

**Consultation Title: SNH 2017-22 Corporate Plan**

**Date: 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

**To: Scottish Natural Heritage  
Battleby  
Redgorton  
Perth PH1 3EW**

**From: Anne Gray & Karen Ramoo  
Scottish Land & Estates  
Stuart House  
Eskmills Business Park  
Musselburgh  
EH21 7PB**

**Telephone: 0131 653 5400**

Scottish Land & Estates is a member organisation that uniquely represents the interests of both land managers and land-based businesses in rural Scotland. Scottish Land & Estates has members with interests in a great variety of land uses and welcomes the opportunity to respond to SNH's request for feedback in the preparation of its next Corporate Plan.

**What are the key drivers affecting your plans for 2017-22 and beyond? How do these affect the drivers for SNH in the next 5 years?**

The key drivers for Scottish Land & Estates in the next 5 years will almost certainly be rural support mechanisms in light of the UK's decision to leave the EU, and the continuing land reform debate. Other issues that will be significant to us and that are also likely to be significant we imagine to SNH include deer management, moorland management, species reintroductions, the implementation of Scotland's land use strategy, woodland expansion, and landowner's contributions to meeting biodiversity and conservation objectives.

In terms of rural support mechanisms, Scottish Land & Estates is currently forming a paper for Government and others on how we see rural support mechanism operating in the future. There remains a clear need to support agriculture and land management in the UK, however these support structures need to provide commonality so that areas of the UK are not disadvantaged, whilst also being flexible so that they can be tailored to provide support for different farming and land management systems and to tackle environmental priorities.

Exiting the EU presents an opportunity to re-think how to deliver the safety, standards and environmental outcomes that are necessary for all. There is an opportunity to move towards a proportionate, flexible regulatory system that supports the rural economy, environment and communities.

Initial soundings from the membership indicate ease with, or at least acceptance of, a move away from direct support for agriculture and towards a new rationale for public support to rural land-based businesses on the basis of the delivery of a range of public goods, including improvements to biodiversity, natural flood management and climate change mitigation. Our paper will also explore the role of natural capital accounting in delivering these objectives.

In the current uncertain future, key areas of conservation also need to be addressed, with the goal of achieving healthy ecosystems where both business and wildlife can prosper being fundamental to safeguarding the future of the natural heritage. We want to see the development of new mechanisms which identify practical ways to deliver new and additional investment in the natural environment.

In terms of species and habitat management we want to see a shift in approach towards adaptive management processes, whereby species are monitored and actively managed and where necessary negative impacts can be mitigated to ensure species better integrate with other land uses. We think there are a number of opportunities to introduce and further this type of framework.

We are supportive of the ongoing movement away from single species or single habitat focused work towards more integrated landscape scale approaches which take account of the full range of things that the public want to see delivered from the land, and encourages rational decision-making and choices in terms of what is possible from any area. However, whilst supporting an ecosystem approach, we do recognise that there is still a place for specific targeted conservation action for some species and habitats within this wider ecosystem approach, this might be in the form of direct action for a species or as a habitat action for a species.

We acknowledge protected areas across Scotland represent the jewel in the crown of our natural heritage and are bastions of the delivery of nature conservation in Scotland, however we would like to see the protection of nature sitting alongside everyday economic and social activities rather than being compartmentalised into specific areas that are protected just for nature. In this way all of society will have some responsibility for the nature rather than a specific few who are charged with managing protected sites.

The final driver will be the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and in particular the Land and Rights and Responsibilities Statement. Given that this will underpin all land use policy it will be a key driver for not only landowners and landmanagers but also agencies such as SNH.

## **What do you think should be the most important areas of activity for SNH given these drivers?**

Not so much an area of activity as an ethos, but perhaps the most important thing for SNH going forward is to find better and more effective ways to work with landowners and managers in a spirit of co-operation. We appreciate that SNH's remit is to deliver for natural heritage and the public enjoyment of the countryside, however, in achieving this a greater understanding of and empathy with others objectives for the land would we are sure pay dividends in terms of achieving multiple benefits. We believe that this aligns with both the approach outlined in the Land Use Strategy and the fundamental principles which are likely to be contained within the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement.

**What are the main changes you envisage for your organisation that we need to be aware of?**

As above, a major change affecting all land-based businesses will be an almost inevitable change in rural support systems. In addition, greater public scrutiny and involvement in land use decision making will undoubtedly lead to changes in some of our members' businesses.

As an organisation we will increase the work we do to raise awareness of the wider range of public benefits delivered by our members, and of the societal benefits delivered through good land management.

**What opportunities do you see for collaborative working with SNH?**

If SNH was to adopt an enabling ethos, we see many opportunities for collaborative working. If landowners and managers could build relationships of trust with Government agencies, not only SNH, it would lead to knowledge transfer and a genuine desire to work together for the benefit of all.

**Is SNH right to construct its programmes around focussing on investing in natural assets and delivering benefits for people and society?**

We would have no argument with this high level focus.

**We have identified some principles to help us to guide our approach to our work. Are you happy with these?**

We are supportive of these principles, provided the correct mechanisms are put in place to ensure effective delivery and where appropriate principles are able to be adapted as necessary to meet changing situations,