****

# TWO HUNDREDTH and fourth MEETING OF THE BOARD OF NATURESCOT

## ST KILDA BOARDROOM, GREAT GLEN HOUSE, INVERNESS

## CONFIRMED MINUTES

## MEMBERS PRESENT

Mike Cantlay Chair

Aoife Martin Deputy Chair

Margaret Davidson Member

Ian Gambles Member

Jaboury Ghazoul Member

Peter Higgins Member

David Johnstone Member

Wayne Powell Member

Heather Reid Member

Jill Robbie 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)

Mary-Anne Thomson Executive Support (observer)

Alison MacDonald Head of People and Organisational Development (item 6)

Katie Gillham Head of Marine Ecosystems (item 7)

Sarah Cunningham MPA and MPF Manager (item 7)

Suz Henderson Marine Ecology Advisor (item 7)

Thomas Shaw Young Employee Panel (Rural Surveyor (North))

## APOLOGIES

Colin McPhail Member

# AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the two hundred and fourth meeting of the Board of NatureScot, particularly Thomas Shaw from the Young Employee Panel, and Mary-Anne Thomson from the Executive Office.

2. Apologies were noted from Colin MacPhail.

3. The Chair highlighted that there was an opportunity for the Board to engage with staff from Great Glen House following the meeting. He also updated that his current focus was on the transition to the appointment of a new Chair, and the associated contact with groups and organisations that this entails.

# AGENDA ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4. Aoife Martin declared an interest in agenda item 7. Aoife is the Director of Operations for Seafish, a public body supporting the seafood industry in the UK.

# AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS FROM 05 october 2022

5. Board members were content to **approve** the minutes of the Board of NatureScot Meeting on the 02 February 2023.

## 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.** Robbie Kernahan advised discussions were continuing with the prospective buyer, but although progress was being made, there had not yet been a mutually acceptable agreement on the transfer. A recommendation was to be made to the Minister by the end of March. Robbie also updated that discussions were ongoing with the Isle of Rum Community Trust around a revised governance model for the island.

**Action Point** (01/203) (More Detail to the Board on Land and Sea Use Priority Action) Members noted that this action point remains **ongoing**, and that this information should be available following publication of the draft Scottish Biodiversity Delivery Plan by the Scottish Government (SG) in May.

Action Point (02/203) (Meeting between NatureScot and the Director of Environment and Forestry) It was noted that this action had been delegated to the Deputy Director of Green Economy to pursue with the SG’s Head of Peatlands. It was therefore agreed to **discharge** this action point.

# AGENDA ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

7. Robbie Kernahan updated that the Board had asked for greater visibility on the new partnership and Memorandum of Understanding with Hampden Bank, Palladium Group and Lombard Odier. This partnership is working on large landscape scale investment in woodland in Scotland. Robbie highlighted that information on this work had been sent out to Members.

8. The Board asked about any plans to engage with key stakeholders in the project. Robbie confirmed that a project board had been set up to look at this, as well as a communication strategy.

9. Members warmly welcomed the recent Memorandum of Understanding with Hampdens, Lombard Odier and Palladium which introduced private investment as a contributor to the restoration of nature in Scotland. Some members voiced their concerns of a possible public relations risk to the NatureScot brand, through any second or third hand investors.

# AGENDA ITEM 5: 2023/24 BUSINESS PLAN YEAR 2 – A NATURE RICH FUTURE FOR ALL - official sensitive

10. This paper set out how the second year of the corporate plan will be delivered, continuing the focus on protecting, restoring and valuing nature. Stuart MacQuarrie explained that how the business plan will be resourced is still being discussed with the Scottish Government (SG) and those affected by prioritisation decisions. He also updated that the final set of measures were included in the plan, which would provide evidence of progress with the areas of focus in the plan.

12. The Board were asked to:

|  |
| --- |
| * Provide feedback on the Business Plan to finalise the content before publication on the 31st of March.
* To note the budget allocations and proposed adjustments (Annex C).
* To confirm the new risk appetite for 2023/24.
 |

13. During discussion, concerns were raised around how the measures in the business plan link to impacts. Members commented that the measures should be more specific for the level of transformation needed for nature. It was agreed that work to strengthen the measures would continue outside of the meeting with Nikki Yoxall, who would help advise on where the existing measures could be made more specific to the impacts needed. The business plan will be published alongside the caveat that work to develop the measures is continuing.

**ACTION POINT 01/204**

14. The Board also discussed the importance of having a good financial monitoring system which would allow agility of resources, enabling movement of resources to areas of work needing it. Stuart MacQuarrie confirmed that the new Organisational Design changes and the 90 day business planning approach would enable this.

15. Other areas of discussion included:

* The working assumption of a cut in resources, yet to be confirmed by SG.
* How partnerships with stakeholders will be important in delivering business plan priorities.
* A greater emphasis in the business plan needed on how the priorities link with SG policy.
* The potential changes that new Ministers could bring.

16. The Board requested that this agenda item is brought back to the May meeting and that an update is provided, along with the proposed process for the Year 3 business plan. In the meantime it was agreed that Members should submit any input to the business plan by the end of the week, and then delegate signing off on the plan to the Chair and Chief Executive.

