



SCOTLAND

## A guide to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy consultation

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy should define how Scotland will respond to the global nature crisis here at home from now until 2045. This document sets out some of our thoughts on the questions posed in the consultation for this Strategy which can be found here: <https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2022/consultation>. We hope that you find it useful when completing your response.

### Introduction (Q1-2)

#### **The evidence for biodiversity loss (Q1)**

It has been unequivocally established by peer-reviewed science that we are facing a nature crisis, both globally and here in Scotland. Evidence of this crisis has been gathered over decades. This evidence is thoroughly and clearly summarised on pages 7-9 of the consultation document and is the best summary of the state of Scotland's nature that we have ever seen from the Scottish Government.

The inclusion of the Biodiversity Intactness Index is very useful to help explain historical nature loss in Scotland, and it would be even better to see the more detailed summary of this (currently on page 22) included in the main evidence.

It would also be useful to have data on the condition of protected areas as well as their extent.

#### **Challenges and opportunities to tackle the climate and nature crises together (Q2)**

The nature and climate crises are linked: climate change is a major cause of nature loss, and the loss of nature is a major cause of greenhouse gas emissions and reduces our ability to adapt to a changing climate.

Restoring nature can be a huge part of the climate solution, as restoring habitats like peatlands, native woodlands, saltmarsh and our oceans to a healthy state will help lock up carbon, as well as helping wildlife to thrive.

However, there are challenges to ensure solutions to climate change don't harm nature. For example, developing offshore wind in locations that will kill thousands of seabirds and damage marine habitats or tree planting that causes in damage to other habitats like peatland or includes too many non-native trees so provides fewer benefits to nature than it could. The Scottish Government needs to put in place a strategic, coherent plan for delivering for climate and nature in harmony.

There are significant opportunities in Scotland for growing and expanding the nature-based sector, creating green jobs and skills and supporting local, resilient economies particularly in rural areas. But it requires a joined-up approach across different areas of policy and departments and investment in future skills now.

## Draft Vision (Q3-5)

It's a good start and ends strongly. However, we think it should also include reference to:

- reversing nature loss across all our ecosystems – both on land and at sea,
- halting extinctions and supporting appropriate reintroductions and translocations,
- how key sectors are supporting nature.

The lack of proper targets and indicators is a major failing. Targets are key for providing a clear thread and framework that can be implemented via each delivery plan. They are also key for helping measure progress towards the milestones and vision set out in the strategy. Without them the vision is a little vague. The vision could also better show the scale of change needed to restore nature and describe the wider socio-economic benefits this change would deliver.

The title should be ***Scotland's Nature Emergency Strategy***.

## The Outcomes (Q6-30)

All the outcome sections need to incorporate three key elements

1. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound) 2030 and 2045 targets to accompany the outcomes
2. A rolling programme of ecosystem restoration for key ecosystems within the land type
3. A targeted programme of species recovery for species within the land/ecosystem type

## Rural Environment – farming, woodlands and forestry, soils and uplands

### **2045 outcomes** (Q6)

**Farming** – No. The outcome is too generic. It's not clear or precise enough about the change wanted by 2045 and lacks any metric to measure if that change and the outcome has been achieved.

**Woodland and Forestry** – No. The outcome is a good start, and the three points align with some of the things that should be a priority in this area. But it misses others. The seven things we think it should include, in priority order, are: Protecting, improving and restoring ancient woodlands including legal protection to prevent more loss and damage; Restoring ancient woodland sites that have been damaged by plantations as this is far quicker than replanting; Supporting natural spread in buffer zones around ancient woodland including removing invasive species and some planting; Increasing the connectivity between ancient woodland and new native woodlands; Improving the condition of other semi-natural woodland; Increasing new native woodland creation (ideally 50% of all new tree cover); Expanding native trees outside of woodland.

In addition to this, there should be more native species in commercial forestry.

**Soils** – Not really. We need to be incorporating soils as a nature-based solution now, not by 2045.

**Uplands** – No. The outcome is too vague to be impactful and unambitious suggesting that in 23 years' time the best we should expect is that habitats are regenerating. Given that uplands cover roughly 70% of Scotland's land they have a huge role to play in nature's recovery as well as carbon storage and providing clean water. The outcome should set out that deer numbers will have reduced to sustainable levels (less than 5 per km<sup>2</sup> for the uplands), acknowledge illegal persecution of birds of prey should have been reduced to very low levels where no populations of birds or prey are negatively impacted, integrate banning muirburn on deep peat and protecting shallow peat from damage and erosion, and it should be aiming for degraded habitats to be fully restored with wildlife increasing.

