

## **Consultation on a new Enterprise Agency for the South of Scotland SNH responses:**

### ***Question 1: Do you agree with our ambition outlined above?***

We support the main points on the ambition set out in the consultation document, but we recommend that the ambition be broadened to recognise the full importance of the natural and cultural assets which are found in the South of Scotland. These assets have the potential to be developed into unique selling points for the region – and contribute significantly to the development of a sustainable economy. The sustainable use of the natural and cultural assets of the area is key to both increasing GVA and attracting and retaining a young workforce.

In particular, the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency should have the same responsibilities to deliver on Scottish Government policies on the environment as Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. For example, HIE has been asked to focus on four key areas – with two of these being linked to Scotland’s natural assets and addressing environmental challenges:

- Contributing towards the development of a strategic approach on environmental policy in Scotland to protect and enhance our environment, safeguard our natural capital and continue Scotland’s leading role on addressing environmental challenges
- Supporting and harnessing the potential of our natural assets and protecting our natural resources

These strategic aims should be part of the ambition for both the new Agency and for the South of Scotland as a whole. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss further how this might be addressed in the new body’s founding legislation and how we can work with the Agency to help deliver on these ambitions.

### ***Question 2: What would you like to see for the South of Scotland?***

We would like to see the South of Scotland develop its economy in a way which makes sustainable use of the region’s outstanding natural and cultural assets – using their full potential to support social and economic development, and investing in and protecting these assets so that future generations can also benefit from them.

These natural assets have the potential to improve the quality of life for those who already live and work in the area. If they are protected and enhanced, they will promote the region when the Agency and others are encouraging business and individuals to locate in the area. This would build on the approach already taken by Dumfries & Galloway to market itself as ‘The Natural Place’.

### ***Question 3: What are your ambitions for the future economic success of the South of Scotland?***

We want to see inclusive growth of the economy in the South of Scotland so that the benefits of economic development reach all those who live and work in the region. We want to see this inclusive growth linked closely to sustainable use and long-term investment in the natural and cultural assets of the area. This will help increase GVA as well as attract and retain a young workforce.

### ***Question 4: What are the strengths you would like to see the Agency build on?***

The South of Scotland has a wide variety of natural and cultural assets which can support inclusive growth in the area through the development of sectors such as tourism and local food and drink. This already happens in many parts of the region, so it is important to learn from these successes to help deliver inclusive growth in other places.

We want the Agency to work with other partners to help look after the natural assets of the area so that these assets continue to provide benefits to people – for example:

- helping to protect and enhance peatlands and rivers so that they reduce flood risk to homes and businesses;
- improved active travel routes for residents and visitors, building on the success of the existing network (e.g. the Southern Upland Way, Connecting the Tweed, South West Coastal Trail, Ride Scotland's Horse Country and Galloway Glens Rural Tourism);
- increased levels of environmental volunteering and training to improve the health, skills and employability of the workforce, building on the success of the Southern Upland Partnership, Tweed Forum, Borders Forest Trust, Galloway & Southern Uplands Biosphere, Solway Firth partnership and LEADER.

**Question 5:** *What are the economic challenges you would like to see the Agency address?*

- the retention and attraction of younger people as part of the local workforce;
- the need to increase the value of local products - For example, a priority for the new Agency should be to work with public and private sector partners to invest in the forest industry to help develop and produce higher-value and higher specification products for other sectors such as the construction industry. This would help both the region and Scotland as a whole compete with other producers of high-value products which are currently imported to Scotland. These are the sort of products which could supply the substantial housebuilding programmes in Edinburgh and the rest of the South East Scotland City Deal area, as well as the Borderlands economic areas.
- the need to diversify the rural economy;
- the need to increase the income from tourism and broaden the seasonal and geographical spread of this income – there are lots of natural and cultural assets in the South of Scotland that could support greater levels of tourism with the right management and promotion;
- the need to move to a low carbon economy as set out in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan.
- the need to support land managers and land management during and after Brexit – in particular for the agricultural industry. We provide more comments on this below in response to question 8. This adds to the need for the new Agency to look for ways to help the rural economy diversify.