17. Members were content to confirm the new risk appetite for 2023/24.

# AGENDA ITEM 6: NATURECOT EQUALITY REPORT 2021-2023

18. This agenda item presented the Equality Report 2021-2023 and its key findings on progress with equality outcomes. Of the 27 contributory actions, 15 were on track for delivery, 8 had been achieved, and 4 had been delayed. The paper also contained proposals for a refreshed set of equality outcomes for the next four year period. These had a continued focus on an inclusive approach to NatureScot work, increased representation from Minority Ethnic (ME) and other disadvantage communities in nature-based decision making; increased awareness of career paths into nature-based roles from ME communities; and, an increase in the impact of inclusion within the organisation.

19. The Board were asked to:

* Endorse the Equality Report and its key findings before its publication in April 2023.
* Note the revisions to our Equality Outcomes and contributory actions.
* Note the opportunity to re-establish a Board Equality Champion.

20. Jane Macdonald informed members that should they endorse the report, it would be published in April, as part of the public sector duty under the Equality Act.

21. Members made the following points:

* There were lots of good news stories to promote within the report.
* Query over action 3.1 (related to age-inclusive culture – ‘recognition for good practice’), which suggested good progress, but is delayed. It was clarified that the introduction of Career MOTs had been delayed, but that progress had been made with planning their content and introduction.
* Query over why there is still a gender pay gap. Alison Macdonald confirmed that as there are more women in lower paid roles within the organisation, this increases the pay gap between men and women. There were no pay gaps between men and women undertaking the same role.
* Noting that action 4.3 (to develop STEM Ambassadors in areas where there is significantly lower female representation) is delayed, Heather Reid volunteered to help take this work forward.
* Nikki Yoxall volunteered to become the Board Equality Champion.

22. The Board were content to agree the recommendations.

# AGENDA ITEM 7 – PRIORITY MARINE FEATURE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

23. This paper gave an update on work to protect seabed Priority Marine Features (PMFs) outwith the Scottish Marine Protected Area (MPA) network, being led by Marine Scotland, with advice and support from NatureScot. This forms part of a wider programme to deliver a step-change in the implementation of marine conservation measures in Scotland’s seas.

24. The proposal by Marine Scotland is to apply the same level of protection to the most sensitive seabed PMFs outside the MPA network as within. It is recognised as one of the Priority Actions in the draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy published in December 2022.

25. The Board were asked to note the update and provide a steer on NatureScot’s positioning relating to this work on Priority Marine Features.

26. In support of the paper, Katie Gillham gave a short presentation which highlighted the policy and politics of this work, including that the work was agreed as part of the Bute House Agreement. She also updated on the live public consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMA), which is concentrating on high-level policy framework and site selection guidelines. This is a controversial area of work, with concerns about the potential loss of fishing grounds and effects on the fish processing sector, clarity over what will/won’t be allowed within HPMA, and that ecosystem recovery is not being sufficiently supported.

27. Members discussed the importance of face to face public, community and stakeholder engagement through consultation, which should highlight the positive benefits of protection, such as to nature, tourism and just transition. The Board advocated NatureScot continue to build relationships with stakeholders, both independently as well as jointly with Marine Scotland (MS). They recognised that there is a greater need for marine protection due to the increase in the use of marine space in the UK energy sector.

28. The Chief Executive updated that there was opportunity for MS to engage with the marine industry on the benefits of PMFs, and that she intended to liaise with MS on this matter.

29. The Board requested that this agenda item returns to them in the autumn, to update on progress with stakeholder engagement and consultation.

# AGENDA ITEM 8 – UPDATE TO SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE EXPERT PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

30. This oral update by Eileen Stuart requested a minor change to the Terms of Reference for the Scientific Advisory Committee Expert Panel. The Board were asked to agree that the maximum time that a person can be a member of the Expert Panel is increased from 6 to 8 years.

31. The Board were content to agree this minor change.

# AGENDA ITEM 9 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT

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

* Progress with the Business Plan.
* Progress on Bute House Agreement work, including creation of a new National Park, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, 30x30 and Nature Networks.
* Potential impact of a new First Minister and Deputy First Minister on NatureScot work, and the Bute House Agreement.
* Public Service Reform involvement.
* Planned implementation of operating model.

33. Members recognised that the implementation of the new operating model was a major change for the organisation, and asked for an update on how this had gone, at either the May or June Board meetings.

**AGENDA ITEM 10 – FORWARD PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

34. The Board Forward Programme of Business was presented to members. Members had no updates to make to the Forward Programme of Business.

AOB

35. Jason Ormiston reminded Members of the two staff conferences taking place in May, in Edinburgh and Aviemore, and warmly invited them to attend if they are able.

36. Members asked whether there was any recognition of the retirement of long term employees, and were informed that long service is recognised throughout career at different times, and that on leaving NatureScot, a letter of thanks/congratulations is issued by the Chief Executive.

## Date of Next Meeting

37. The next Board of NatureScot meeting is planned to take place on 10 May 2023, in Callander.

38. The Chair thanked all those in attendance, particularly Thomas Shaw from the Young Employee Panel, and Mary-Anne Thomson from the Executive Office. The meeting was closed.

# END