### **2030 milestones** (Q7)

**Farming** – No. The emission reduction milestone is not ambitious enough because we are already seeing reductions so could end up meeting it without further action when we need to do more. The subsidy milestone is vague and needs to be more precise. The new system needs to ensure that every farmer is actively managing land with nature in mind and reducing emissions. At least three quarters of the budget directed to support farmers should deliver for nature and climate and all payments should be conditional on delivering nature and climate benefits.

**Woodland and Forestry** – Lacks urgency and ambition and it would be better to have more measurable milestones (focussing on the first four priorities from those outlined in the response to Q6) for example all ancient woodlands protected, all ancient semi-natural woodlands improving in condition, 100 m buffer zones for natural colonisation around all publicly owned ancient woodland and incentives for the same for those privately owned. Plus 50% of all tree cover expansion targets should be native woodland primarily for conservation.

**Uplands** – By 2030, Werritty report recommendations to license muirburn and grouse shooting and improve deer management should have been implemented for a number of years. There should also be a milestone that recognises illegal raptor persecution should have significantly reduced by 2030, with populations of key raptors such as hen harriers recovering across suitable habitats.

### **What's missing?**

This section doesn't address development in rural areas with development only covered in the urban section. This is a significant oversight given that major built developments such as golf courses, windfarms, spaceports are generally not in urban areas. There needs to be more recognition of the role of planning for nature throughout the strategy and join up with crucial initiatives such as the National Planning Framework 4 and Nature Positive.

**Farmland** – there should be reference to maintaining High Nature Value farmland which links to ecosystem restoration. It's not clear how the strategy will relate to wider food and farming policy. Additional targets such as 10% for high diversity landscape features and the ambition for 25% organic farming are missing. We would propose that there should also be specific targets for birds like curlew.

**Woodland/Forestry** – It is important to consider the interaction of trees, woods and forests with other important habitats. This means avoiding repeating past mistakes by planting the right trees in the right places for the right reasons but also rectifying the mistakes of the past by removing trees on peatland and dealing with issues caused where non-native trees are encroaching on other habitats.

### **Opportunities** (Q9)

The agricultural bill is a chance to really reform agricultural policy and mainstreaming nature-friendly farming will help Scotland become the global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture that the Scottish Government wants it to be.

### **Challenges** (Q10)

Change is hard and requires collaboration and understanding. But if farm payments are not reformed then this public money will continue to contribute to the nature and climate emergency rather than helping to solve it.

## Marine

### **2045 outcomes** (Q11)

No. The 2045 outcomes lack detail particularly what indicators will be used to assess what is healthy.

The first outcome mentions that marine mammals, marine birds and fish will have recovered. However, it doesn't say to what level. This should be specified. It would be sensible to relate both outcomes to the current Good Environmental Status (GES) indicators for healthy seas in the UK Marine Strategy. These were due to be achieved by 2020 but 11 out of 15 are yet to achieve GES.

As with every section, the outcomes should include detail on ecosystem restoration, species recovery and specific targets.

### **2030 milestones** (Q12)

No. Again, the milestones are far too vague. It's not clear what would be deemed to be improving. The marine environment faces enormous challenges which need clear and ambitious targets to reverse the trend of species and habitat decline.

Under the UK Marine Strategy there was a commitment for our seas to reach Good Environmental Status by 2020, but only 4 out of the 15 indicators achieved this. There should be a 2030 GES milestone to measure progress. The milestones should also have specific targets for area-based conservation. The Scottish Government has committed to 10% of Scotland's Seas being designated as highly protected marine areas by 2026. Having these areas implemented and well managed should be a 2030 milestone.

The consultation document refers to 37% of Scotland's seas being part of the Marine Protected Area network. But this does not mean 37% are protected from damaging activities. There is commitment from the Scottish Government to deliver protective measures by the end of 2024, but this needs to include restoration and protections suitable to bring about Good Environmental Status.

In the same way that the strategy identifies the need to change farming practices in recognition of the impact that farming has on the landscape under marine there should be recognition of the impact of major sectors such as fishing and offshore renewables.

