

# Cross-Party Group on Nature & Climate

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, 18:00-19:30

## Minutes

## Present

### MSPs

Mercedes Villalba MSP

Ariane Burgess MSP

Monica Lennon MSP

Mark Ruskell MSP

Lorna Slater MSP – Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy, and Biodiversity

### Non-MSP Group Members

Io Hadjicosta – Office of Mark Ruskell MSP

Kaley Cochran – Office of Brian Whittle MSP

Tariq Nabi – Biodiversity Unit, Scottish Government

Kathy Wormald – Froglife

Eddie Palmer – Scottish Badgers

Sophie Brett – Keep Scotland Beautiful

Craig Macadam – Buglife Natalie Stevenson

Annie Robinson – CIEEM

Alison Lomax – Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

Calum Duncan – Marine Conservation Society

Arina Russell – Woodland Trust Scotland

Suzie Saunders – Woodland Trust Scotland

Alistair Whyte – Plantlife Scotland

Vhairi Tollan – Scottish Greens Researcher

Amy Hill – Scottish Government

Jack Beadle – RSPB Scotland

Matthew Bird – Scottish Government

Claudia Gebhardt – Bat Conservation Trust

Nora Casey – RSPB Scotland

Rebekah Strong – Scottish Wildlife Trust

Rachel Richards – Buglife

Stephanie Mander – Nourish Scotland

Emily Burton – Scottish Seabird Centre

## Apologies

Brian Whittle MSP

Finlay Carson MSP

Meghan Gallacher MSP

Maurice Golden MSP

Paul McLennan MSP  
Beatrice Wishart MSP

## Welcome to CPG Nature & Climate and Introductions

Mark Ruskell MSP welcomed members to the first official meeting of the CPG for Climate and Nature.

## Ministerial Speech on Biodiversity Strategy

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy, and Biodiversity gave a speech on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) and ambition for the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill.

Minister Slater emphasised that the process of creating the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is a collaborative space where stakeholders can set asks on the table. In order to put the right tools in the right places, the Minister asked for stakeholders to be clear with policy asks, supported with sufficient evidence, and to highlight how it links into other legislation.

The Minister outlined how the Scottish Government sees the process of the SBS:

- Part 1: 'what does good look like in a changing climate' which is a high-level question. The answer is not static. The Minister emphasised that eNGO expertise with this is helpful.
- Part 2: 5 year rolling adaptive and dynamic delivery plans – 'what does good look like' has to apply to these too.
- Part 3: Statutory targets, the governance and accountability framework and 'getting to good'.

The Minister outlined that this strategy will supply us with a toolkit – legislative toolkits such as green finance, National Parks etc. The Minister asked stakeholders to help to join things up in order to align the pieces.

## LINK Opening Speech: An Overview of LINK Member Views on Biodiversity Strategy

Alistair Whyte introduced LINK and emphasised how pleased LINK members were with the evidence section of the SBS draft and how important a shared evidence base is, which hasn't previously been highlighted in biodiversity legislation/strategies. LINK members were particularly pleased to see reference to the Biodiversity Intactness Index.

LINK is proposing that the SBS should be called 'Scotland's Nature Emergency Strategy' to reflect the fact that it must be focused, challenging, ambitious, engaging and inspiring. Alistair highlighted key asks from LINK's response to the SBS consultation:

- Programme of ecosystem restoration – rather than looking at broad land use types, the Scottish Government should look at a programme of specific ecosystems in order to make needed changes to these important habitats.
- Programme of species recovery. A suite of priority species that need targeted action over and above ecosystem restoration. Species recovery needs to be nested within the strategy.
- Ambitious, measurable, and legally binding nature recovery targets.

LINK is in the process of preparing a briefing of what the targets in the Natural Environment Bill could look like via a working group.

## LINK Member Speeches on Biodiversity Strategy

**Natalie Stevenson** (Scotland and Northern Ireland Manager at Buglife) highlighted the importance of protecting and restoring freshwater habitats and species. Key points from the presentation:

- Scotland is renowned for rivers and lochs with important species such as Atlantic salmon.
- Freshwater habitats support the greatest amount of species. However, with temperatures rising and changes to precipitation patterns, there is a huge impact on biodiversity and fisheries – with warm water holding less oxygen and expiring more floods and droughts, and currently 70% of rivers now experience temperatures of over 23 degrees.
- Freshwater species are particularly at risk – with invertebrates as the ultimate victims to the impacts of climate change. Invertebrates are the building blocks of freshwater habitats, they have short life cycles and good powers of mobility – they are one of first groups to show impacts of changing climate. For example, the Upland Summer Mayfly

which is prominently montane species and found above 300m has been pushed upstream as temperatures rise.

