

## **Response from the James Hutton Institute to Scottish Natural Heritage's 2015-18 Corporate Plan – discussion paper.**

The James Hutton Institute welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper which informs the Corporate Plan for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), 2015 to 2018. We will be delighted to discuss any aspect of our responses below, and how the institute can work with SNH in delivering in areas of shared interest, and so acting on the aim of working in partnership with a range of stakeholders.

Understanding the international context for tackling environmental issues in Scotland is of great importance. A challenge is to identify how to project Scotland's contributions to global environmental issues as ones of best practice and leadership. This is one area in which collaboration could take advantage of SNH's responsibilities for increasing the public benefits from Scotland's natural assets and the James Hutton Institute's global network of research partners and activities.

We are very supportive of the appreciation conveyed of the links between nature and landscapes, and social and economic benefits such as health and wellbeing, and the overall relationship with communities and place.

Given the aspirations of working with partners, the corporate plan would benefit from stating who SNH recognise as its stakeholder communities of interest, practice and place.

Our responses to the specific questions posed in the consultation follow.

### **Do you think SNH has correctly identified the main drivers for our work in the next 3 years?**

- By restricting the Corporate Plan to a three year time frame, it misses an opportunity to engage properly with the long-term challenges of climate change.
- Climate change and the drive to greater food security will add further pressure on the farmed countryside, potentially making it harder to deliver wider environmental benefits.
- One of the major drivers for continued biodiversity loss is the weakness of biodiversity within the overall policy arena and the lack of mainstreaming biodiversity in the public discourse. These are highlighted as major drivers of failure to meet the 2010 targets. The draft corporate strategy starts to align the work of SNH with other policy sectors (e.g. food and drink, health and wellbeing, urban planning) but it is passive, i.e. there is no aim in terms of working with other policy sectors to minimise their impact on biodiversity, to demonstrate the benefits of biodiversity in terms of ecosystem service provision and to better integrate biodiversity conservation into their considerations of these other policy sectors.

### **What are the key drivers affecting your own plans for 2015/18 and beyond?**

- The key drivers in the James Hutton Institute's science strategy are:
  - Environmental Security: addressing the scarcity and degradation of environmental assets.
  - Biodiversity Crisis: addressing the loss of biodiversity with knock-on effects for ecosystem services.
  - Soil Degradation: threatens the sustainability of terrestrial ecosystem services.
  - Food Security: has been recognised as one of this century's key global challenge.
  - Energy Security: developing renewable energy supplies.
  - Water Security: understanding the pressures on this finite resource.
  - Rural Development: understanding the pivotal role of rural areas in sustainable development.
  - Social and Economic: understanding the demands which demographic change and societal expectations place on all aspects of natural capital, and people's behaviour towards the natural environment.

Climate Change: the most serious environmental threat facing our planet.

In addition, at a Scottish level but also in some parts of the world, increasingly community empowerment is a driver.

**Do you think SNH has correctly identified the most important areas of activity given these drivers?**

Yes we agree with these areas of activity but would add the following comments:

- There is a challenge in identifying where local and national efforts reinforce or act against each other. Given this potential, there is a need for actions to ensure coordination of local efforts to reach national targets.
- Given the complexity of the drivers facing ecosystems and the complexity of their responses, a greater focus on developing adaptive management would be timely.

**Are there any other issues you would like us to consider in developing our new Corporate Plan?**

- There should be a clear definition of 'sustainable'. Currently, it could be read that the main aim of this discussion document is how SNH can contribute to driving economic growth. There needs to be differentiation between sustainable economic growth and sustainable management of resources. The two may not always be possible together.
- It is not clear where the evidence for policy development will come from, and the document mentions 'evidence' only three times; only two of these instances suggest the need for more evidence. However, it is clear from both the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Land Use Strategy that improved evidence is crucial to the decision making that will be necessary for the actions described in the SNH discussion paper. A strong research base is needed and SNH has a key role to play in doing research and directing/influencing the research of universities, institutes and NGOs to provide the relevant evidence base. It should also be recognised that citizen science has weaknesses as well as strengths.
- Does the balance of language between 'natural assets' and 'biodiversity' indicate a switch of emphasis? SNH is the lead partner in delivering the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the current choice of language suggests biodiversity has less emphasis than it needs to deliver this strategy.

*Specific comments on Introduction, Issues and Drivers*

Pg 2, para 5. We suggest a rewording of: Scotland's natural assets 'CAN BE a sustainable ..... resource'

Pg 2, para 9. It is also important to protect the stocks for long-term sustainability, so swapping this with para 10 would be putting these two statements in a more appropriate order.

**Do you have any comment on our proposed focus on increasing the benefits delivered through Scotland's natural assets and on improving the health and resilience of those assets?**

- As mentioned in the last section, it makes more sense to highlight the protection of assets before the increase in benefits drawn from them (i.e. reverse the bullets on page 5, para 4).

