

**ONE HUNDRED AND NINETIETH MEETING OF THE BOARD OF NATURESCOT
BOARD VIRTUAL MEETING SPACE, 17 MARCH 2021**

OPEN SESSION CONFIRMED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mike Cantlay	Chair
Angus Campbell	Deputy Chair
Cath Denholm	Deputy Chair
Kate Broughton	Member
Bob Furness	Member
Ian Gillies	Member
Jackie Hyland	Member
Aoife Martin	Member
Susan Murray	Member

IN ATTENDANCE

Francesca Osowska	Chief Executive
Nick Halfhide	Director of Nature and Climate Change
Robbie Kernahan	Director of Sustainable Growth
Jane Macdonald	Director of Business Services & Transformation
Stuart MacQuarrie	Deputy Director of Business Services & Transformation
Claudia Rowse	Deputy Director of Sustainable Growth
Eileen Stuart	Deputy Director of Nature and Climate Change
Jason Ormiston	Head of External Affairs
Graham Boyle	Chief of Staff
Ben Ross	Head of National Nature Reserves (item 8)
Yvonne McIntosh	Planning and Performance Manager (item 9)
Sara Lewis	Governance Support Manager (minutes)
Megan Rowland	Operations Officer (Young Employee Panel)

APOLOGIES

None

AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the one hundred and ninetieth meeting of the Board of NatureScot. Particular welcome was given Nick Halfhide, returned back to NatureScot after a 12 month secondment, to the role of Director of Nature and Climate Change. Also to Megan Rowland from NatureScot's Young Employee Panel. The Chair informed Aoife Martin would join the meeting at a later point.

2. There were no apologies.
3. The Chair updated the Board on his recent activities, which included introductions to new members of staff, a submission to the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association newsletter, and correspondence with Scottish Land and Estates. In addition, the Chair had met with the new Chair of JNCC Colin Galbraith, and along with the Chief Executive, met with the Cabinet Secretary, and the newly appointed Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Ben Macpherson.
4. Chair reflected on a number of changes of key personnel within Scottish Government, including the Cabinet Secretary (Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform), Special Advisor, and civil service roles within the Directorate of Environment and Forestry. He noted that this was in addition to the end of term of 4 Board of NatureScot members at the end of March 2021.

AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

5. There were no declarations of interest.

AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS

6. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the Board of NatureScot Meeting on the 03 February 2021.

Action Points

7. The **actions points** were discussed and the following updates were provided:

Action Point (AP01/181) (Future Paper on Protected Areas Committee Review) Board members acknowledged that this review is on the agenda for this meeting. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

Action Point (AP13/181) (Future Options for Kinloch Castle) Board members acknowledged that this action remains **ongoing**.

Action Point (AP02/188) (Update to Board Members on Development of Green Finance) Board members acknowledged that this action remains **ongoing**.

Action Point (AP01/189) (Further Options for Youth Employment) Members acknowledged that this was an information paper for this meeting. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

Action Point (AP02/189) (Further Discussion on Peatland Budgeting and Governance)
Members acknowledged that this was to be an agenda item at the June Board meeting, and acknowledged that this action remains **ongoing**.

AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

8. There were no matters arising.

AGENDA ITEM 5: DEPUTY CHAIRS' REPORT

9. Angus Campbell updated on his involvement in the following:

- Convention of the Highlands and Islands meeting.
- Formation of a crofting working group.

9. Cath Denholm updated on her involvement in the following:

- JNCC Audit and Risk Committee meeting.
- JNCC engagement session on air pollution.
- Developing the Board member induction
- Highlighted the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership report which recognised the human right to a healthy environment. Also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child being integrated into Scots law. Cath noted the opportunities these developments create for NatureScot.

AGENDA ITEM 6: COVID-19 UPDATE

10. Board members received an update on Covid-19 from Jackie Hyland, which featured the following key points:

- Timetable released for next phase of easing restrictions.
- High levels of Covid-19 continue in Scotland, much is community spread.
- Regional and local testing units operational. Workplaces encouraging staff attend. This should be considered when looking to allow access to NatureScot offices.
- National Nature Reserves will need careful management to mitigate any spread of the virus.

Aoife Martin joins the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 7: CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

11. The Board noted the contents of the CE Report, including the following highlights:
 - COP15 and COP26 opportunities to highlight the importance of nature in decision making.
 - Progression of wildlife management issues.
 - Visitor Management Strategy Steering Group's preparation for increased use of the outdoors by the public.
 - Winter Carnival engagement with NatureScot staff.
12. The CE further updated that since writing her report to the Board, her interview with The Herald on land management delivering nature and climate objectives had been published. The article paves the way for the expected Scottish Government (SG) response to the Deer Working Group report.
13. Members queried the resourcing of additional ranger services, listed in the CE report. The CE informed that additional funding had been allocated to increasing the number of staff on National Nature Reserves (NNRs) In addition, the Better Places Fund was in receipt of additional funding, enabling partner bodies to apply for extra ranger resourcing. Eileen Stuart updated that NatureScot had recruited 9 extra seasonal NNR staff, with 3 ranger trainees from the University of Highlands and Islands. Senior Leadership Team support was also to be offered to those NNRs facing particular challenge.
14. Concern was voiced by members that the current work to increase ranger resources could be perceived as conflicting with NatureScot's decision in 2020 to reduce funding for community rangers. The Chief Executive responded by stating that additional funding secured for the Better Places Fund will provide a route for community groups to apply for funding of small infrastructure, including rangers. It was noted that the sustainability of that additional funding was uncertain. Work is currently being undertaken with the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association (SCRA) to agree policy, and for them to provide ranger training.
15. The Board asked whether NatureScot were adequately resourced to realise their ambition regarding the opportunities available at Conference of the Parties (COP) 15, and COP 26. The Chief Executive confirmed that resources were available, and that in relation to COP 15 we were not at the table however the COP 26 event was an opportunity for the organisation to highlight Making Space for Nature, as well as showcasing nature-based solutions.
16. Aoife Martin was invited to give an update following her attendance on behalf of Cath Denholm at the recent Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) meeting. Aoife summarised the meeting as including a focus on budgets, business planning and organisational risk profiling. Topical issues were discussed, including the vision of protecting 30% of the UK land for nature by 2030.