- The SBS represents a chance, perhaps a last chance, to help species such as the Upland Summer Mayfly and all freshwater species. It needs to include ambitious, catchment scale plans to restore natural processes and native woodland streams across freshwater habitats to give species the best chance.
- LINK and Buglife are calling for programmes of species recovery.

**Calum Duncan** (Head of Conservation Scotland at Marine Conservation Society) highlighted the importance of protecting and restoring our Marine ecosystems and species. Key points from the presentation:

- There is a de facto ocean emergency which is reflected in international UN reports.
- Climate change and overfishing are creating a vicious circle. For example, over 90% of seabed habitats have seen a reduction in status of range, seabird numbers have declined by over 50%, and while 27% is designated Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) not all is protected from fishing.
- A useful framework that the Scottish Government could use is the Marine Nature Conservation strategy which highlights the site protection pillar and the need for MPAs but unfortunately, measures are not yet in place to apply to MPAs.
- Marine Conservation Society welcomed the Bute House Agreement and the commitment to highly protect 10% of seas. The species protection pillar is valuable, and LINK welcomes the commitments to seabird and whale and dolphin strategies.
- The wider seas pillar is recognising that sectoral management is more widespread pressure.
- Calum highlighted that it was great to see the SBS recognising where sectoral help can influence with nature recovery – fisheries need to become fully trackable and transition toward sustainable fisheries management. The commitment to inshore cap is really important and welcome to these efforts.
- There are active forms of nature recovery such as seagrass and native oyster restoration. There are passive forms of recovery that can identified beyond the MPA network, such as removing pressures from fragile seabed habitats. It is easier to damage marine ecosystems rather than restore them. The licensing process needs to become easier to enable the restoration of marine habitats and species.
- Support is needed for ocean recovery targets. We need to think about the proportion of habitat we need in a natural state. 30% widespread habitats and fragile species should be 100% protected. We need to go beyond feature based approach.

**Alistair Whyte** (Head of Plantlife Scotland highlighted the importance of protecting and restoring our terrestrial ecosystems and species. Key points from the presentation:

- Scotland has an amazing montane environment / arctic alpine environment. Scotland has arctic and alpine species living alongside each other which are poster species for our response to climate change – but these species are continuously threatened and nearly extinct in Scotland.
- We can restore our mountains and restore our mountain woodlands that we have completely lost. Restoring our mountain woodlands would have a whole host of other benefits such as preventing flooding and providing micro habitats.
- Montane habitat and species restoration needs to be prioritised and ties into relevant discussions around deer, agriculture and how we want to make best use of mountain environments.
- Scotland's Rainforest is a good example of a habitat we can do something about. This is an opportunity to carry out strategic landscape scale approach. This is a globally threatened and rare habitat that we must protect from pressures such as overgrazing and invasive species – it requires long-term action.
- Species rich grasslands – we have lost over 90% grasslands which support vital populations of pollinators and need to consider species-rich grassland habitat restoration through nation-wide nature networks. Alistair highlighted that Mercedes Villalba MSP is the Nature Champion for road verges.
- We need a Scottish Nature Network to improve connectivity.

## Q&A

- Ariane Burgess MSP spent time at the Cairngorms Connect project and is interested in discussing the importance of Grassland further with Plantlife.
- Monica Lennon MSP asked whether the Scottish Government had done much thinking on nature targets and whether they will be legally binding.
  - The Minister stated that the intention is to have high level targets in the Natural Environment Bill with detailed targets in the rolling delivery plan and emphasised that this must be a co-design exercise with stakeholders. The intention of SBS is to raise the recognition of the nature emergency and how it links with the climate emergency, , because we can't solve one crisis without solving the other.

- Matthew Bird (Scottish Government) highlighted that the intention is for the targets to be legally binding and linked to an accountability and governance framework which will ensure that ministers and future governments will be held to account.
- Mercedes Villalba MSP asked about whether specific targets on native woodland will be included.
  - The Minister stated that high level targets will carry us to 2045 and will have a big picture feel. Stakeholders are invited to contribute to the design of the targets – the Scottish Government is open to ideas. Overarching targets will be in the Natural Environment Bill and more detailed targets will be in the delivery plans.
- Nora Casey (RSPB Scotland) asked how Scottish Government will link the SBS and Natural Environment Bill to other bills and strategies. LINK would like more clarity on how the SBS and Nat Env Bill link together. Nora also asked whether there will be reference to programmes of species recovery in the SBS and whether there will be targets around species recovery.
  - The Minister highlighted that the deliverables will be high level targets. The Biodiversity Strategy sets out the vision, and then the legally-binding delivery to be set out via upcoming legislation – e.g. Natural Environment Bill and Agriculture Bill. The SBS sets out ‘this is where we want to go’ and delivery plans are ‘how we want to get there’. The Minister looking for recommendations from stakeholders on those targets.
- Arina Russell (Woodland Trust Scotland) highlighted the proposals for forestry grant schemes within the Agriculture Bill and how we must be making connections to biodiversity beyond the agriculture system. Arina suggested a public consultation on forestry grant schemes as there are opportunities for montane woodland, riparian woodland etc. LINK hopes that NatureScot colleagues are involved in forestry grant scheme so there is expertise there.
  - The Minister stated that the intention of the delivery plan is to join everything up. The Agriculture Bill is an example of a lot of things coming through parliament that will affect biodiversity. We must mainstream biodiversity and assume every bill is going to affect biodiversity.

