# **SIXTY THIRD MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 3rd MARCH 2022**

**AT: virtual - VC**

**OPEN SESSION**

**MINUTES**

**Present**

Professor Peter Higgins (Chair)

Professor Jane Reid

Dr Ruth Mitchell

Professor Martin Price

Professor Neil Metcalfe

Professor Marian Scott

Dr Aileen Mill

**Apologies:** Professor Dan Haydon and Dr Jackie Hyland.

**In attendance**

Paul Robertson (minutes)

Sarah Hutcheon (SAC Secretariat)

Dr Sallie Bailey

Susie Turpie

Rhys Howell

Eileen Stuart (items 1 – 6)

Nick Halfhide

Sarah Fenn

Professor Des Thompson

David O’Brien

Clive Mitchell

Duncan Stone

## **ITEM 1. Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies were received from Dan Haydon and Jackie Hyland.
3. There were no declarations of interest raised.
4. The Chair noted that Aileen’s time on the committee ends in July and so this would be her last meeting. The Chair thanked Aileen for all of her work on the Committee and sub groups.
5. In addition to staff attendees, Sallie Bailey, Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, joined the meeting. As did Susie Turpie, Head of the Environment Strategy Team, and Rhys Howell, a social researcher with the Scottish Government. Sarah Fenn, an Aberdeen University CASE PhD student (supervised by Jane), also joined the meeting as an observer.
6. The Chair thanked Jen Rodgers for leading in producing the latest Science Newsletter.
7. The Committee had received a pre-meeting copy of the capercaillie sub group report on conservation and management. The Chair thanked Neil and his colleagues for their excellent work on this report.

## **ITEM 2. Minutes, action points and matters arising from the meeting held on 13th September 2021**

1. There were no changes suggested to the minutes of the March 2021 meeting.

**Action Points**

1. There were no outstanding actions and no matters arising.

**Discussion Papers**

## **ITEM 3. The Environment Strategy and Indicators – a presentation**

1. Susie Turpie, Rhys Howell and David O’Brien introduced the paper to update the committee on current thinking and seek the views of the committee for work moving forward.
2. The Committee was asked for:

* Any comments that they had on the current work and where the work was going moving forward.

1. The Committee discussed:

* The use of ocean acidification as an indicator - this is a global issue and cannot be solved locally.
* That the material for the indicators comes from data that we currently have and so there may be a need to look at where there are currently gaps in the data.

1. In conclusion, the Committee:

* Confirmed the usefulness of indicators to help our understanding of the state of nature and of the effectiveness of our interventions.
* Agreed this was a very important area of work and they would be happy to input further, as proposals developed.

**AP01/22:** Marian to speak to Susie Turpie to compare notes on indicators being used in a Glasgow project in comparison with the Environment Strategy.

**ITEM 4. Carbon-biodiversity synergies**

1. Clive Mitchell gave a presentation to introduce the paper, which explores the assumption that what is good for biodiversity is good for carbon sequestration, but the reverse (what is good for carbon sequestration and carbon stores is good for biodiversity) is not always true.
2. Action

The Committee was invited to discuss the paper and:

i. agree that the conceptual framing of the challenge is helpful in guiding policy choice;

ii. support the underlying assumptions (given in italics in the paper);

iii. comment on how this approach could be used to influence policy positioning and understanding of critical land use choices; and

iv. comment on how can the Committee can contribute further to the development of this approach.

1. The Committee discussed:

* That more clarification is required as to what is meant by woodland restoration. Is this woodland being planted in new areas or does this refer to improvement of current woodland areas?
* Concern over the use of the term ‘diverse nature’, the term ‘functional biodiversity’ may be clearer.
* The need for more context to be included on marine and sea bed habitats.
* That there may be a need for more consideration over utility/production – to consider the trade offs/balances between carbon, biodiversity and production.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that this was an important area of work and an important paper.
* Jane, Ruth and Marian all agreed that they would be happy to be part of taking this work forward. Sallie also offered to provide further comments and input.

**ITEM 5.** **How should we create more woodland in Scotland?**

1. Duncan Stone introduced the paper discussing where woodland expansion will play a key role in the Scottish Government’s plans to make Scotland a carbon net zero country.
2. Action

The Committee was asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the analysis set out in this paper;
2. Advise on general approaches for planning within uncertain long-term environmental conditions, especially risk-reduction options; and
3. Endorse further collaborative policy development work on this issue.
4. The Committee discussed:

* That this work should look to other similar work that was being done in the UK and in Canada and elsewhere.
* That a lot of the focus on resilience is around production and not biodiversity.
* Agroforestry could be discussed more in the paper.
* We should recognise the benefits of using timber and timber products to replace concrete and steel in construction.
* Agreed on the need to encourage a greater diversity of species planted, more intermixed and not all planted at the same time.
* The need to reduce grazing pressure from deer and other herbivores.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Were happy to endorse further work on this topic, and emphasised the need to develop this with partners.

**ITEM 6. SAC sub groups update**

1. Sarah Hutcheon and Des Thompson introduced the paper with an update on the current work of the sub groups and a request to agree the revised membership of the MPA sub group.
2. The MPA subgroup have met since the last meeting and the capercaillie sub group has now concluded their work with their report produced.
3. Two new groups were agreed to be set up at the last SAC meeting:
   * 1. Digital Aerial survey – this group has met and the work is progressing.
     2. Fish eating birds – this group has not yet met, but plan to meet soon.

1. Action

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

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that Jane would take over as chair of the MPA sub group and that Neil would join the group.
* Pete thanked Neil for his work chairing the capercaillie sub group and Aileen for taking over the chairing of the MPA sub group following Bob’s departure.

**ITEM 7. Report from February Board/SAC meeting**

1. Sarah Hutcheon gave an update on the discussions from the joint Board/SAC meeting held in February. We are looking to develop a forward work plan for the Committee to support the implementation of the Corporate Plan.
2. Action

The Committee was asked to comment on the emerging forward programme of work.

1. The Committee discussed:

* The desire to provide mentoring opportunities for staff.
* Options round how to organise and structure future meetings with the Board and future committee meetings to best facilitate discussion.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that it was valuable to meet with the Board and would welcome more time to discuss work in more detail with them.
* Suggested the following ideas for future SAC meetings – Wildlife management, adaptive management, mentoring/paper writing.
* Agreed that the work of the SAC will need to fit in with NatureScot’s new corporate plan.

**ITEM 8. Update on COP15 and development of the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy**

1. An update was given by Des Thompson. We are looking at what success will look like in 2030 and then 2045. This work will need to take into account targets set at the delayed COP15.

**ITEM 9. Information Papers**

1. Avian influenza and impacts on wild bird populations (Alastair MacGugan)

This is a complex issue and Des Thompson has been in discussions with Scottish Government as to whether we should set up an SAC sub group on this.

1. Development of a strategy on the conservation of herpetofauna (Rob Raynor)

We will need to work up an implementation plan for this strategy.

**AP02/22**: Marian Scott to forward on a student dissertation of relevance to the herpetofauna work to NatureScot

**ITEM 10. AOB**

1. The format for this meeting differed from previous ones in that staff had used PowerPoint presentations to introduce papers. Committee members were asked for their thoughts on this. There was some preference for just providing papers and allowing more time for discussion at meetings.

**END OF OPEN SESSION**