

Written evidence from the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) on the Scottish Government paper 'Tackling the Nature Emergency – Consultation on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity'

Executive summary

To inform our response to this consultation, IEMA hosted a workshop for members and other relevant experts outside of the membership, across sectors and professions. Based on those insights we have answered a selection of the questions contained within the consultation. A summary of our recommendations are as follows:

- Baselines are essential to the measurement and monitoring of the various aspects of the implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy – baselines need to be agreed and defined, and a baseline date(s) needs to be set for either the whole strategy or for individual parts of the strategy.
- The actions to drive investment must include a public-private investment component.
- Public and private organisations should be incentivised to share data and this should be collated, managed, and freely available through a depository to facilitate its use.
- Stakeholders, especially in farming, fisheries, and forestry, but also in projects such as windfarms and infrastructure, should be included in developing actions.
- Actions relating to MPAs (marine protected areas) and HPAs (highly protected marine areas) should be included in the implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.
- There must be clarity and consistency in the final document around what's being asked for (targets and requirements), by when, of whom (who is responsible), and according to what standard of measurement (where applicable).
- Statutory targets will drive actions but must be underpinned by further requirements, including on delivery, beneath them.

Overarching responses

Priority actions need to be identified and be clear. The document currently reads as a list of actions and it would be helpful to understand how these will be sequenced and prioritized and what actions will be taking place in parallel (there could be synergies) and what the criteria for these choices are (based on scientific evidence). The limited number of ecologists in the workforce should be taken into consideration in the prioritisation of action plans. Immediate priorities should include creating targets, metrics, and baselines. If businesses understand priorities then they will be more willing to act.

Baseline measurements are needed across all aspects of this document. However, outside of Environmental Impact Assessment they are barely mentioned. It is very important to set realistic baselines to measure progress against. Baselines need to be agreed and defined and a baseline date needs to be set for either the whole strategy (less complicated but less

specific) or a series of dates for individual parts of the strategy (more complex but more specific). Data is needed for creating baselines and this should be identified quickly. Data is often captured for individual projects by private and public organisations – and especially in infrastructure projects - and we suggest that the government look into identifying a mechanism for capturing data that can then be freely accessed for those undertaking biodiversity baseline, conservation, and restoration activities. This could be, as one example, delivered through planning system requirements. More and better data will allow effective target setting (and delivery). What is asked for – if it's clear – can create much more biodiversity enhancement.

Since local biodiversity action plans were retired in the 1990s biodiversity data has been poorer. A system for collecting data is needed. We would like to highlight the publication 'A Review of the Biological Recording Infrastructure in Scotland' by the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF)¹ that makes recommendations on how biodiversity information is stored and collected and shared and makes structural recommendations on how a system of data sharing could be set up. This could be used by the Better Biodiversity Data Project mentioned in the text (if it isn't already).

Related to the above, in terms of data, the document talks of citizen science. We have concerns about relying on this because how and where it's collected (and its validity) can vary and is unverifiable. Recognising that a wide variety of businesses already collect biodiversity data via surveys and monitoring, we recommend that businesses are incentivised to share their data, and that a central system is implemented to support the collection of all relevant data.

The 'actions' in the consultation have often been too high level or aspirational to understand fully what lies beneath. This was especially evident in the section on farming, fisheries and forestry. This has made it very hard to comment on whether the actions are the right ones because how the actions are delivered is subject to variability. Similarly, a few (not many) have numbered targets already while others don't. More detail on the specific actions for delivery, how they will be delivered, who will deliver them, along with target dates (including interim dates) is required. Throughout the document it is not always clear who will be responsible for what or lead on what action and this must be included in the final document.

Much of the land in Scotland is privately owned, but the focus here appears to be on government delivery. It is critical that landowners and businesses involved too. The Scottish Government should take action to understand business drivers to engender action. For example, Argaty Estate² has chosen (without being mandated) to increase the number of red squirrels on their site. More effective ways to capture and communicate good practice to demonstrate the business case for conserving and restoring nature are required.

