

# A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR SCOTLAND?

Summary notes from an online meeting, compiled in June 2025 by Kerry Waylen (James Hutton Institute) [Kerry.Waylen@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Kerry.Waylen@hutton.ac.uk) and Elana Bader (NatureScot) [elana.bader@nature.scot](mailto:elana.bader@nature.scot)

## Background

Over the last decade, the idea of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) has become a key term in global discussions related to natural resource management. This is also true in Scotland: although there is no single policy or organisation tasked to deliver NbS, it is a key focus or framing for individuals working across several disciplines and sectors.

To understand if there was cross-sectoral interest to networking on NbS Scotland, the authors of this briefing convened a 1.5 hour online meeting on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

## What did we discuss?

The meeting aim was to explore the interest in and possibility of building a community of practice for enabling and implementing NbS in Scotland. There was a short talk by Professor Robin Pakeman (JHI) to explain the [IUCN Global Standard for NbS](#) and [Scotland-specific guidance on NbS](#); the result of the meeting focused on discussion to share examples of work linked to NbS, and to collect ideas about if and how to build a network or community of practice. Menti was used to capture and support some topics discussed, and generated the figures shown below.

## Who was involved?

There were 33 participants from the following sectors:

- Infrastructure (SGN, Scottish Power, SP Energy Networks, Network Rail, Scottish Water)
- Scottish Government policy & analysis (RESAS, Climate adaptation, Flooding & resilience teams)
- Local authorities (Scottish Borders Council)
- Statutory agencies (SEPA, Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot)
- South of Scotland Enterprise, Crown Estate, Architecture & Design Scotland, ARUP
- Third sector (Forth Rivers Trust, Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust)
- Academics (Herriot Watt, CEH, James Hutton Institute).

The participants were invited via the pre-existing networks of the lead organisers in Hutton and NatureScot as well as Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh; the meeting was not publicly advertised so it is likely that individuals in other organisations may also be interested to participate in this subject.

## Was there a shared understanding of NbS?

Participants discussed their understandings of the term, before and after the talk by Robin Pakeman. These descriptions such as *"Using nature to solve societal challenges"* matched well with each other, as well as with internationally accepted definitions such as the IUCN Global Standard for NbS. Shared ideas, expectations and terminology can ease knowledge sharing. However, some of the details of the IUCN Global Standard were less widely familiar (Fig.1), including its 8 principles and its Self-Assessment Tool. It may be important to consider the principles of NbS to avoid use the term becoming an 'empty label'; yet there should be flexibility in adapting and using the standard to support practices.

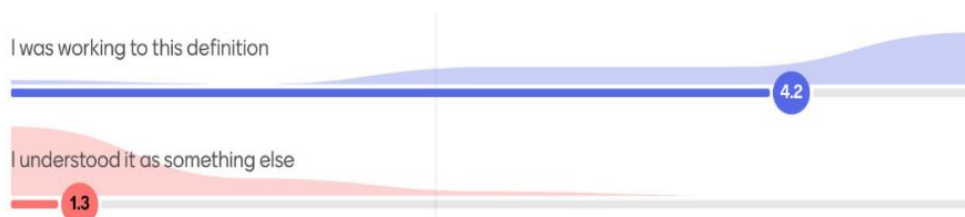


Figure 1 Ratings of agreement, selected by 21 participants on Mentiimeter, on a 1-5 sliding scale in response to the question 'Before today, how aware were you of the full NbS definition?'

## What ongoing work was related NbS?

Using Menti, participants described what they work on that is already aligned or related to NbS. These answers (Table 1) show a range of places and settings that people work in, the issues or goals they are working for, and the activities that are used. Interestingly, managing designated sites or protected areas was not noted, reflecting the relevance of NbS across settings and sectors.

Activities	Settings	Challenges or Goals
Analysing policy & supporting policy design for multiple objectives	Linear infrastructure and energy networks	Contaminated land remediation
Tree-planting for water quality and quantity	Management of sites adjacent to infrastructure	Urban heat islands
Providing indicators to assess quality of green, blue, urban or rural space for people	Marine	Improving human health & well-being
Assessing how to involve economic sectors in freshwater restoration	(Upper) Catchments	Over-heating electricity assets and infrastructure
Peatland restoration	Cities and urban spaces	Wildfire
Integrating NbS and BNG	Peatlands	Carbon removal /climate mitigation
Improving participation and governance	Woodlands	Balancing multiple objectives
Refining planting design and plant choice	Riparian zone	Climate adaptation & resilience
Developing Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENS)	Agricultural land	Drought
Vegetation management		Flooding
Installing rain gardens		Landscape resilience
Improving urban space for nature		
Encouraging set aside agricultural land		

Table 1 Summary of initial activities, settings and challenges/goals noted in response to Menti question 'What do you work on that is already aligned with NbS?'. There is no connection between items across rows.

## Was there interest in networking for NbS?

Yes, there was definite interest in future networking on topics related to NbS (Fig.2). There was particular interest making contacts and sharing knowledge on the following interrelated topics:

- Sharing resources and building conceptual clarity, understanding when (and when not) NbS is an appropriate framing;
- Sharing examples to help inform, inspire and build confidence in designing for NbS. This should include Scotland-relevant examples using the IUCN Global Standard, best practice, but also the 'warts and all' reality of trying to progress NbS initiatives;
- Setting out the evidence and building the business case for NbS: collating evidence and identify any gaps that impede designing or justifying upscaled NbS; showing that NbS is cost-effective in a specific place and offers cost-benefit ratios needed to convince business, regulators and public sector organisations to justify and make the business case for NbS rather than other interventions;
- Understanding what and when to measure, especially for benefits that are hard to quantify, or delivered over longer-terms. What are the essential indicators/metrics that we need to monitor (including baselines); and how link social issues/outcomes to other indicators;
- Networking, collaborating and building partnerships at larger or landscape scales;
- Identifying if there are different NbS 'families' with differing support needs;
- Understanding how existing concepts, tools & practices relate to or can help deliver NbS.

