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# ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY- NINTH MEETING OF THE BOARD OF NATURESCOT

## LINKS HOTEL, MONTROSE – 28 JUNE 2022

## CONFIRMED MINUTES

## MEMBERS PRESENT

Mike Cantlay Chair

Ian Gambles Member

Peter Higgins Member

David Johnstone Member

Colin McPhail Member

Wayne Powell Member

Heather Reid Member

Nikki Yoxall 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

Jason Ormiston Head of External Affairs

Graham Boyle Chief of Staff

Sara Lewis Governance Support Manager (minutes)

Andy Douse Ornithology Advisor (item 5)

Cathy Tilbrook Head of Sustainable Coasts and Seas (presentation)

Alistair Rennie Dynamic Coast Project Manager & Geodiversity Advice Manager (Virtual) (presentation)

## APOLOGIES

Aoife Martin Deputy Chair

# AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the one hundred and ninety-ninth meeting of the Board of NatureScot.

2. Apologies were noted from Aoife Martin.

3. The Chair updated on his visit to the Royal Highland Show. He also commented on the challenging nature of the Resource Spending Review, and of the difficult decisions that lay ahead for NatureScot.

# AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4. There were no declarations of interest.

# AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS FROM 18 MAY 2022

5. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the Board of NatureScot Meeting on the 18 May 2022.

## Action Points

6. The **actions points** were noted:

**Action Point** (AP13/181) (Future Options for Kinloch Castle) Board members acknowledged that this action remains **ongoing,** with detailed negotiations for the sale continuing. Engagement with the community of the Isle of Rum is taking place. It was confirmed that the items within the castle are part of the sale, and that an inventory with a scale of value was available as part of meeting the requirements of the Scottish Public Finance Manual. Pete Higgins informed that he was considering a request to provide short term support to the Isle of Rum Community Trust in a personal capacity, in consultation with the Head of Operations - Central Highland, and the Director of Green Economy.

**Action Point** (01/198) (Arrange a Session for Discussion on Risk Appetite) Members noted that this discussion and development session will take place at the October Board meeting. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point** (02/198) (Update to the Board on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Consultation and Next Steps) It was noted that this update will take place at the August Board meeting. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

**Action Point** (03/198) (Board Members Engagement with Staff – Opportunities) The Board noted that arrangements for members to engage with Edinburgh based staff after the October Board meeting were being explored. **Ongoing.**

**Action Point** (04/198) (Identify Opportunities for SAC Presentations/Seminars with the Board) Members noted that the SAC Chair had been contacted for suitable topics. **Ongoing.**

**Action Point** (05/198) (Discussion between Claudia Rowse and Nikki Yoxall on Peatland Contractors and Natural Capital Working Groups) Members heard that Claudia and Nikki were to formulate a form of governance for this area of work. **Ongoing.**

# AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

7. Stuart MacQuarrie updated members that the Scottish Government (SG) had requested details on how a 2% resource in year saving could be achieved. These proposals would be provided to SG in due course. A discussion on the Resource Spending Review was also tabled at agenda item 6 at this meeting.

# AGENDA ITEM 5: CAPERCAILLIE REVIEW PROPOSALS

8. This agenda item presented to the Board policy proposals to address the decline of the Scottish capercaillie population. A recent Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) report identified four management measures to prevent capercaillie extinction in Scotland and restore capercaillie populations in the Strathspey/Deeside areas:

* Predator control (including pine marten control).
* Diversionary feeding of predators.
* Access management (which may be seasonal) within habitat used by breeding capercaillie (especially broods).
* Removal, or marking of deer fences.

9. SG had requested advice from NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on next steps in light of the SAC Report.