¹ <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SBIF-Review-Final-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>

² <https://argatyredkites.co.uk/>

There is a need to recognise the cultural challenges in moving in the direction the framework suggests. The strategy needs to take people with it and demonstrate clear understanding of concerns and show the benefits to people, communities, and businesses of an approach which delivers nature recovery. This would include clear articulation of the co-benefits of action.

Actions will have more impact across the framework if there is read across to what is happening in other nations to allow landowners and businesses who work across nations to quickly transfer/translate information for each nation rather than starting from scratch for each requirement for each nation (recognizing that the different landscapes will require different detailed actions).

There are several action plans and strategies scattered across the framework, from a new Scottish Seabird Conservation strategy and a plan for marine and ecosystem restoration to a River Basin Management Plan and Wee Forest Vision and Delivery plan. All new (and existing) plans and strategies should include ongoing monitoring over time and the appropriate resources apportioned to ensure sites will be managed and monitored successfully.

In the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) there is a requirement to show significant enhancement. However, it's not clear what 'significant enhancement' means. In developing the implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy please provide clarity so that organisations can understand what needs to be delivered – clarity will give them the confidence to act.

Section 2

Chapter 2, Objective 1, Accelerate Restoration and regeneration.

Question 2a: Have we captured the key actions needed to deliver the objective: accelerate restoration and regeneration?

Unsure.

The key actions have been captured but because baselines are not included in the text, it's difficult to discern whether the key actions will deliver the objectives proposed.

The Lawton principle³ of bigger, better, more joined up appear in places but it would be useful to see this point emphasized more throughout because it's such an important principle.

³

webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402170324mp/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf

Question 2b: Are the key actions, to support the objective: accelerate restoration and regeneration, sufficient to put Scotland on track to ending the loss of biodiversity by 2030?

Unsure.

Again, without baselines it's difficult to know if the key actions will be deliverable.

There are no connections between the outcomes and the monitoring framework further down the document to help to understand if the actions will be enough. Outcomes should be more quantified with a greater focus on indicators. This would allow business to understand what is expected of them and prepare accordingly. What's being asked for needs to be clear so that what's being delivered can progress appropriately.

In the proposal for a programme of ecosystem restoration there is mention of partnerships. This is important but there must be a way to link partners. Currently, there is no one source for a business to find partners outside of a larger NGO offering a service. Larger NGOs can be too expensive for a smaller organisation to partner with. Equally, it might be that smaller charities can't find businesses to partner with. The Government should create a platform to facilitate organisations to create partnerships by for example, listing services offered and businesses interested. Demonstrating how partnerships might work will be key and will require good communications that include case studies, examples of good practice, and where to find partners.

Creating a register of ancient woodland will help the Scottish Government to know how much ancient woodland they have and which meet the condition of protected and restored. This should also include the development of a continuous maintenance and improvement plan.

We welcome the commitment to publish a plan for marine and coastal ecosystem restoration including prioritising habitat and locations by 2025. MPAs and HMPAs must be part of this plan.

Question 2c: Which actions do you think will have most impact?

Identifying the most impactful actions is essential and must be done using data and monitoring. What is monitored is key in knowing if actions have been successful or not. Acceleration is required but there doesn't seem to be a clear depository of evidence that shows what restoration and regeneration is currently happening and where (for example on farmland, or on protected sites, etc.). If there is a clear system (and data sharing is part of this) then it brings an opportunity to understand what current restoration and regeneration activities can be built on to provide the fastest solutions. If data management doesn't currently exist this is an opportunity to create a process for collection, storage and management. This key action is relevant across the whole framework and not just here.

Chapter 3, Objective 2, Protect nature on land and sea across and beyond protected areas

Question 2d: Have we captured the key actions needed to deliver the objective: protect nature on land and at sea across and beyond protected areas?

No.

National parks and protected sites should have mandated management plans that are temporal and with objectives that are reported on and that aim to improve biodiversity as a whole rather than simply retain a single significant feature. National parks – and all protected sites – should have buffer zones (commensurate to scale and type of any proposed development) around them to maximise potential for nature conservation and restoration for each site.

