisation signed up to the Spectrum website, with a total of 379 visits to the web page. Most of those views where to the digital gym followed by the wellbeing content. 2% of those sign ups had contacted the EAP helpline. |
| **Employer of Choice** | * The average return rate for exit questionnaires in 2024/25 (to date) is 67%. There was a 61% return rate (11 in total), (Q1; 72%). * We started to see responses to the supplementary questions to understand why colleagues are attracted to alternative employers and leaving NatureScot. Of the employees who left in Q2, 27% (3) were leaving for roles in the public sector. Two of those employees confirmed that the salary and benefits package was better in their new employment. |