NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency

**SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**NatureScot**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

# Update on sub-groups

## Purpose

1. This paper updates the Committee on the work of its sub-groups.

## Action

1. **The Committee is asked to note the update and to agree revised membership of the MPA sub group.**

## Preparation of the paper

1. The paper was written by Sarah Hutcheon and Des Thompson.

## Background

1. Committee sub-groups review our work and provide advice from Committee and Expert Panel members on novel, contentious or complex matters. The sub-groups contain at least two Committee members (one of whom chairs the sub-group), two Expert Panel members, and additional expertise as required. A staff member provides the secretariat. Depending on the Terms of Reference, the sub-groups report to the Board, to the Committee, or to members of the Senior Leadership Team.
2. This paper provides an update on existing sub-groups. **Annex A** provides a tracker of all current sub groups.

## Existing sub-groups – need for new members

1. Aileen Mill currently chairs the MPA sub group. Aileen’s term on the SAC ends in June 2022. We will then need a new Chair for the sub group and another SAC member to join the group. We are proposing that Jane Reid takes on the chairing of the group and that Neil Metcalfe joins the group.

**Capercaillie sub group update**

1. The sub-group concluded its review in December 2021, and the report was published on 25th February (circulated to the Committee in advance). Work is now being taken forward by NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority).

**Contact:**

**Des Thompson** [**Des.thompson@nature.scot**](mailto:Des.thompson@nature.scot)

**Annex A. Committee Sub-group tracker**

**March 2022**

| **SAC Sub- group** | **Task set** | **Membership** | **Date set up** | **Progress update** | **How advice has been used** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| MPA | Report to PAC as requested on consultations | Aileen Mill, Jane Reid, Ben Wilson, Beth Scott | 2013 | Met in November 2021 | To advise on Red Rocks and Longay possible MPA |
| Genetics | Advise staff on development of novel genetics framework | Pete Hollingsworth, Richard Ennos (Chair), Rob Ogden , Penelope Whitehorn, Laszlo Nagy | March 2019 | No formal meetings in 2021, however all members have provided advice on conservation genetics. | Since 2021 we have recruited a new member of staff (a two-year graduate placement) with a primary task of developing online guidance on the use of eDNA monitoring approaches for NatureScot staff. This will be extended to include modules on conservation genetics and gene editing once the initial task has been completed. It is in the latter two areas that we specifically hope to engage SAC/Expert Panel expertise.  To guide our genetics work, we have established an internal Genetics Group – drawing in representation from across the organisation – which we would be happy SAC/Expert Panel members to attend if anyone wishes to do so. A register of DNA/genetics-related work in which NatureScot staff are currently engaged has also been developed. |
| Capercaillie | To review the evidence and advise on measures for conservation and management of Capercaillie in Scotland | Neil Metcalfe (chair), Jane Reid, Dan Haydon, Rob Marrs, Judith Webb (observer) | August 2021 | Completed | Report is advising NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority on next steps. |
| Digital aerial surveys | To advise staff on methodology | Marian Scott (Chair), Ruth Mitchell, Rob Marrs, Aly McCluskie, Francis Daunt, Tom Evans, Kate Thompson and Chris Eastham. | Dec 2021 | Two meetings on the 21 January & 4 February. Workshop planned for 11 March. |  |
| Fish eating birds | To advise staff on evidence needs | Neil Metcalfe, Kathy Dale, Steve Campbell (SASA), John Armstrong (MS), Antje Branding (RESAS), Sally Blyth (licencing) | TBC |  | The Atlantic Salmon Trust and two fisheries trusts (Ness and Kyle of Sutherland) are running two detailed Atlantic salmon smolt tracking studies to examine losses of fish due to predation. NatureScot staff are advising this project on the use of new Piscivorous bird monitoring approaches (using spot-counts) recently trialled on a number of Scottish rivers in 2021. A briefing on NatureScot’s work in this area is being developed for SG and will be shared with the advisory group set up to move this issue forward. |