

# Title: Scientific Advisory Committee Annual Report 2022/2023

**Date: 22 June 2023**

| **Purpose:** | Decision |
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| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | Our Corporate Plan requires a foundation of sound science underpinning NatureScot policy. The SAC provides peer review of complex areas of science as a ‘critical friend’, draws on expertise in the natural and social sciences, and synergistically works with staff to provide robust advice and evidence. |
| **Summary:** | This paper presents a summary of the activities of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) between April 2022 and March 2023. The SAC met twice:  November 15, 2022  March 27, 2023  Sub-groups addressed issues relating to avian influenza, muirburn and digital aerial survey. |
| **Recommendations:** | Board are asked to endorse the ongoing activities of the SACand its subgroups. |
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| **Sponsor:** | Pete Higgins |

## Purpose

1. This paper summarises activities of the Scientific Advisory Committee in 2022-23. The aim of the report is to brief the Board on the work of the SAC.

## Changes to the committee

1. During the year Dr Aileen Mill left the Committee as her appointment came to an end and Professor Martin Price stood down from the Committee for personal reasons. Following a brief internal review with the Chair, given these departures and the increasing workload of the SAC and Expert Panel, it was agreed to extend the appointments of Dr Ruth Mitchell, Prof Dan Haydon and Prof Neil Metcalfe. Appointments of a number of Expert Panel members are also proposed to be extended. We are currently undertaking a recruitment exercise to appoint a new member of the Committee and an additional Expert Panel member.
2. Professor Jaboury Ghazoul (NatureScot Board member) has joined the Committee as our new Board Observer.

## Meetings

1. The SAC met on 15 November 2022 and 27 March 2023. [Minutes](https://www.nature.scot/about-naturescot/board-directors-and-committees/scientific-advisory-committee) of the SAC meetings are available on our website.
2. The usual September meeting of the SAC had to be rearranged for November, as the September date planned coincided with the Queen’s state funeral. Two papers that were due to be taken to the September meeting were instead send round by correspondence and feedback from the Committee. The papers were on Climate and Nature Scenarios and Peatland Monitoring through the Peatland Action programme.
3. The papers at the **November 2022** meeting included: Offshore Wind Development – understanding the implications for seabird populations; Species Prioritisation; Science and Evidence Leadership Programme – how the SAC can support the programme. There were also information papers on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; SAC forward programme and an SAC sub-groups update.
4. A report back from the Chair on Board Business of relevance to the SAC has been permanently added to the agenda to strengthen the links between the Board and the Committee. A regular item on horizon scanning has also been added to the agenda.
5. The papers at the **March 2023** meeting included: Horizon Scanning; Horizon Scanning (specifically on plant health); Deer Research – a proposal for a subgroup; Peatland Action – monitoring and research issues; and Biodiversity Metrics. The Committee also heard from Professor Anna Meredith (Edinburgh Dick Vet) on a One health Approach.

## Subgroups

1. The SAC currently has **several sub-groups**, which delve deeper into specific issues. Sub-groups are set up in a time-limited format depending on the topic and may include members of SAC’s Expert Panel and/or external experts, as well as normally at least two members of SAC. Groups of interest this year and current work ongoing are:
2. **Avian Influenza** - this group, chaired by Dan Haydon, was set up to advise on issues emerging from handling the avian influenza outbreak in Scotland last summer. A final report has been published.
3. **Muirburn** - this group, chaired by Marian Scott, was set up with the aim of supporting staff on science matters in connection with the [Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill](https://www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-management-scotland-consultation/pages/1/) relating to [muirburn](https://www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-management-scotland-consultation/pages/5/) issues. A final report is due soon.
4. **Digital Aerial Survey** - sub-group chaired by Marian Scott to advise on survey guidance. The sub-group provided recommendations on this area of work that staff are taking forward.
5. **Capercaillie** - the group, chaired by Neil Metcalfe, completed its work in 2021/22. The final report has been used this year to inform discussions on next steps for NatureScot and Cairngorms National Park Authority at Board level. Advice has been provided to Ministers.
6. The SAC subgroups often work on high profile areas where NatureScot is seeking additional scientific input. For example, recent reports from the Capercaille and HPAI sub-groups have been helpful in providing advice to staff, the NatureScot Board, Ministers and to our partners, with the Chairs of the sub-groups being invited to speak about the sub-group findings at a number of events.

## Other SAC activities

1. Individual members of the SAC and Expert Panel, and the Chair review drafts of scientifically novel or contentious NatureScot-commissioned research reports as part of our editorial Quality Assurance process.
2. Xavier Lambin (former Expert Panel member) is a member of the Technical Advisory Group supporting the Orkney Native Wildlife Project, which is funded largely by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.