AGENDA ITEM 9: NATURESCOT BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22 (DRAFT)

17. Stuart MacQuarrie presented this paper to the Board, which set out the Year 4 Business Plan (2021/22), and how NatureScot plans to deliver the final year of their corporate plan. Stuart updated that since the last Board meeting there had been significant increases to the budget allocation to NatureScot, including confirmation of retention of £1.5m of Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding, and granting of an additional £2.75m for the Better Places Fund.
18. Stuart also informed that the strategic risks to the delivery of the business plan had been revised, and an updated assessment provided in the paper.
19. Members discussed the measures of success stated within the business plan, and how they related to the 90 day business planning approach. Context was sought over the resource allocations stated within the draft business plan, which suggested that Outcome 4 may be receiving more funding than Outcomes 1-3. Stuart confirmed that the wider context includes additional funding via Outcomes 1-3 for the National Cultural Heritage Fund, peatland restoration, Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, the green recovery, Biodiversity Challenge Fund and the Nature Recovery Fund. Stuart further confirmed that resourcing for the management of these funds and schemes was available, however the sustainability of that is uncertain at present.
20. The Board requested additional detail on the figure provided in the business plan for investment in the skills of young people. Stuart agreed to provide information setting out the grant-in-aid funding and additional funding, along with how it will be managed, to members following the meeting.

Action Point 01/190

21. The Chief Executive acknowledged the challenge the Senior Leadership Team have experienced in reducing the number of organisational priorities, and the decisions made on work which would cease, allowing greater focus on fewer priorities.
22. Board members were content to approve the recommendations, having given feedback for minor revisions in content of the business plan.

AGENDA ITEM 10: BOARD APPOINTMENT/INDUCTION – ORAL UPDATE

23. Graham Boyle provided an oral update to the Board on progress Board appointments and the induction of new appointees. The Board noted that the Cabinet Secretary was to

shortly inform of her chosen candidates, and that the official start date for new Board members would be 01 April 2021. Graham also updated that a Board induction programme was being finalised in liaison with Cath, and details would be forthcoming.

INFORMATION PAPERS

SSSI De-notifications from 2019/20 and 2020/21

24. This information paper provided Board members with an update of both partial and full de-notification of sites from 2019/20 and 2020/21. It gave the legislative context and process followed, and presented a summary of the reasons behind the latest de-notification case. The Board noted the contents of the paper.

NatureScot Interim Equality Report 2021 and Equality and Diversity Next Steps

25. This information paper presented the Interim Equality Report to Board members, and outlined some further actions agreed by the Senior Leadership Team in order to help better embed equalities within the organisation and their work. Members queried the higher sickness levels in females over males. In addition, members commented that there was a strong story to tell regarding the work being done to progress equality within the organisation, and that the report could be more clearly focused on the outcomes shown to have had some impact.

26. Jane Macdonald agreed to look further into possible reasons for the higher sickness levels in women, and report this back to members.

Action Point 02/190

27. The Board requested further information regarding the graph on 'recruitment by age range, specifically the numbers recruited between the ages of 16 and 20. Jane Macdonald agreed to forward this information to members following the meeting. The Board noted the contents of the paper.

Action Point 03/190

NatureScot Estates Strategy –Progressing the 10 Year Plan for Offices

28. This information paper proposed a future scenario of remodelled office provision, endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team. It informed the Board of plans to use a combined model of office space, hub working spaces, and home working. The Board noted the contents of the paper.

Programme for Youth Employment Update

29. This information paper provided the Board with an update on the development of NatureScot's Youth Employment programme, with specific reference to engagement with young people aged 16-18. It confirmed that investment in up to 37 posts is planned for the programme in 2021/22. The Board noted the contents of the paper.

Forward Agenda for 12 May 2021

30. The Board noted the forward agenda for 12 May 2021.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

31. The Board acknowledged the recent passing of Ian Findlay, CEO of Paths for All.

32. Chair recognised that this was the last Board meeting for Susan Murray, Ian Gillies, Angus Campbell and Bob Furness. Susan, Ian, Angus and Bob shared their reflections about their time on the Board with attendees, and wished them well for the future.

33. Chair reflected on the journey of the organisation in the time Susan, Ian, Angus and Bob have been on the Board, and added his sincere thanks to them for their time, effort and contributions.

Date of Next Meeting

34. The next Board of NatureScot meeting is planned to take place on 12 May 2021, likely via video conferencing.

35. The Chair thanked all those in attendance, particularly Megan Rowland of the Young Employee Panel. Chair then closed the meeting.

END