The expansion of existing national parks versus new ones should be considered based on which will deliver improved abundance of biodiversity easily and/or at speed.

Linking Nature Networks to planning and policy frameworks is very important – local authorities should have the provision to ensure good practice in protected sites through prudent legal means.

The wording for local authorities to consider the need to prepare and implement a vision for surface water management should be stronger – either mandated or ‘should’ (it currently reads ‘should consider’ which seems very weak).

Question 2e: Are the key actions, to support the objective: protect nature on land and at sea across and beyond protected areas, sufficient to put Scotland on track to ending the loss of biodiversity by 2030?

Unsure. This isn't clear as per our responses above.

Question 2f: Which actions do you think will have most impact?

Strong plans to restore and regenerate biodiversity across protected sites and national parks with the power to enact requirements by local authorities will have the largest impact.

Chapter 4 Objective 3: Embed nature positive farming, fishing and forestry

Question 2g: Have we captured the key actions needed to deliver the objective: embed nature positive farming, fishing and forestry?

No.

There are no actions on highly protected marine areas (HPMAs) as laid out in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and very little mention of MPAs inside the consultation (except around

assessing them and talking to stakeholders). There are so many terrestrial activities around improvements and almost none around marine. The document states that 37% of seas are protected and, on this basis, then surely it's important to have actions and a plan in place quickly. We recommend that MPAs and HMPAs are included in the action plans.

The actions in this section are quite vague and appears to be more aspirational. More detail is needed in the final report.

Question 2h: Are the key actions, to support the objective: embed nature positive farming, fishing and forestry, sufficient to put Scotland on track to ending the loss of biodiversity by 2030?

No.

There must be more communication with the farming, fishing, and forestry industries. The culture around these industries needs to be understood and worked with in the consideration of plans. Key stakeholders involved must be able to understand what's being proposed and be part of co-creating the design of the actions and targets. There should be grants for training professionals in these areas to support them to adapt their business without harming their income. The concept of farm clusters⁴ could be a useful tool for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing but also to aid the communication of concepts and practices. This is especially useful for time-poor farmers. Consistent messaging to farmers, crofters, and the fisheries industry is key to giving them the confidence to invest in nature-positive actions.

Soil health can be quite complex and the actions must have clear indicators and should include biodiversity enhancement alongside carbon-related indicators. (An IEMA paper tackles issues around land and soil in impact assessment within the English system⁵.)

There should be a practical, standardised way for farmers and crofters to report soil testing, animal health and welfare, carbon audits etc. if this does not already exist. Understanding what needs to be reported on and why will allow farmers and crofters to put in place processes to facilitate efficient reporting. The update of the Scottish Soil Framework should include more information about peat and align with the peat strategy. There should be more links to the positive aspects of some developments, for example, windfarms where peat has been restored.

There is no mention of new technological advancements in farming such as vertical cropping. These new developments, often praised as a solution to food security, should be drawn into the implementation of the biodiversity strategy action plans so it is clear what part they play – for both stakeholders but also for the businesses themselves.

⁴ <https://www.farmerclusters.com/>

⁵ <https://www.iema.net/resources/reading-room/2022/02/17/a-new-perspective-on-land-and-soil-in-environmental-impact-assessment>

Fisheries management should align with other nations in terms of definitions and requirements for organisations working across nations. This also needs stakeholder engagement and industry input.

Overall, the indicators should be less simplistic and partial and more robust and talk more about biodiversity (currently the main focus is not biodiversity). There also should be more information on species introduction into farmlands or forestry. There should be a link to key species targets in this section. More generally, we would like to highlight a WWF document on nature positive sectoral pathways for agriculture, 'A nature-positive pathway to decarbonize UK agriculture and land use'⁶ as an input document when creating the final framework.