Fisheries are recognised world over as the biggest impact on marine biodiversity and as such management of Scotland's fisheries must be as ambitious as possible to minimise the impact they have on the marine environment as required in the Ecosystems Objective of the Fisheries Act. Measures to improve selectivity to avoid unwanted bycatch of marine wildlife and wasteful catches of non-marketable fish need to be incentivised and effective monitoring at sea should be introduced to support these measures.

These actions, along with a strong commitment to biosecurity to protect our internationally important seabird colonies, should be included as part of the milestones in the Strategy.

### **What's missing?**

There is no mention of marine renewables (or marine development in general) despite the recognition that they pose threats to both marine species and habitats and that these will need to be addressed from the outset. The expansion of offshore wind is vital to tackle the climate crisis but must be done in ways that address its environmental impact and helps restore nature. There should be an aim to make all development at sea nature positive.

There is no specific mention of tying the strategy to current indicators of Good Environmental Status. At the last assessment, the UK was only meeting 4 out of 15 indicators for healthy seas with seabirds being the only indicator that is moving further away from the target, something that should be reflected in the marine section. Scotland has significant international importance for seabirds, including nearly 60% of the world's breeding great skuas and 46% of the world's northern gannets. However, the index of 11 annually monitored breeding seabirds declined by 49% between 1986 and 2019 pointing to a major shortfall in effective seabird conservation.

The strategy must be more specific and ambitious if this is to change especially given this decline was before the devastating impacts of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza this year. We need to see:

- Leadership from Scotland to deliver resilience measures such as the closure of the industrial sandeel fishery across UK waters,
- A national programme of island restoration and biosecurity for seabird islands affected by non-native mammals,
- Clear ambitions for making fisheries practices more sustainable including working with the fishing industry to reduce seabird deaths from by-catch in fishing gear and delivering robust mitigation and monitoring at sea.
- Clear ambitions to secure nature positive offshore renewables development and delivery

### **Opportunities** (Q14)

We must ensure development in the marine environment is nature positive, ensuring harm is minimised and development is only allowed in parallel with measures that restore nature at equal scale and pace.

In light of the bird flu outbreak, there is momentum to take action to help seabirds. This should include addressing all pressures facing seabirds from industrial sandeel fishing, invasive species, death through entanglement in fishing gear, and marine development.

Robust monitoring at sea will underpin sustainable fisheries. The Scottish Government has already issued a consultation on the application of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM) at sea. This is welcome but falls short of applying REM to the high-risk segments of the fishing fleet which is needed if we are to understand better what we are removing from our seas and to monitor mitigation of issues such as discarding and bycatch.

There is an opportunity to follow on from the UK-wide Biosecurity for LIFE project to create a lasting legacy of biosecurity for Scotland's most important seabird islands. And to create a complementary national programme of island restoration to tackle invasive non-native species.

### **Challenges** (Q15)

The decarbonisation of our energy sector is rightly moving at pace and needs to be delivered at scale if we are to tackle the climate crisis, but it also needs to be delivered in a nature positive way. This means restoring seas and supporting species recovery as part of the UK's renewable energy transition. Ensuring leadership on this will be essential with government, industry and others working together if we are to tackle the nature and climate emergency.

Securing the levels of funding required will doubtless be challenging but this needs to be prioritised if we are to reverse species and habitat declines and deliver marine climate mitigation.

## **Freshwater**

### **2045 Outcomes** (Q16)

The vision for the freshwater section should be 'Our rivers are naturally dynamic, a shifting mosaic of small channels, islands and wetlands along the majority of their length. They are devoid of pollution and invasive species.'

As with every section, the outcomes should include identified ecosystem restoration, species recovery and include or be accompanied by specific targets. For beavers, there should be an outcome to ensure they are restored to all suitable habitats across their range. It should also be acknowledged that some species won't be able to 'naturally return' and for them there will need to be additional measures such as conservation translocations and ex-situ breeding.

### **2030 Milestones** (Q17)

It's not good enough to simply strive for routine acceptance of nature-based solutions to the climate crisis – their use should be actively increased. This should include removing barriers, restoring river channels and natural processes including braiding and floodplain wetting. It should also ensure riparian edges have native

species, providing dappled shade and cooling to the watercourses. Substantial restoration of Scotland's degraded peatlands should also be part of this.

