NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency

**NatureScot**

**SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

# Proposal for a joint meeting with the Board - February 2024

**Purpose**

1. A provisional date for a joint Board/SAC meeting has been identified for 7 February 2024. This paper outlines options for using this meeting to strengthen working between the Board and SAC to ensure the expertise of the SAC collectively is adding maximum value to NatureScot’s work.

**Action**

1. **The Committee is asked to comment on the proposals and identify two members to help shape the meeting agenda, and prepare briefing material.**

**Preparation**

1. The paper was written by Eileen Stuart, Des Thompson & Sarah Hutcheon. It is sponsored by Pete Higgins.

**Background**

1. The Board and SAC met to discuss how the SAC could support the Board and NatureScot staff in delivering the new corporate plan in February 2021. The output of this session was used to prepare a work plan for the SAC, which highlighted priority topics from the Corporate Plan where scientific input from the SAC would be most valuable. The work programme has guided agendas since 2021, and the majority of the topics have been covered in SAC or SAC sub-group discussions. [SAC/2022/11/info02 - SAC forward programme - November 2022 (A3816357)](https://naturescot.nexus.objective.co.uk/documents/A3816357/details)
2. It was intended to refresh the work programme in light of any additional themes or priorities identified in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.
3. The SBS draft Strategy and Delivery Plan are now out for consultation and feedback from this consultation will be available early in 2024. A joint review with the Board on new emerging themes from the Delivery Plan where SAC input (or wider science and evidence needs) would be valuable to support NatureScot’s own work and advice to Government.
4. Closely related to this is the question of risk and resilience across all uses of the land and sea. The context for this is a further degree of warming likely by the 2050s, arriving three-times faster than the last one (1920-2020). And there are increasing concerns that we are approaching tipping points more rapidly, for example events not considered likely until well after 2100 now plausible even by the 2050s (as discussed earlier (Climate scenarios – sea warming)). There is therefore a heightened need for urgency in nature restoration (SBS delivery) alongside land and sea use for net zero and SBS delivery.
5. In addition, we have continued to have discussions internally about how we communicate our science and evidence so it has maximum impact. This is particularly important for the implementation of the Delivery Plan which requires mainstreaming of biodiversity action and wider understanding and acceptance of the policy and behaviour changes required to halt biodiversity loss. Our recently published [report on indirect IPBES drivers](https://www.nature.scot/considerable-change-needed-stop-nature-loss-scotland) is relevant regarding this.
6. Recent discussions with our Senior Leadership Team have confirmed that there is a role for NatureScot to provide clear and authoritative science and evidence summary statements which highlight the current state of knowledge on key topics and inform appropriate policy responses. Given the complexity and contested nature of some of the science in the natural environment this work would be extremely valuable but could inevitably be controversial. The Senior Leadership Team would like the SAC to work with staff to prepare some sample ‘evidence briefings’ to test their value. There is a range of ways of framing these briefings to explore complex choices with IPES offering an interesting recent example [IPES Politics of Protein](https://www.ipes-food.org/pages/politicsofprotein).

**Proposals for joint meeting**

1. It is proposed that for the joint meeting we have two sessions focused around the SBS Delivery Plan.
   1. **Identifying science and evidence priorities.** A joint overview from staff & SAC members on new themes in the Delivery Plan where there are evidence gaps and a need for focused investigation or input from the SAC.
   2. **Consideration of priority topics for ‘evidence briefs’.** A discussion on key topics and how these should be constructed so they have weight and impact. The discussion will also confirm the purpose and audience for the briefs.
2. For session 1, we would welcome offers of input to the planning of the session, who would work with colleagues to prepare some material and lead the discussions.
3. For session 2, we think it would be valuable to have prepared an example ‘evidence brief’ on a key topic (possibly one from a recent Sub-groups work) to highlight good practice and inform the discussion on their value and use.
4. We will work this up into a more detailed programme with, input from relevant internal policy leads, and highlight how this will contribute to an updated forward work plan for the next two years. This will also raise awareness of the science output of the organisation and develop stronger links between the SAC, Board and staff.
5. **We would welcome comments from the SAC particularly on:**
   1. **Suggested format of the joint meeting;**
   2. **Suitable topics for a sample ‘evidence brief’ and approaches we might test;**
   3. **Members willing to contribute to further development of the joint meeting.**

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