NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency

**SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**NatureScot**

**INFORMATION PAPER**

# SAC forward programme

## Purpose

1. This paper updates the Committee on the development of the forward programme.

## Action

1. **The Committee is asked to note the update.**

## Preparation of the paper

1. The paper was written by Sarah Hutcheon and Eileen Stuart.

## Background

1. Following the Board – Committee meeting on 3 February 2022 and feedback from Board, Committee and staff members, we have devised a thematic forward work plan for the Committee until March 2024. This is framed within the [Corporate Plan 2022-2026](https://www.nature.scot/doc/corporate-plan-2022-2026-nature-rich-future-all) headings of: Protect, Restore and Value.
2. This work plan and proposed changes to ways of working for the SAC was discussed with Committee members and then taken to the NatureScot Board in August, as an information paper. The Board confirmed that they were content with the paper.
3. The August Board paper is attached at Annex A for information.
4. As mentioned in the Board paper the forward work plan is not static and will be updated to reflect emerging priorities identified by the Board, staff and the Committee.

**Contact:**

**Eileen Stuart**

**Annex A.**

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**Title: Scientific Advisory Committee - Forward Programme and Ways of Working**

**Date: 24 August 2022**

| **Purpose:** | For Information. |
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| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | The Scientif The Scientific Advisory Committee plays an important role in supporting our science-based decision making. The forward plan aims to strengthen the support they can provide to help us achieve our corporate priorities. |
| **Summary:** | The paper sets out a Work Plan for the Scientific Advisory Committee in response to the NatureScot Corporate Plan 2022-2026. It incorporates feedback from members of the Board and the Committee, including from the joint Board – SAC meeting in February.  The paper identifies key areas of work where we anticipate we will require input from the SAC over the next two years. It also sets out some changes to ways of working to strengthen the relationship between the Board, Committee and staff and best utilise the expertise of the Committee. |
| **Recommendations:** | The Board is asked to note the work programme and new ways of working |
| **Report Author(s):** | Pete Higgins, Eileen Stuart, Des Thompson, Sarah Hutcheon |
| **Sponsor:** | Mike Cantlay |

**Purpose**

1. The paper sets out a Work Plan for the Committee in response to the NatureScot Corporate Plan 2022-2026. It incorporates feedback from members of the Board and the Committee on the programme and ways of working.

**Background**

1. Following the Board – Committee meeting on 3 February 2022 and feedback from Board, Committee and staff members, we have devised a thematic forward work plan for the Committee until March 2024. This is framed within the [Corporate Plan 2022-2026](https://www.nature.scot/doc/corporate-plan-2022-2026-nature-rich-future-all) headings of: Protect, Restore and Value.
2. The Committee provides an invaluable role in supporting our science-based decisions in key areas such as Marine Protected Areas, de-notification of SSSIs, and contentious species issues, as well as quality assuring our approach to scientific questions to ensure robust testing of our evidence. With the advent of the new Corporate Plan we recognise there is an opportunity to reset the Committee’s ways of working and ensure it is guided by a more strategic steer from Board to support delivery of current priorities.  We initiated this with a joint workshop earlier this year.
3. Traditionally, the Committee has provided advice to staff on key areas including site notification, invasive species management, species management, and broad areas of work (e.g. protected areas surveillance and monitoring; upland management – giving rise to the [Werritty Review](https://www.gov.scot/publications/werritty/)). The role of the Committee and Expert Panel in undertaking QA of reports is also invaluable. Following recent discussion with Board members we anticipate more requests for advice coming from the Board.  Annual Reports are given to the Board on the Committee’s work e.g. in  [2020](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nature.scot%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2020-04%2FSNH%2520Board%2520Meeting%2520-%252006%2520May%25202020%2520-%2520Scientific%2520Advisory%2520Committee%2520Annual%2520Report%25202019-20.pdf&data=05%7C01%7CDes.Thompson%40nature.scot%7C4bdcc864260c48cde62b08da5c172fea%7C074028c0e165499999ad31603ad73bac%7C0%7C0%7C637923552034745553%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=TIJFrhZURCeFB2s961SmFwhWvhUq3WY4XKj37o%2FTJwA%3D&reserved=0) and [2022](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nature.scot%2Fdoc%2Fnaturescot-board-meeting-18-may-2022&data=05%7C01%7CDes.Thompson%40nature.scot%7C4bdcc864260c48cde62b08da5c172fea%7C074028c0e165499999ad31603ad73bac%7C0%7C0%7C637923552034745553%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=pm9fig%2BcXTr%2FwE8Phi4I747xk8o6rQtMcV5vEssSOlo%3D&reserved=0).  To date when NatureScot is asked to give evidence externally (Parliamentary Committees or Public Inquiries) we rely on staff rather than Committee members, however, given their particular expertise there may be a role for SAC members in the future, and the sub-group work on capercaillie has highlighted the ready availability of specialist expertise for us to call on.
4. The Expert Panel plays an important role in complementing the work of the Committee, notably through members providing quality assurance for our reports, serving on Committee sub-groups, and giving specialist advice. We recently established a Science and Evidence Leadership Board (with Alex Mackay as Manager). This will develop the communications around our science and evidence-bases work, and provide opportunities for staff to develop their science-based skills. We will involve Committee and Expert Panel members in this, notably through mentoring, ‘teach-ins’ and involvement in Project-based work. We want to utilise the expertise of the Committee to help support NatureScot staff in improving the scientific process within the organisation, including project design, statistical analysis, report writing and preparing scientific publications.

