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# TWO HUNDRED and FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE BOARD OF NATURESCOT

## MS TEAMS

## CONFIRMED MINUTES 09 OCTOBER 2024

## MEMBERS PRESENT

Colin Galbraith Chair

Ian Gambles Member

Jaboury Ghazoul Member

James Harrison Member

Peter Higgins Member

David Johnstone Member

Colin McPhail Member

Wayne Powell Member

Heather Reid Member

Jill Robbie 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

Eileen Stuart Deputy Director of Nature and Climate Change

Graham Boyle Chief of Staff

Sara Lewis Governance Support Manager (minutes)

Stephen Coulter Planning and Performance Manager (item 8)

Jessica Findlay Moorland Licencing Project Manager (item 9)

## APOLOGIES

Margaret Davidson Member

Jason Ormiston Head of External Affairs

# AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the two hundred and fifteenth meeting of the Board of NatureScot. He added that during his time spent visiting different areas on behalf of NatureScot, he had been impressed with the enthusiasm and expertise of staff, as well as their connections with their local communities. The Chair noted that the next 6 months will see confirmation of the budget allocation from Scottish Government (SG), which will require NatureScot to be very clear about future priorities.
2. Apologies were noted from Margaret Davidson and Jason Ormiston.

# AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. There were no new declarations of interest other than those already declared via the Register of Interests.

# AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS

1. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the Board of NatureScot Meeting on the 21 August 2024 subject to minor amendments.

## 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 were updated that work continues alongside SG officials to develop advice to ministers on targets to propose in the Natural Environment Bill. Therefore, this action is **ongoing**.

**Action Point (06/206)** (Next Steps/Draft Plan for Kinloch Castle to be presented to the Board.) Members noted that an information paper had been sent to them. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point, however members requested details of the ongoing cost liabilities for repairs to the castle.

**Action Point 01/215**

**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 was to take place at this meeting, which will be followed by a paper at the November meeting. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** the action point.

**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, but further work was needed before being brought back to Board. 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 01/214** (Letter of Thanks to Graham Neville on Flow Country Nomination Work) Members heard that this letter had been sent on behalf of the Board. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point 02/214** (Information on Development of Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Framework to be Sent to Board Members) The Board were updated on some developments at the meeting and will receive further briefing when more information is available. **Ongoing.**

**Action Point 03/214** (Progress on Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Framework to be Added to Quarterly Performance Reports) It was agreed that this information is already added to the reports, and that greater prominence will be given when more information is available. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point 04/214** (Further Information to be Sent to Board on the Offshore Marine Protected Areas Consultation) This information had been sent to Board members, therefore it was agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point 05/214** (Query on Biodiversity Controls when Moving Salmon) Members heard that staff are investigating this query. **Ongoing**.

# AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

6. There were no matters arising.

# AGENDA ITEM 5: ITEMS FOR AOB

7. Jill Robbie requested an AOB to update members on her recent attendance at the UKRI Building a Green Future Congress.

8. Graham Boyle also requested an AOB, to update the Board on progress with NatureScot’s participation in the Board apprenticeship scheme.

# AGENDA ITEM 6 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

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

* The role of NatureScot as Reporter for the proposed new National Park in Galloway.
* Letter sent to Scottish Government regarding spending control mechanism issues.
* Programme for Government priorities including tackling the climate emergency.
* Reduction in local government stream funding of the Nature Restoration Fund with assurance of payback in next financial year.
* Visits to new office premises in Dunoon and Cupar.

10. Members were updated by Eileen Stuart on the current stage of the proposal for a National Park in Galloway, and that NatureScot’s role as impartial Reporter includes outlining the proposal, consulting widely with the public and key stakeholders, leading to the provision of advice to SG in April 2025. A web-portal has been established as part of the consultation tools which will enable opportunities, risks, concerns, benefits and dis-benefits on the proposal to be gathered and considered. An independent consultant company is to be engaged to undertake the 12-week formal consultation which will start in November.

11. The Board were concerned to hear that some staff and family members had been subject to unacceptable behaviour by individuals opposed to the National Park proposal. They, along with the Chief Executive reinforced their zero-tolerance of this behaviour, urging that any concerns on the proposal should be given responsibly and respectfully. The Chief Executive informed that she was in conversation with SG to ensure that this approach is understood by those wishing to give their opinions on the proposal.

12. Eileen Stuart informed that the timetable for the National Park proposal and consultation allowed for time to amend the developing consultation document while it is being drafted and finalised, to encompass the feedback being received on planning and governance mechanisms. The document was also being designed to be accessible and proportionate to ensure widest participation. The Board requested a timeline for the process showing the key stages of the proposal and consultation process which highlights appropriate opportunities for their input.

**Action Point 02/215**

13. Members were clear on the requirement of impartiality of NatureScot as reporter and agreed that our advice would be based on evidence-based feedback from the consultation process.

# AGENDA ITEM 7: BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES

14. The Chairs of the Board Committees were invited to give a brief verbal update on recent Committee meetings.

Pete Higgins – Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

* The most recent meeting took place on 01 October, which welcomed attendance from Iain Munro, Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor to Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) division, and Roger Crofts, representative from the Royal Society of Edinburgh.
* The meeting included a horizon scanning item on landscape scale restoration; considered how to support NatureScot staff in interacting with higher education and funding for research and partnerships; a presentation on the Environmental Community of Interest from the Royal Society of Edinburgh; and an overview on the role of RESAS in plans for their next research programme.