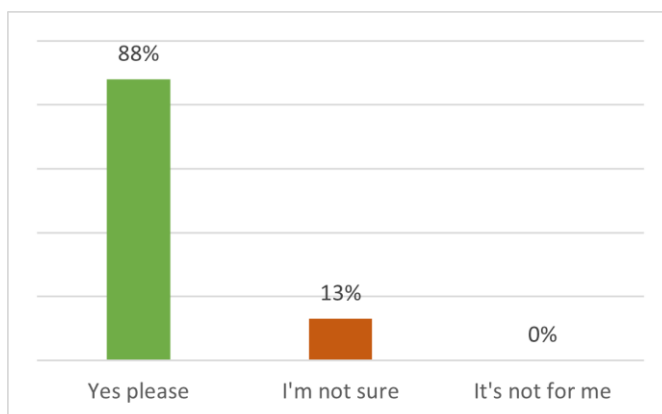


Figure 2 Responses to "Would you like to see a Community of Practice for NbS in Scotland?" made by 24 participants in Menti

Care would be needed not to “reinvent the wheel” by duplicating or separately convening conversations that better belong or already happen in other fora or resources (see Annex).

### **How could a Community of Practice be facilitated in future?**

Most options focused on what could be done online and remotely, to make efficient use of time. The following mix of activities was mentioned during the meeting:

- Hosted online meetings;
  - Issue/topic-based meetings, targeted to those relevant;
  - Question/challenge-focussed interactions that lead to an outputs/knowledge repository;
- A web platform, hosting resources that could include;
  - Guidance/best practice on NbS, and how it inter-connects with other concepts;
  - Links to tools, evidence and datasets, especially for making business cases;
  - Information on potential funders for NbS-related activity;
  - A library of geotagged NbS projects;
- Optional site/field visits to share real life experiences;
- An e-bulletin or newsletter to help to signpost new events resources across the network.

Another option not discussed during the meeting is a ‘basecamp’ style discussion fora. There was strong feedback that meetings, resources and other activities should have a clear focus and benefit – not just a talking shop – but there was also interest in making new contacts and expand networks. This feedback, together with staff time available to support the network, should inform the mix of future activities.

We do not assume that participants in this meeting are the totality of those working on NbS in Scotland; carefully appraising and addressing gaps in representation would be important. For example, increasing participation from engineers, local authorities or Public Health Scotland may be appropriate.

### **Proposed next steps and priorities**

- Explore options for data management of network members (Q2 2025). NatureScot will look at how best to formally collect your consent to participate in and be contacted about the network. Please look out for this and feel free to share with colleagues.
- Next online meeting: Exploring urban NbS in Practice (Q3 2025). This will address several inter-connected topics raised during the first meeting; NatureScot have several examples available.
- Membership survey to capture more detail of current NbS experience and work (Q3-4 2025). This would allow a better assessment of the range of experiences and interests of the network, beyond what could be captured in the first meeting.
- Develop an initial website page, hosted by NatureScot (Q4 2025). This will help capture and link any discussions and resources developed by the network.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **This work was supported by**



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# ANNEX – MATERIALS AND LINKS SHARED DURING THE MEETING

## IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions

- IUCN (2020). IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. A user-friendly framework for the verification, design and scaling up of NbS. First edition, IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gland, Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.08.en>
- IUCN (2020). Guidance for using the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions: first edition, IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.09.en>
- IUCN online [Self-Assessment Tool](#).

## Other guidance on NbS

- [Safari Guidance on NbS for Scotland](#)
- [EU guidance on evaluating the impact of nature-based solutions : a handbook for practitioners](#).

## Other links tools or resources mentioned during the meeting

- [Futurelakes project on NbS in lake catchments - big focus on assessing efficacy to inform upscaling](#)
- [RSPB Haweswater – use of IUCN Global Standard in UK](#)
- [Fernbrae Meadows](#) – example of UK site-specific urban project where the IUCN Global Standard for NbS was applied
- [Place Standard](#) – tool for assessing places
- [Restoration vs NbS – a paper](#)
- [Deliverable D2.1 - H2020 MERLIN project](#) - the Scottish case in H2020 MERLIN (Allan Water) used the IUCN Self-Assessment Tool; these data are being used as part of evaluations of how well the NbS implementation has worked, deliverable due in Autumn 2025.
- [The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment \(CCRA\)](#)
- [Introduction to Communities of Practice](#). Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (n.d.).

## Related networks

- [Nature-based Solutions Task Forces](#) (EU level)
- Scottish Forum for Natural Capital (SFNC) <https://naturalcapitalscotland.com/> and associated basecamp fora: <https://3.basecamp.com/4322753/projects>
- Climate Ready Infrastructure Scotland Forum - [Scotland's infrastructure leaders unite in landmark climate resilience agreement](#): more than 20 organisations are formally joining forces to protect Scotland's critical infrastructure from weather and climate related impacts.
- Public Sector Climate Adaptation Network (PSCAN) <https://adaptation.scot/our-work/public-sector-climate-adaptation-network/>
- Climate Resilience Forum (?) / Climate Ready Infrastructure Forum <https://adaptation.scot/our-work/climate-ready-infrastructure-scotland-forum/>
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) Network - <https://www.nfm.scot/>
- Catchment groups