*Specific comments on Alignment with the National Performance Framework*

Pg 5, para 5. It should be added that SNH will work with other public bodies and private bodies as well as the public. It should be made clear that many of the goals of this strategy can only be delivered by working with all sectors.

**Do you see changes we are making in our priorities and activities as helping your work?**

- Yes, the greater emphasis on people and communities is welcome and aligns with our own direction of travel. We can help SNH through delivering research and evidence to help it in its decision making. A clearer focus on those research and evidence needs would be helpful.

**Do you see new opportunities for collaborative working with SNH?**

- Yes, we already collaborate and would be keen to explore additional ways of doing so. As our research emphasis shifts to a greater degree of analysis and synthesis and consideration

of ecosystem services and to the implementation of the ecosystem approach, we foresee greater opportunities to increase collaborative work in this area.

#### **Do you have any concerns?**

- We wonder about the use of 'natural assets' rather than 'natural capital'. Is there a difference between the two in SNH's mind? If not, then natural capital appears to be gaining traction in policy and industry circles.
- In line with earlier comments, the emphasis on protecting stocks (Portfolio 2) should come before deriving benefits (Portfolio 1).
- The conservation of stocks and the increase in flows may not always be possible at the same time/place. The document should make it clear that there needs to be a full understanding of trade-offs between managing for particular services and benefits.
- The focus on flows of benefits could potentially detract from the need to manage for specific elements of Scotland's biodiversity. There needs to be a process that identifies potential trade-offs between greater benefits and improved conservation status.

#### **Specific comments on Portfolios 1-4.**

##### **Portfolio 1.**

We support the emphasis on both health (physical and mental) and the broader notion of wellbeing.

We would agree with the focus on facilitating health / wellbeing and opportunities for first hand enjoyment and understanding nature for the identified target groups.

We would encourage consideration of opportunities for nature-interaction (which promote health / well-being, enjoyment, understanding) during non-recreational time. For example, when at work (e.g. incorporating / re-incorporating nature into areas around workplace settings) or during commuting (e.g. this could link with the delivery of national walking and cycling networks).

The priority on 'National Nature Reserves' appears at odds with the observation in the 'Issues' section for the need to move toward wider ecosystem- or landscape-scale (i.e. beyond protected areas), as it is unclear how these National Nature Reserves would differ from Protected Areas.

We agree about the importance of supporting the improvement of places close to urban areas and not only the National Nature Reserves, as part of recognising the importance of everyday landscapes, as set out in the European Landscape Convention.

We are keen to see an emphasis on continued development of an evidence-base associated with nature's contribution to enriching people's lives, e.g. through formative evaluation of new initiatives; ongoing evaluation of the process as a new programmes are implemented or existing programmes continue; summative and ongoing evaluation of impact.

The recognition of the need for 'nearby nature' (i.e. places close to urban areas) is encouraging. We support the recognition of the need for both: (i) 'nearby nature' in non-urban areas (e.g. access to nature for recreation, enjoyment, understanding in rural areas); and (ii) non-green infrastructure e.g. 'blue infrastructure' (e.g. coastal areas that are near urban or rural), 'blue/green' infrastructure (such as rivers or sustainable drainage systems).

We suggest that there is scope for the inclusion of deliberative processes and consideration of shared values. These should align with the stated aim of engaging with Community Planning Partnerships.

We are encouraged by the inclusion of ways to improve information about availability of and access to nature. We suggest more of an evidence-based approach to development and provision of such information.

## **Portfolio 2.**

The document makes the assumption that all management can increase the flow of benefits and services. It is entirely possible that the most appropriate management for overall benefit may reduce the flow of specific benefits: for instance natural flood management will compromise food production within certain fields within a water catchment. There needs to be a more explicit statement that the trade-offs have to be understood, and that SNH has a role in brokering decision making and encouraging research in this area.

Portfolio 2 (pg 7, para 10). Should this be 'the value of nature and landscapes to the public'?

Portfolio 2. As well as assessing site status and trends, SNH must play a lead role in improving national status and trend measures.

## **Portfolio 3.**

We recognise the background to considering the contribution of the natural environment to promoting sustainable economic growth. However, as sustainable economic growth is the stated core purpose of Scottish Government, and items in other portfolios also contribute to that (e.g. Portfolio 1, national walking and cycling network; Portfolio 2, SRDP; Portfolio 3, accessible information), a more specific title for the portfolio is warranted.

Pg 8, para 3). 'Wildlife' isn't always the best term as it is generally associated with mammals and birds.

## **Portfolio 4.**

We support the aims of providing better and more accessible information about Scotland's assets. The institute is committed to enabling access to environmental spatial data and will welcome opportunities to work with SNH and other partners, including Scottish Government, in furthering this common objective.