# **SIXTY FOURTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 15th NOVEMBER 2022**

**AT: Silvan House, Edinburgh**

**OPEN SESSION**

**MINUTES**

**Present**

Professor Peter Higgins (Chair)

Professor Jane Reid (VC)

Dr Ruth Mitchell

Professor Neil Metcalfe

Professor Marian Scott

Professor Dan Haydon

**Apologies:** No apologies were received.

**In attendance**

Paul Robertson (minutes)

Sarah Hutcheon (SAC Secretariat)

Professor Jaboury Ghazoul

Professor Mathew Williams

Eileen Stuart

Professor Des Thompson

Clive Mitchell

Erica Knott

Ben James

Mairi Cole (item 6)

Alex MacKay (item 7)

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

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and was pleased that we are able to meet face to face once more. In particular, the Chair welcomed Professor Jaboury Ghazoul to the SAC as a new Board observer and Prof Mathew Williams (Chief Scientific Adviser – Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture).
2. There were no apologies and no declarations of interest raised.
3. The Chair noted that Martin Price has tendered his resignation from the Committee for personal reasons. The Chair has written to thank Martin for his work on the Committee and asked for our thanks to be noted in the minutes. The Chair noted that this would leave a gap in the Committee in social science skills.
4. The Chair was pleased to note that former Committee member, Aileen Mill, has been awarded a Personal Chair in ‘Modelling, evidence and policy’ at Newcastle University. He had also written to her to thank her for her service to the Committee.
5. NatureScot staff are currently contributing to both the COP27 (First Minister’s presentations) and COP15 in December. A NatureScot staff member, Abi Gardner, will attend COP 15 as a Youth Delegate on behalf of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network and NatureScot’s marine ornithologist Helen Wade has been elected to the Young Academy of Scotland.
6. Members of the Committee have been very busy recently with a number of sub-groups. New legislation will be coming through soon with the Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill and a new sub-group is being set up to support staff on this.
7. Avian Influenza is a major issue at the moment. Eileen Stuart is chairing the Scottish Avian Flu Task force and Dan Haydon is chairing the sub-group on this issue. It is good to see that Scotland is taking the initiative with this work.
8. The Committee has been strongly supportive in its encouragement of the formation of the Science and Evidence Leadership Board. There is a paper on this at today’s meeting.
9. The Chair informed the group that on the 23rd of November he will represent NatureScot at a key event at the Royal Society in London. On behalf of the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, this will launch a statement entitled ‘Nature Recovery for Our Survival, Prosperity, and Wellbeing’ in advance of COP15.

## **ITEM 2. Minutes, action points and matters arising from the meeting held on 3rd March 2022**

1. There were no changes suggested to the minutes of the March 2022 meeting. There were two action points for Marion.
   * Action 01/22 ongoing with initial discussions held.
   * Action 02/22 discharged.

**Matters Arising**

1. Two short papers were circulated around the Committee for comment ahead of the meeting.
   * Climate and Nature Scenarios
   * Peatland Monitoring through the peatland action programme

Sarah Hutcheon provided some brief feedback from the paper authors for the Committee.

Peatland Monitoring through the peatland action programme

Thanks to Marion and Ruth for their feedback on the draft Strategy and Network document. Sally Blyth has confirmed that she will come back to members by the end of the November if there are any queries on the comments. The strategy is to be published later this year. The updated Network will be circulated later this year, possibly as a manual, and then we will start monitoring sites in 2023 according to the new methodology.

Climate and Nature Scenarios

Debbie Bassett noted that the Committee agreed with the approach proposed in the paper. The plan now is for two workshops to be held with advice on who should be invited taken into account. The next steps for the work are to consider the scoping document and workshop plan at the Climate Nature Forum on 9 December and to undertake the work in Q4. The Nature Climate Scenarios Phase 1 work is complete, and staff would like to send this out to SAC members for QA later this month, with responses requested by mid/late January.

## **ITEM 3. Oral update on NatureScot Board business**

1. A brief update was given by the Chair on recent Board business of relevance to the Committee. This will become a regular agenda item in order to strengthen the links between the Board and the Committee. Recent Board business includes:
   * May – strategic discussion on private investment in natural capital; SAC annual report.
   * June – capercaillie report from SAC sub-group
   * August – NatureScot role on delivering the biodiversity strategy; living with wildlife; Avian Influenza; SAC forward programme.
   * October – Agriculture - delivering outcomes for nature.

Link to recent Board papers:

<https://www.nature.scot/about-naturescot/board-directors-and-committees/our-board/board-meetings>

**ITEM 4. Horizon Scanning**

1. Clive Mitchell introduced the paper to update the Committee on approaches to horizon scanning and how the SAC could engage with this.

**Action**

## The committee was asked to agree the benefits of, and an approach to, horizon scanning.

1. The Committee discussed:

* That it would be useful for this work to have more links to other work going on, noting that there are a number of relevant European groups such as the Environmental Risks on the Environment. We also need to look at other UK agencies approach. We could also make use of the papers that Bill Sutherland produces on global biodiversity issues.
* The need to approach horizon scanning in a strategic way and build on the work of others due to dwindling resources that are available.
* We should look at the work that others are doing on horizon scanning and identify the key issues for NatureScot to explore.
* This work should be informed by that of the First Minister’s Environment Council on what Scotland will look like in 2045.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that this is a really useful approach for the Committee in terms of forward work planning
* Agreed that it would be useful for a member of the SAC to input to a meeting in January where proposals and significant updates will be looked at. It was agreed that the Committee would work on a rolling involvement in the horizon scanning item as there will be a wide range of interest in this.
* Considered that plant health could be a useful specific topic to focus on for the March SAC meeting, with input from Ruth Mitchell.