Chapter 5, Objective 4: Protect and support the recovery of vulnerable and important species and habitats

Question 2j: Have we captured the key actions needed to deliver the objective: protect and support the recovery of vulnerable and important species and habitats?

Unsure.

This section is very short and we feel that there should be more detail on key species and targeted species. There is no information about when this objective will be delivered by. There is a lack of detail about who will carry out the actions and by when. Also, please be clear what is being referred to - there is a mention of biodiversity action plans – does this refer to generic action plans or Local Biodiversity Action Plans. New initiatives, such as the priority marine feature list, should be communicated effectively to stakeholders so that they are aware of it and are able to act on it.

Targets are needed here for effective species recovery, reintroduction, and reinforcement noting that some vulnerable and important species and habitats might be terminally affected by, for example, climate change (this may affect where resources are placed). The Wild Salmon Strategy implementation plan should be linked to the 30 by 30 strategy. As previously mentioned, and it's relevant here too, there must be a mechanism for data to be captured, stored, and made accessible. Habitat definition and classification needs to be standardised by using a recognised tool such as UK Hab⁷ (noting that it might have to be regionally or nationally adapted.)

There is a need here to identify how to take measures to reduce human pressures to give habitats and species more chance (see Scottish Biodiversity Strategy).

The 2024 review of licensing approach for species conservation and management has the potential to impact on the time taken for data to be collected and actions to be undertaken on business projects. The revised licensing should be practical, effectively communicated, and able to have phased implementation if necessary.

⁶ https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/WWF_land_of_plenty_England_0.pdf

⁷ <https://ukhab.org/>

Communities must be engaged in the process of protecting and supporting recovery of important and vulnerable species so that they both understand the process, can co-create solutions, and support the aims of the process.

Question 2k: Are the key actions, to support the objective: protect and support the recovery of vulnerable and important species and habitats, sufficient to put Scotland on track to ending the loss of biodiversity by 2030?

To maximise recovery of vulnerable species and habitats, continued public investment in monitoring and data collection in the long term will be essential to support the continued availability of up-to-date information into the future.

Chapter 6, Objective 5: Invest in nature

Question 2m: Have we captured the key actions needed to deliver the objective: invest in nature?

Yes.

The actions to drive investment must include a public-private investment component.

It must be easier for companies to invest and commit to providing biodiversity improvements to either meet planning requirements or because they want to (instead of traditional investment routes from large finance organisations). There should be a mechanism to link buyers, sellers, and brokers, how to find them, and who to trust.

Principles are required to ensure that investment decisions deliver the right outcomes. For example, investment in tree planting is not enough. What is required is to ensure that trees and other flora goes in the right place, building on the woodland and carbon peatland codes etc.

An IEMA workshop with business and UK Government agencies⁸ suggested that a return on investment (ROI) needs to be demonstrated to give business the confidence to invest. Assurance for investors and landowners with regard to return on investment and insurance against risk must be communicated in order to promote investment.

The nature investment market needs to be regulated. Organisations must have confidence to invest in this mostly unregulated market and so good principles are essential (see the Scottish Government's Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital⁹). The government should identify codes or standards that they support and that provide 'what good looks like'. The Scottish Government could be taking part in the BSI (British Standards

⁸ <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/iema.net/documents/The-Role-of-Business-in-Implementing-the-Global-Biodiversity-Framework-A-Workshop-with-Business-and-Government.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/interim-principles-for-responsible-investment-in-natural-capital/>

Institution) work on nature investment standards¹⁰ (if they're not already). There should be mention of, and actions for, the three distinct groups in nature markets: landowners, buyers, and brokers & biodiversity banks, and how each might play a role in kickstarting nature markets.

The biodiversity investment plan should include principles for transparent nature investment. There must be a plan for how the investment market will be created and land managers and businesses engaged. It could be useful to create case studies and communicate how nature finance markets work in practice including ROI.

It would be useful for the Government to use the terms and processes in frameworks such as TNFD (Task force for Nature-related Financial Disclosures) and CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive), rather than starting something new because they are recognised by, and used by some, businesses (rather than write something new).