There should also be milestones for the full range of freshwater biodiversity not just beavers, salmon and riparian woodland.

We encourage a commitment to provide Ramsar sites with the same level of legal protection as European sites.

There should be a pollution milestone including measures to reduce soil erosion in order to reduce silting of water, prevent aquatic pollution such as agricultural runoff, chemicals from buildings and sewage waste and stop horticultural peat extraction and restore degraded peat bogs.

There should be a milestone regarding the need to properly assess the impacts of new structures on a wide range of freshwater biodiversity, not just migratory fish and to manage water abstraction and temperature changes from industry.

And there should be a specific milestone regarding the eradication of invasive non-native species.

In addition, current monitoring of the freshwater environment focuses on rivers and lochs. This should be extended to other freshwater bodies such as ponds, marshes, ditches and streams.

### **What's missing?**

Key elements missing from this section include:

- Connectivity actions within freshwater environments
- Outcomes relating to diffuse pollution
- Outcomes to support response to climate change
- Riparian planting targets
- Instream temperature targets

### **Opportunities** (Q19)

We welcome recognition that freshwater systems are particularly at risk from invasive non-native species and that once established they are hard to remove making biosecurity key. The UK Government has established an INNS inspectorate. The Strategy needs to either clarify how the UK inspectorate will operate in Scotland or specify that a Scotland one will be created.

### **Challenges** (Q20)

Increasing effects of climate change such as reductions in the amount of water concentrating pollutant or higher water temperatures making it easier for invasive species to thrive. The strategy needs to ensure measures to tackle future issues are taken now.



## Coastal

### **2045 Outcomes** (Q21)

No. As before the outcomes must include identified ecosystem restoration, species recovery and specific targets. As in other sections the outcomes are also not specific enough in terms of scale or how healthy populations will be measured or what healthy population means.

Given the importance of coastal areas for wildlife (seabirds are the most threatened group of birds in the world), people and climate change mitigation, this section needs substantially strengthened.

There should be an outcome focussed on the protection, restoration and enhancement of blue carbon habitat. These habitats (such as saltmarsh, seagrass and kelp) can deliver to tackle climate change by storing huge amounts of carbon and deliver for biodiversity by providing safe areas for species to thrive.

### **2030 Milestones** (Q22)

No. This section needs SMART targets. For example, the proportion of coastal habitats managed with biodiversity in mind. And, in the final statement, extensively needs to be defined in terms of what it means for the amount of machair and saltmarsh being managed for nature.

### **What's missing?**

There should be targets for increasing and restoring lost habitats such as saltmarsh.

There should be no more inappropriate developments on sensitive or irreplaceable habitats such as coastal dune systems.

There should be mention of how sectoral activities should contribute to recovery of coastal nature including industry, leisure and hard coastal defences.

There needs to be an acknowledgement that the number of migratory coastal birds depends crucially on conditions in their wintering grounds.

The challenge that the current bird flu outbreak poses to maintaining our breeding seabird populations.

### **Opportunities** (Q24)

There is an opportunity to follow on from the UK-wide Biosecurity for LIFE project to create a lasting legacy of biosecurity for Scotland's most important seabird islands. And to create a complementary national programme of island restoration to tackle invasive non-native species.

Blue carbon habitats are going to be hugely important in terms of climate change mitigation and there is an opportunity here to focus on these important habitats and the role they can play in combating both parts of the nature and climate emergency.

### **Challenges** (Q25)

Increased use of coastal areas for recreation, lack of funding for management of important habitats like machair and saltmarsh, and lack of uptake of natural solutions to climate change (such as managed realignment). Bird flu is going to be an ongoing challenge and, even if this year's scale of outbreak is not repeated, the impacts will be long-lasting. We welcome the NatureScot led task force being launched to tackle this.

## **Urban**

### **2045 Outcomes** (Q26)

This section needs to be clearer about the role of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the planning system in delivering the vision and outcomes.

Urban biodiversity cannot easily be separated from biodiversity in general, as species found in urban areas have often come from the wider countryside. So, the urban environment shouldn't be considered in isolation and a holistic approach is needed to ensure nature-positive urban areas.

Outcomes need to be SMARTer including defining what is a measurable increase and some sort of baseline understanding of the current state of biodiversity in urban areas will be needed.