**Question 6:** *What currently works well in the South of Scotland?*

There is already a substantial tourism sector with much of this based on the natural assets of the area – this involves a number of public-private partnership working arrangements.

The partnerships mentioned above highlight that there is already an integrated approach to social and economic development in some parts of the region – and it is important to build on these existing networks wherever possible.

**Question 7:** *What would you add or take away from the potential activities that the Agency could carry out across the three areas:*

- a) *drive forward the economy;*
- b) *sustain communities; and*

*c) capitalise on people and resources*

- a) In terms of driving forward the economy, we see value in enabling many small innovations and opportunities, rather than seeking major interventions. This diversity is good and reflects the scale and variety of rural societies and their economy.
- b) On sustaining communities, it is important to help them plan and develop their own futures – and part of this is helping people in those communities learn about what has been done elsewhere which might work for them. These lessons might be available from other places in the region – or it might be that communities in the South of Scotland can be supported to learn from communities further afield. The Agency should be at the forefront of helping communities to make the most of resources available to them – whether these are the natural assets round about them, or funding which comes from developments such as renewable energy projects.

The LEADER programme currently supports communities across the region in this way and leads on the community-led learning and development approach. Integrating their approach and building on their networks could be a valuable addition to the agency.

- c) As for capitalising on people and resources, we have highlighted earlier the importance of protecting and enhancing the region's natural and cultural assets so that these continue to provide economic and social benefits to people across the area. Environmental education and volunteering programmes are an effective way of both linking people with their local area as well as helping them develop job-related and other skills to help build resilient communities. This, especially, will help attract and retain a young workforce.

**Question 8:** *What would you prioritise as the key areas of activity for the Agency?*

We have highlighted the importance of the area's natural and cultural assets – and the need to protect and enhance these. We see this as a long-term strategic priority for the Agency. In addition, it is important for the Agency to work with existing partners and delivery bodies – and we have mentioned some of the key environment-related ones above.

However, a priority in the short-to-medium-term is to identify the potential challenges that Brexit poses for the economy of the South of Scotland – and to plan and implement active measures to address these. Agriculture is likely to be specifically impacted, through effects on export markets, on the sector's labour supply and as a result of any reduction in support payments. This is likely to have a knock-on impact on associated businesses. Alongside this, the tourism and hospitality sectors may be heavily affected by restrictions on the labour supply.

**Question 9:** *What specific things could the Agency do to help you, your business, your sector or your community?*

We have highlighted earlier the need to look after the natural assets of the region so that people continue to get benefits from nature – the Agency could help with this by promoting the benefits we all get from these assets in the South of Scotland so that there is a wider understanding of the need to maintain and enhance these assets. In particular, we are happy to work with the Agency to showcase ways in which these assets contribute to increasing GVA.

In addition, the Agency could help promote the development and use of nature-based solutions to challenges – especially where these solutions provide a more cost-effective long-term solution than other options.

**Question 10:** *What could the Agency do outwith its boundaries working with other local authorities or with agencies like Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support specific projects which benefit the South of Scotland and with national agencies?*

As mentioned above, there are opportunities to work with others across Scotland to share information on the benefits that people get from our natural assets and on how nature-based solutions can be implemented in practice. This is about sharing good practice and we are happy to work with the new agency as well as with SE and HIE to facilitate this sharing of ideas – both knowledge from within Scotland, as well as knowledge from further afield.

Our Sharing Good Practice programme of events provides a useful model for this type of knowledge-sharing – and we are happy to discuss further how we would work together on this.

**Question 11:** *Which option, either from the list above or your own suggestion, do you think offers the best way to ensure the Agency is accessible to all across the South of Scotland?*

We suggest that a combination of an online presence as well as a network of local offices is the best way to provide accessibility to those across the region. We have undertaken a number of customer surveys over the past few years – and the feedback has always been that while customers find our online advice and guidance helpful, what many of them most value is the opportunity to talk to SNH staff face-to-face and to build working relationships with those staff.