15. The Board requested that the papers from the recent SAC meeting are shared with them, along with the dates of the next meetings.

**Action Point 03/215**

David Johnstone – Protected Areas Committee (PAC)

16. The Committee met on 07 October to discuss the proposal for a new National Park in Galloway. Feedback was given to members as part of the Chief Executive’s Report agenda item. The Chair thanked the Committees for their work on behalf of the Board. He noted that the Board would receive an update from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, after their next meeting on 14 November.

# AGENDA ITEM 8: NEXT STEPS TOWARDS THE CORPORATE PLAN 2026/30

17. This paper presented the outputs from the Board workshop which took place at the August 2024 meeting, which examined the landscape that NatureScot is currently in, at the start of developing the new, impactful Corporate Plan for 2026/30, to address the nature-climate crises. It provided an indication of the next steps to be taken, which included:

* Refinement of the 4 areas of focus.
* Stakeholder engagement.
* An indicative timetable to produce a draft of the new Corporate Plan to the Board by early Q3 (25/26) for discussion and agreement.
* Meetings between the Board and SG to have been set up by Q4 (25/26) to seek Ministerial approval on the Corporate Plan and agree on a launch strategy.

18. The Board were asked to review the report given in the paper and approve the outlined next steps.

19. During discussion, the following key points were made:

* It was suggested that by early 2026 Ministerial approval should be sought on the new Corporate Plan.
* Members were informed that Jaboury Ghazoul was running a workshop on the ‘Theory of Change’ approach as a possible tool in helping develop the Corporate Plan for NatureScot staff in the new year.
* A more detailed timeline should be established showing key milestones and when engagement with the Board and with SG is anticipated.

**Action Point 04/215**

* The risks to NatureScot over the coming few months including from the National Park proposal work should be considered.

20. The Board noted the review of the August workshop in the paper and endorsed the next steps in developing the Corporate Plan for 2026/30.

# AGENDA ITEM 9: NATURESCOT SPECIES LICENCING – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

21. This paper set out progress with reviewing aspects of NatureScot’s species licencing function. The review was focused on legal compliance of processes to assess licences for lethal control, options to introduce cost recovery and the development of a public register of licences. The Board were asked to discuss the proposed approach and comment on timescales, and stakeholder engagement, by way of ensuring that the species licencing function is robust.

22. Robbie Kernahan explained to the Board that the species licencing review commission had been part of the now dissolved Bute House Agreement, however the review had continued to enable NatureScot to reassure that the function is both competent and legal. He asked that the Board comment on how this should be communicated to the public and stakeholders, to consider whether cost recovery is appropriate and if so in what form. Robbie also informed that there was an opportunity as part of this review to increase transparency over who licences are issued to.

23. During discussion, the following points were made:

* Broad support for cost recovery, (on which, charges should not exceed cost) however mindful that charging could be contentious with stakeholders.
* Need to better differentiate between the suggested levels of licensing with examples to illustrate to stakeholders.
* Advised to take legal advice on whether, in an attempt to increase transparency, those issued licences can/should be identified.
* Importance of getting feedback from stakeholders, particularly on the suitability of the principles involved in granting licences.
* Clarity on how the decision to grant a licence for lethal control is made.
* Clarity on the Board’s involvement in this work.

24. Robbie informed members that non-lethal control methods were always considered first, with lethal control being the last option. In answering queries on cost recovery, he stated that there would be consistency of approach, and that charging would be expected to be at the application stage. There would be no charge for public interest cases, those involving the health and safety of the public, and to eradicate non native species. Transparency on licences issued was advocated, without exposing details of the individual licence holders. It was noted that the licencing process is reported on through the Annual Report, published on the NatureScot website.

25. Robbie then went on to explain that the Board would be involved in developing a way forward on completion of the review, and that there was an opportunity for the Board to have more ownership and oversight of the licence process

**Action Point 05/215**

26. Members thanked Robbie for the update on the species licencing review.

Information Papers

**FORWARD PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

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

**NATURESCOT BOARD MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

28. This paper gave a short summary of Board members’ internal and external engagements with NatureScot related work since the last Board meeting. It was noted that it would be helpful to include forward engagements on this report so that any influencing opportunities could be identified.

AOB

29. Graham Boyle raised an AOB to update the Board on progress in registering NatureScot as a partner in the UK Boardroom Apprenticeship Programme 2025. He updated that the scheme will be sponsored by the UK Government for 2025/26 and NatureScot has been accepted as a host Board. Applications for places on the programme would be accepted from November and Jill Robbie and Heather Reid agreed to be ‘Board buddies’ to the successful candidate for NatureScot.

30. Jill Robbie raised an AOB to update on her attendance at the UKRI ‘Building a Green Future’ congress. The programme had a budget of £800m per year to fund low carbon and green economy research and innovation. She noted that the congress had not discussed the impact of renewables on communities and biodiversity. Members were informed that a Board discussion on this issue was being planned for a future meeting.

31. Nikki Yoxall raised an AOB to ask that a meeting of the agricultural Board sub-group be arranged.

*Post meeting note: The meeting has taken place.*

Date of Next Meeting

32. The next meeting of the Board of NatureScot is scheduled to take place on 27 November 2024 online.

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

# END