There is no mention of stacking benefits such as nature based solutions, carbon sequestration, soil recovery, climate adaptation and biodiversity benefits, and we would expect to see this in the detail of the final framework.

There is no current timeline for actions for investment in nature and we worry that a lot needs to happen very quickly to achieve the 2030 deadlines. Investment is one of the things that will drive nature positive actions and we would recommend the creation of targets to support this.

It would be helpful to align targets broadly with other nations to make it easier for all organisations – from pensions companies buying biodiversity credits to a business trying to be nature positive – to implement nature positive actions.

Question 2o: Which actions do you think will have most impact?

Demonstrating examples of good practice and what an ROI looks like to key stakeholders including investors will be the biggest driver here.

Section 3 – Nature networks policy framework

Question 3a: Do you have any comments on the Nature Networks Framework?

As before, data created by Nature Networks should be stored, managed, and freely available.

Nature networks should be statutory and/or the responsibility of one group, for example, local authorities, so that it is clear who has overall responsibility for nature networks.

¹⁰ <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/about-bsi/uk-national-standards-body/sustainability-and-climate-action/nature-investment/a-high-integrity-standards-framework-for-uk-nature-markets/thank-you-ga-03ri/>

Whoever has responsibility for the networks should have plans that are science-based, linked to the planning system, and includes plans for conservation, restoration, and monitoring over the short and long terms.

Section 6 – Statutory targets for nature restoration

Question 6a: Do you agree with this approach to placing targets on a statutory footing?

Yes, but it could be clearer.

It's not clear who will be responsible for achieving the targets. If all of the targets are to be aimed at local authorities then it's important that they are provided with the resources to meet them. If the targets will be aimed at businesses (including agri-business) then it's essential that they are involved in the relevant decision-making process, but also understand what's being asked of them so they can understand how to deliver them.

Targets will help to drive actions, but delivery requirements will need to be put into place to support their realization.

Question 6b: Do you agree with the criteria set out for the selection of targets?

Yes, but including alignment with other UK Nation's biodiversity plans (as well as European and international frameworks) would be beneficial.

Question 6c: Do you agree statutory targets should include a combination of outcome targets and output targets?

Yes.

Question 6f: Do you agree with the proposal to have the smallest feasible number of targets which reflects the complexity of nature restoration?

Yes, but It depends on what 'smallest' looks like – for example, three probably would be too few. We agree that the number of targets should be kept to a minimum but that targets that fail to make the final list should be captured in secondary legislation. All relevant stakeholders for targets must be able to easily identify what they need to do through a single-entry point (target) from which they can drill down to find out more detail.

Question 6g: Do you agree statutory targets should align with the 2030 and 2045 timescales set out in the Strategy?

Yes and no.

Alignment would be good and should be done where possible, but in reality it could be unrealistic and targets should be influenced by priority actions (in terms of urgency). Interim targets should be added beneath overarching targets. It would have been useful to see clear links between research and proposals.

Question 6h: Do you agree the Bill should allow for the review of statutory targets?

Yes.

Question 6i: Do you agree that reporting on targets should align with existing Biodiversity reporting requirements?

Yes.

Question 6j: Do you agree that an Independent Review Body is needed to report on Government's progress in meeting the statutory targets?

Yes.

An independent review body has the opportunity to hold the Government to account but also to take an objective look at the overarching process and its success. Environmental Standards Scotland are an independent body and could take on this role with more funding, rather than putting funding into setting up a new organization.

About IEMA

IEMA are the global professional body for over 21,000 individuals and 300 organisations working, studying or interested in the environment and sustainability.

We are the professional organisation at the centre of the sustainability agenda, connecting business and individuals across industries, sectors and borders.

We also help and support public and private sector organisations, governments and regulators to do the right thing when it comes to environment and sustainability related initiatives, challenges and opportunities. We work to influence public policy on environment and sustainability matters. We do this by drawing on the insights and experience of our members to ensure that what happens in practice influences the development of government policy, legislation, regulations and standards.

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