**Scottish Science Advisory Council and related bodies in Scotland**

1. There is a strong relationship between the work of the SAC and that of the [Scottish Science Advisory Council](https://www.scottishscience.org.uk/scottish-science-advisory-council), the Co-ordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment and Rural Affairs Science ([CAMERAS](https://www.gov.scot/publications/cameras-evidence-strategy-rural-affairs-terrestrial-environment/pages/1/) ) and the Scottish Biodiversity Programme Board Advisory Group, among other bodies. We will continue to strengthen links with relevant research bodies to share expertise and maximise our collective impact, by inviting attendance at SAC meetings and more targeted joint work. The Advisory Group is contributing the development of the new, 25-year [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-biodiversity-strategy-consultation/pages/2/).

**New ways of working**

1. Several changes are proposed for future Committee meetings:

* First, we will provide an oral update to the SAC on Board meetings to ensure Committee members are aware of live and future issues. The SAC Chair will provide reciprocal updates to the Board.
* Second, we will have a standing item on horizon scanning (led by one or more Committee members).
* Third, we will ensure that for all ‘in person’ meetings of the Committee there is an opportunity to meet staff over lunch.

1. As part of our Annual Report to the Board on the work of the SAC we will ensure that the Board is invited to consider whether there are future areas of work for which it would like to seek advice from the Committee, particularly where there are emerging issues which are novel, contentious or complex. The forward work plan will be updated to reflect these emerging priorities.
2. We will continue to operate some of the business of the Committee through sub-groups, and provide updates to the Board on progress. Where appropriate, we will involve Board members (alongside Expert Panel members) in the work of Committee sub-groups.
3. The quarterly [NatureScot Science Newsletters](https://www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-science-quarterly-newsletter) have proved popular with a specialist audience, but we need to promote the content more widely. We propose to reduce the length of articles, and encourage Committee and Expert Panel members to contribute copy, as well as our existing range of contributors. This forms part of our wider communications around our science and evidence, led by our Science and Evidence Leadership Board.
4. We are encouraging staff to seek input from Committee members on specific areas of work outwith formal meetings and structures, and will continue to promote the skills and expertise within the Committee and Expert Panel to extend this. The Science and Evidence Leadership Board will be looking at the best way to facilitate this.
5. Whilst the Senior Leadership Team and Board engage in Horizon Scanning, we have not sought input from the Committee. We propose to change this and have it as a standing item on the meetings’ agenda. We propose to invite one or two members at each meeting to provide their perspective on issues ahead in relation to our work. Whilst there is no expectation to do so, this may inform future SAC work-planning. Some excellent papers on horizon scanning continue to be published e.g. [marine and coastal biodiversity](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-022-01812-0); [global biological conservation](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169534721002895).
6. Several areas of work have been proposed for further input from the Committee. ‘[Systems thinking](https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html)' has been mentioned, along with ‘Big Data’ and applications of 'Artificial Intelligence’ and we will seek Committee input on how we incorporate consideration of these issues in our work.

**Priorities for future SAC involvement**

1. The following identifies key areas relating to science and evidence arising from our new Corporate Plan which will require input from the Committee until 2024. These issues largely arose from the Board-Committee discussion in February 2022, and further discussions amongst staff. These are grouped around the three Corporate Plan themes, though many are cross-cutting, and span broad areas of our work.
2. **Protect**

* **Modelling impacts of climate on environment** – update on work, implications for protected areas and species and opportunities to collaborate with others on adaptive planning.
* **Monitoring and surveillance** – strategy and technology and interpreting survey results. Role of innovative technologies and eDNA in long-term monitoring.
* **Offshore wind energy developments** – cumulative impacts and compensatory measures.
* **Wildlife disease and one health approaches** to addressing emerging threats.

1. **Restore**

* **Statutory targets for nature** – options and validation of approaches to contribute to the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill
* **Large scale nature restoration** – spatial priorities and monitoring
* **Land and marine use developments and transformations** – regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, deer, woodland regeneration, fisheries and measuring the benefits of nature-based solutions
* **Peatland restoration** – prioritising investment and monitoring long-term recovery as part of [Peatland ACTION](https://www.nature.scot/climate-change/nature-based-solutions/peatland-action-project)
* **Marine restoration** – monitoring of MPAs, HPMAs
* **Species priorities –** contributing to the development and implementation of the [25-year Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2022/), this will develop the framing of priorities for species and assemblages restoration, including translocations
* **Freshwater ecosystems and salmon** – to include new work on the evaluation of impacts of fish-eating birds on salmon populations.

1. **Value**

* **Biodiversity and natural capital metrics** - validatingcarbon metrics as part of the 'green' and 'blue' economies
* **Just transition** – assessing socio-economic impacts of land and marine use changes
* **Data analytics and behaviour change** – harnessing data to influence change effectively
* **Indirect drivers of biodiversity loss –** NatureScot will shortly publish a report on these [drivers](https://ipbes.net/glossary/driver) (commissioned report by the James Hutton Institute)
* **Making the best use of data –** best approaches to use with targeted data, sparse data or Big Data. Develop work to ensure we are making best use of ‘Big Data’ approaches, which involve applications of [AI](https://phys.org/news/2020-12-artificial-intelligence-scientists-ecology.html)

**Recommendation**

1. The Board is asked to note the work programme and new ways of working.