In addition, we have developed our local presence over recent years so that in many locations we share offices with other public bodies. We suggest that this office-sharing model is one which the new Agency should consider from the start. This would enable it to have a much wider local coverage than if it occupied offices on its own. We are happy to discuss further our experience of co-locations and to talk about options for SNH and the new Agency sharing offices. In Newton Stewart, for example, we already share an office with SEPA.

**Question 12:** *Which criteria should be used in reaching a decision about the location of the Agency?*

We have highlighted above the importance of customers being able to engage with the Agency in a way which suits them – and that is often face-to-face. This should be one of the main considerations when it comes to locations for the Agency.

Alongside this, locations for the Agency should make it as easy as possible for people to access its offices by sustainable transport – whether that be using public transport, or by walking or cycling (active travel). This is both for customers as well as for employees of the Agency.

**Question 13:** *If you were to use the services of this Agency, what factors are important to you in terms of reaching it? (This might relate to the location itself, to transportation links, or to proximity to other services, or digital delivery, for example.)*

As above, it is important that it is easy to get to the agency's locations though the use of sustainable modes of transport – public transport and active travel.

It is also important for the Agency to have an effective customer-focussed digital presence for those who want to access its services that way. This digital presence should take into account the needs of users accessing its services via mobile devices as well as those using desktop/laptop computers. In addition, the Agency should also take into account the broadband services available to its users – sometimes in areas with low bandwidth, a website with few images and mainly text is preferable.

**Question 14:** *What sort of people should be on the Board of the Agency and what sorts of skills and expertise should they have?*

The Board and sub-groups should have wide and inclusive representation. The current Theme Groups that have been established appear to be quite limited in their representation. SNH would be happy to contribute to any relevant theme groups or sub-groups, in particular those that seek to maximise the use of the regions natural assets to promote a sustainable economy.

**Question 15:** *We know that young people are less likely to stay in or move to the South of Scotland than they are other parts of the country. Do you have any comments on things the Agency could do to meet the interests of children and young people?*

A University of the Highlands and Islands-style, dispersed campus university/college setup would make it easier for some young people, and other mature students, to remain in the South of Scotland and to take courses specifically tailored to the economic opportunities available in the region. This method of learning should incorporate opportunities for students to travel to places out with the region as part of their studies – a key benefit of further and higher education is the opportunity to build networks with people from different places and backgrounds. This will help attract and retain a young workforce.

It is important to engage young people from the region directly in these discussions to find out what their needs and aspirations are – as well as to hear what their suggested solutions might be. We have been working closely with Young Scot for a number of years to help us learn how best to engage young people in environmental issues. This has proved very valuable and has informed our thinking in this area to a great extent.

**Question 16:** *In delivering opportunity and growth in the South of Scotland, how can the Agency:*

- *promote equality for people who share one or more protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010/13;*
- *combat discrimination; and*
- *foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?*

We have no specific comments in relation to this question.

Equality and diversity should be a fully integrated part of the agency and partnership from the outset. The partnership should seek expert advice on how to do this.

**Question 17:** *Do you have any other comments on how the Agency might address specific needs?*

We have no specific comments in relation to this question beyond what we have said in relation to young people above.

**Question 18:** *We want to make sure that the Agency works effectively with a wide range of key stakeholders/partner agencies to ensure that inclusive growth also enables positive*

*social and environmental outcomes. Do you have any comments on how this should work in practice?*

As we have highlighted earlier, there will be benefits from the new Agency working with – and possibly helping to fund – existing, well-established delivery partners such as those we have listed in our response to question 4.

**Question 19:** *Do you have any other thoughts on powers that the Agency will need?*

We have no specific comments in relation to this question.

**Question 20:** *Is there anything else you wish to say about the operation of the Agency?*

We would welcome the opportunity to engage as early as possible with those involved in setting up the new agency. In particular, we are happy to share in more detail our ideas and examples of how we can best work together to ensure that the region's natural assets deliver benefits to the region's economy and people.

**SNH**  
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