- Mark Ruskell MSP took evidence from Scottish waters and is wondering what Buglife's thoughts were on reviewing the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP).
  - Natalie Stevenson (Buglife) highlighted that there are opportunities to address the drivers in decline in waters such as removing of barriers and enabling natural flow. Craig Macadam (Buglife) said we need to be looking now at what we want in the next RBMP. The current one isn't very ambitious in terms of removing barriers in rivers and allowing free-flowing rivers.
  - The Minister emphasised that if LINK has clear asks to go into the RBMP then to get in touch. We need to make sure we have the right tools and levers to make sure we have the correct nature-based solutions in place.
  
- Kaley Cochran asked LINK members whether there are any knowledge gaps whilst the Scottish Government develops the Natural Environment Bill and the SBS and how the government are addressing it.
  - Calum Duncan (MCS) stated that there is lots of good evidence in the marine environment. There are stock assessments for targeted species which is essential for Arhus Compliance for public information.
  - Alistair Whyte (Plantlife) said we have a good understanding of where we are. There is already an evidence base and a vast amount of it is developed by citizen scientists. For example, the State of Nature 2019 report evidence came from citizen scientists and specialist taxonomic groups. We are hugely reliant on citizen science as a sector.
  - Arina Russell (Woodland Trust) said there are obvious gaps to the extent, condition, and quality of ancient woodlands across Scotland. We need the correct data to support forestry grant schemes. However, we have the evidence and we are not acting on it fast enough or translating it into action.
  - The Minister said the data in marine space is more challenging. We need to figure out how we make decision in a space where we can never have perfect evidence. There are cultural challenges - e.g. herbivore pressure. Monitoring and measuring will be a crucial part of the SBS.
  
- Stephanie Mander asked a question on our food system. She welcomes the Ministers statement on how the SBS interacts with the Good Food National Act. However, what is missing is the nitrogen and chemical aspect.
  - Mark Ruskell MSP emphasised that the Scottish Government have a commitment to align with the EU.

- The Minister said this should be an example of something that will need to go into delivery plan (e.g., soil testing plan) but the details of this will not be included in Part 1 of the SBS. We need to have big conversations on how we use our land.
  - Matthew Bird stated that we need to set the SBS in the wider suite of government to reflect the discussion about how everything links together. The SBS must increase focus across government so we can mainstream biodiversity to the wider government policies.
- Mercedes Villalba MSP asked whether the Scottish Government would consider expanding NatureScot in order to have a public sector nature restoration work force. Should we be looking at private investment and incentivising private companies to do things differently?
    - The Minister said investment would need to come from both a mix of public and private. Green finance initiatives down to community projects. We need to make sure local communities benefit and we are creating local jobs.
- Annie Robinson (CIEEM) commented the following via the chat function: Think we can all agree that habitat creation and restoration must be planned and implemented by professionals with the expertise and understanding of the relevant species, habitats and ecosystems. Two examples - peatland restoration that is happening at scale has struggled with a shortage of skilled people. Secondly a survey we conducted of Local Authorities in Scotland revealed that 22% of respondents said they have no current ecological resource or expertise available and 65% rated lack of enforcement staff to ensure compliance as a high or very high risk to their LPA's ability to implement NPF4 and Positive Effects for Biodiversity. So, while, looking at Biodiversity Strategy need to look at the future workforce needed. <https://greenjobsfornature.org/>.
- Rebekah Strong (Scottish Wildlife Trust) commented the following via the chat function: There hasnt been any mention of the biodiversity in urban areas too. We need to make more space for nature in towns and cities, mostly for selfish human benefits - climate adaptation and health and wellbeing etc.

## AOB & Closing Remarks

- Alistair Whyte emphasised that environmental NGOs are very open to collaboration and the co-design of both the SBS and the Natural Environment Bill.



- The Minister would like input around grouse moors and land use change – what does change look like and how do we bring communities together.
- Mark Ruskell MSP closed the discussion by inviting members to think of themes to suggest for the next meeting which will be scheduled at the beginning of next year.