10. The Board was asked to:

* Discuss and confirm support for significant investment in specific capercaillie conservation measures to safeguard this species, noting that some of the measures may be contentious.
* Approve, in principle, advice to Scottish Government Ministers on measures and additional resources needed to take forward a package of support for capercaillie within the Cairngorms National Park, and those protected areas outwith the Park area.
* Consider whether further exploration of the control of protected species for capercaillie conservation should be undertaken

11. Regarding the recommendations of the paper, the Board made the following conclusions:

* It is recognised that in order to safeguard the capercaillie species, significant investment would be needed, with a number of measures deployed in order to achieve this.
* The Board concluded that the case for lethal control of pine marten was currently not compelling. This situation should remain under review should new evidence emerge.
* The Board recommended that privately funded conservation interventions should focus on actions to aid long term habitat restoration which would derive the broadest possible benefits for nature. The Board concluded that there were a range of other sources of funding, including private finance and crowd funding, that could be used to support a package of funding for further capercaillie conservation measures, recognising that funding from private donors and the general public would continue to be needed for some core activities.
* They recognised that a number of stakeholders would be involved in deploying the methods advocated. CPNA would be encouraged to lead the initiative, with NatureScot giving advisory support, and leading on science and evidence development, as required.

*David Johnstone leaves the meeting.*

# AGENDA ITEM 6: RESOURCE SPENDING REVIEW

12. This paper provided a set of opportunities in response to the Resource Spending Review (RSR). The options were framed as Board’s advice to Scottish Government in light of the RSR outcome, and in the context of key areas of focus to secure a Nature Rich Future for All, and built on the prioritisation within the Corporate Plan.

13. SG retain a commitment to investment in actions towards nature recovery, in particular nature based solutions to tackle climate change. While portfolio allocations have been already been set, it was recognised that there remains opportunity within the spending profile to ensure that funding is targeted at the right set of interventions. The 3 key areas to focus on were given as:

* How the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) portfolio funding bends further towards nature restoration.
* How NatureScot optimise impact with their settlement through prioritised action.
* How other funding across Government leans towards outcomes for nature.

14. The Board were asked to consider the content of the paper in light of the Resource Spending Review settlement, and confirm they are content to advise Scottish Government that the opportunities noted should be prioritised as post-RSR discussions continue to evolve.

15. During discussion, the following points were made:

* How the Bute House Agreement may influence future spending reviews.
* Although there are aspirations for the private sector to invest in peatland restoration, it will be some time before this is possible.
* Land management incentives are another example of significant public expenditure, as a way of driving the protection and restoration of nature. These incentives must include the importance of improving biodiversity, not just the sequestration of carbon.

16. Members were content to approve the advice to SG as contained in the paper, however wished to highlight their deep concern regarding the consequences of a flat cash settlement on NatureScot’s ability to deliver on the corporate plan and SG manifesto.

# INFORMATION PAPERS

# AGENDA ITEM 7 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

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

* The publication of the consultation on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy on 20 June.
* The Resource Spending Review on 31 May and the implications for NatureScot.
* Support to staff on new ways of working post-pandemic.
* External engagement through meeting of Network of the Heads of European Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA).

18. Members asked for an update on the Estate Strategy. This was provided by the Chief Executive, who advised that the NatureScot estate was to be rationalised in the context of hybrid working and the carbon footprints of the different buildings. More workspace sharing with co-locatees was expected, and in the longer term, public sector hub working. Workforce wellbeing was an integral part of the ongoing strategy. An updated message to staff regarding the strategy was due to be communicated during the week of this meeting.

19. Members noted the contents of the Chief Executive’s report.

**AGENDA ITEM 8: DRAFT AGENDA FOR 24 AUGUST 2022 MEETING**

20. Members noted the draft agenda for the meeting taking place on 24 August.

# ANY OTHER BUSINESS

21. Eileen Stuart updated members on the current situation regarding Avian Bird Influenza. A Scientific Advisory Committee sub-group had been set up in order to monitor the situation and provide surveillance. Both the Isle of May and Noss National Nature Reserves had been closed to the public.

22. Nick Halfhide informed the Board that the ‘Species on the Edge’ fund was expecting a lottery award of £4.2m. The fund concentrates on species in both coastal and island habitats, involving local communities.

23. The Board requested an update on the agricultural bill consultation at the next meeting in August.

*Post meeting note – the Executive Office have tabled this as a future agenda item.*

## Date of Next Meeting

24. The next Board of NatureScot meeting is planned to take place on 24 August 2022, virtually via MS Teams.

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

# END