Nature-rich urban spaces will need long-term restoration and management plans to ensure nature thrives along with other benefits.

The second outcome should be more ambitious by seeking to reduce or minimise the impact associated with extreme weather.

The third outcome seems focused on new infrastructure and could be strengthened to recognise the role of informal nature areas as part of a nature network and the benefits it can provide through urban cooling.

### **2030 Milestones** (Q27)

We are concerned that the wording suggests a downgrading of a commitment from a national nature network. The Strategy must steer nature networks for the whole of Scotland across local authority boundaries and between urban, suburban and rural areas and ensure that nature-rich places in towns and cities support nature's recovery.

Greater reference should be made to creating positive effects for biodiversity through the planning system. Instead of nature-richness being a feature of all developments, we want to see all developments be nature positive ie leaving nature in a better state than before they took place.

We think nature-rich spaces should be core to not just prominent in neighbourhoods, schools, healthcare and community settings and access to these needs considered given the clear benefits nature can have on health and wellbeing. Nature-richness needs to be defined to ensure real benefits for nature.

The third milestone is wholly inadequate, retrofitting blue and green infrastructure at large scale to be nature positive must be a priority. Opportunities should be identified through nature networks and local biodiversity strategies and implementation should have begun by 2030 to help deliver the other milestones.

### **What's missing?**

The involvement and role of communities in delivering and managing urban biodiversity is missing. There are a variety of approaches local authorities could take to achieve that, but it should be captured perhaps in a fourth outcome.

Another key missing element is recognition of the role planning has in delivering positive change for biodiversity in the vision/outcomes. But worse than that, the towns and cities' ecosystem approach appears to place a false boundary around areas where planning has a role. Planning influences development across urban and rural landscapes and could play a key role in co-ordinating the delivery of nature networks and nature-based solutions as well as improving delivery via protected areas.

Planning strategies and plans, especially the National Planning Framework need to directly link to the Biodiversity Strategy with clear roles and responsibilities for which part of government is delivering, supporting and facilitating efforts to address the nature crisis.

### **Opportunities** (Q29)

There is huge potential to make biodiversity gains through re/development particularly if mandated through planning legislation.

Establish a national nature network will create bigger, better, more joined up places for nature as well as delivering benefits for mitigating climate change or helping cope with the effects of it and for health and wellbeing.

### **Challenges** (Q30)

A lack of recognition and prioritisation of the nature crisis in the planning system. No current requirement for 'no net-loss' of nature, let alone ensuring a net gain. NPF4 can change this, but the policies must be linked.

## Overall health, resilience, connectivity

### **2045 Outcomes** (Q31)

We are very pleased to see nature networks and resilient, healthy ecosystems in the 2045 outcomes, but it would be better if the outcomes were SMART or accompanied by SMART targets. We would like to see mention of effective and area-based restoration measures in place for all of Scotland's degraded ecosystems included in the outcomes.

### **2030 Milestones** (Q32)

The lack of specificity makes it difficult to judge the level of ambition.

By 2030, we would want a spatially identified National Nature Network embedded in land use planning and management and for ecosystems to be diverse, healthy and resilient.

We also need proper targets and suggest these include 30% of land and sea protected for nature, with 10% strictly protected, and effective area-based restoration over 20% of land and sea.

### **What's missing?**

Protected areas and national parks are critical things that are missing from this section. And it is the quality of protected areas, not just the quantity that matters.

But protected areas are not enough on their own. We can't choose between them and actions in the wider landscape – both are vital and must be integrated to create landscapes where nature can thrive.

We also need to move from protection to restoration, with the protected area network expanded by bringing together a programme of ecosystem restoration.

Protected areas need to be fully integrated into the strategy, with protected areas, nature networks and ecosystem restoration functioning as a trio of interlinked programmes to drive recovery of nature at scale.

### **Opportunities** (Q34)

There is a chance for a real step change in protected areas to ensure that they are not just lines on a map but really work for nature and to place them at the heart of wider efforts to restore ecosystems and link them up through a National Nature Network.

There's also huge potential for Scotland's National Parks to play a much greater role in tackling the nature and climate emergency and this should be considered by the strategy.

## **Challenges** (Q35)

Achieving the strategic vision of halting biodiversity loss by 2030 and substantially restoring it by 2045 will depend on progress across all outcomes. Falling short on one will undermine the overall goal.



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