**AP03/22**: Marian Scott to forward the report on horizon scanning that was produced by the European Group – Environmental Risks on the Environment.

**AP04/22** Clive and Ruth Mitchell to work together on a horizon scanning paper to bring to the next SAC meeting.

**Discussion Papers**

**ITEM 5. Offshore wind development – understanding the implications for seabird populations**

1. Erica Knott introduced the paper and asked for the Committee’s future engagement with this work.

**Action**

1. Initial feedback is sought on the following key areas to inform our planning for future work with the Committee:

* our approach in considering the effectiveness of proposed compensation measures for marine seabirds in response to cumulative effects from offshore wind on marine birds both for individual projects and at a more strategic level;
* our approach in considering the implications of the avian influenza outbreak and how we should take account of this in our offshore wind casework advice.

1. The Committee discussed:

* How adaptive management measures could be built into planning consents.
* The monitoring data we have available for this. The data sets need to cover a long time period, as some of the species such as fulmar are long lived.
* Technology that could be used to inform this work including predicting turbine strikes.
* The issues around Avian Influenza making this work even more difficult, with disruption to monitoring work due to concern about transmission risks.
* That Scotland along with other countries in Northern Europe are the forerunners with this industry, with North America and Asia behind on this.
* The need to use predictive modelling to help with this work.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that this work would need to look at compensation at a strategic level. It needs to look across a wide area and look at the work from a number of developers.
* Accepted that this is a very complicated area of work and agreed that the Committee would be happy to be engaged further in future on this.

**ITEM 6. Species Prioritisation**

1. Mairi Cole introduced the paper. This has been a massive piece of work for several years now bringing together species information for almost 18,000 species onto one spreadsheet. As well as NatureScot, the eNGOs have been heavily involved in this work.

**Action**

1. The Committee is invited to:
2. Note progress to date;
3. Review the approach being taken to collation and analysis of current evidence; and
4. Advise on next steps to take forward this work to an agreed list of Scottish species for conservation action.

In addition the Committee is asked to:

1. Discuss the approach taken under Species at Risk and advise on its suitability to deliver the SG stated intention of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030;
2. Provide comment on how to address issues of nativeness in identifying priority species in Scotland; and
3. Consider other criteria used for prioritising species for conservation action (see Table 1) and advise on whether and how these should be integrated into the process of developing a list of species priorities.
4. The Committee discussed:

* Accepting that we have limited resources it may make sense to try to protect declining species before they get worse rather than just focus on those at highest risk.
* The need to consider groups of species and habitats/ecosystems engineers and not just individual species.
* How non-native species should be dealt with. There may be occasions where a non-native species may be considered if this species is in danger in its native area.
* The focus on terrestrial species. Seabirds are included but marine species will be included in work elsewhere. We need to ensure that marine species are not being missed or double counted.
* The need to consider communications round the launch of this work and links with functional biology and livelihoods.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that this needs to be linked with SBS (Scottish Biodiversity Strategy) and the Biodiversity Advisory Group, and the RESAS strategic research programme project on “Scotland’s biodiversity: People, Data and Monitoring” run by Jenni Stockan at the James Hutton Institute.

**AP05/22**: Des, Eileen and Mat to discuss species prioritisation further outside of the meeting, to consider how the SBS advisory group can commission a specific output from NatureScot to support the SBS Delivery Plans.

**AP06/22**: Ruth to put Mairi in contact with Jenni Stockan to make links with the RESAS biodiversity project.

**ITEM 7. Science and Evidence Leadership Programme – how the SAC can support the programme**

1. Alex MacKay introduced the paper. A programme board has been set up and is looking at three areas – leadership, influencing and skills and development.

**Action**

1. The committee members are asked to:
2. Consider the areas of work outlined in Table 1 and provide an initial steer on areas SAC members can add most value to.
3. Suggest any other areas of our scientific work that they think they could help us with and should be considered under the programme.
4. The Committee discussed:

* Their keenness to support NatureScot staff via mentoring in areas such as scientific report writing, framing questions for research contracts. A buddy system may be a useful way to achieve this.
* Building links with universities – relationships with staff and students,
* Making more use of the BioSS call down contract.
* Developing Masters projects with university supervisors.

1. In conclusion the Committee:

* Agreed that they are happy to see this programme of work taken forward.
* Agreed that this is very important and more should be made of the available resources from the SAC and our expert panel members.

**ITEM 8. Information Papers**

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy – next steps (Des Thompson)

1. An update was given on where we are with this now and the Committee was informed that there would be events taking place around this at COP15 in December.

SAC Forward Programme (Eileen Stuart)

1. The SAC forward programme paper was reviewed by the Board in August. A request was made for the Committee to be given more of a 'heads up' regarding future agenda items and issues to be covered. Dan is due to provide an update to the Board in December on the work of the SAC sub-group on avian influenza.

SAC subgroups update (Sarah and Des)

1. Dan provided a brief update on the work underway in the avian influenza sub-group.
2. The marine aerial survey sub-group has completed its work. Marian asked for some further feedback on how the recommendations in the report had been received and the next steps with the work. Further future planning is required on what subgroups are required and expertise required. This should also feed in to consideration of recruitment of new SAC members next year, when four of the current members will be standing down.

**AP07/22**: Eileen to send round the group the power-point presentation that she recently gave to the Board on avian influenza.

**AP08/22:** Sarah to ask staff to provide further feedback on the outcome of the work considered by the aerial survey sub-group.

**AP09/22:** Eileen, Des and Sarah to consider future sub-group needs and skills gaps to be filled in upcoming recruitment.

**ITEM 9. AOB**

1. No items were raised for discussion under AOB

**END OF OPEN SESSION**