

PE1966/I: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

NatureScot submission of 23 May 2024

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions committee's consideration of petition PE1966: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy.

The correspondence asks for details of the action NatureScot is undertaking with respect to the points pertaining to local knowledge outlined in the report, *Understanding the Indirect Drivers of Biodiversity Loss in Scotland – A Summary*.

As the referenced reports states “*interlinking local knowledge with technical and scientific knowledge will better protect and restore biodiversity and other resources.*” NatureScot recognises that local knowledge is a vital component of tackling Scotland's twin nature and climate crises.

In relation to the point highlighted about reflecting local knowledge in governance structures, we would draw attention to our submission to this petition from 3rd February 2023. The submission sets out, amongst other relevant information, the following with respect to the composition of NatureScot's Board:

The Board has demonstrable practical experience of land management, as well as members who come from policy development, scientific and academic backgrounds in relation to this area. This includes members who are land managers, farmers, rural business owners and members who have represented or worked alongside communities across Scotland to deliver sustainable nature-based projects. The same applies to water management, with a range of knowledge represented across the board, including with respect to freshwater ecology and the sustainable management of water systems. This broad range of professional and personal experience provides the Board with a variety of expertise and the means by which to ensure that both scientific and local knowledge is applied to our work.”

At an organisational level, NatureScot offices are located throughout Scotland, and we employ staff from a variety of areas and backgrounds who bring local knowledge to their roles. We also have dedicated National Operations teams based around five geographic areas. National Operations teams work closely with people and communities in several ways, including by responding to a wide range of casework consultations and enquires, and more generally work to foster positive relationships across the areas in which they operate.

We also seek to incorporate local knowledge and engage communities in our work and decision-making through several means, including by:

- listening to the needs of communities and a wide variety of stakeholders, and recognising the skills, knowledge, energy, and ideas they can add.
- encouraging a wider range of communities to get involved – particularly those for young people or people who are excluded in some way.
- informing communities and stakeholders that we work directly with how their input has informed our thinking and decision-making.

- learning from and sharing good practice.
- finding ways to help more people to get involved in shaping the decisions that affect nature and landscapes.
- involving people and communities more in how we design and deliver some of our services.

To use one example, the Species on the Edge is a partnership programme of NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities, all dedicated to improving the fortunes of 37 priority species found along Scotland's coast and islands. Primarily funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the programme is working to tackle the impacts of environmental change on wildlife, to benefit both nature and people.

The programme is engaging with people in some of Scotland's most remote areas to establish projects that provide a vital lifeline for our most nationally and internationally vulnerable coastal and island wildlife. Working with communities, local initiatives, and land managers, Species on the Edge seeks to create opportunities for people to get involved in efforts to save these species for future generations. Through workshops, volunteering, and training opportunities, the programme is working with communities to identify barriers to participation, equality, or inclusion.

More generally, we meet with stakeholders from a broad range of sectors to discuss pertinent issues and to collaborate across a range of projects and initiatives, offering opportunities for both formal and informal consultations and, more generally, seeking their views and knowledge.

It is important, in the context of this petition, to reference the engagement that has taken place in relation to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS). The SBS sets out a vision to deliver the transformational changes needed to protect and restore terrestrial, freshwater, and marine biodiversity in Scotland. A co-design approach has been taken throughout the development of the SBS. This includes a significant programme of engagement aimed at incorporating the knowledge and advice of a broad range of stakeholders and a wide-ranging public consultation. We will continue to engage in a collaborative manner in relation to the SBS.

I hope that the information provided is of use to the committee's consideration of this petition. If any further information from NatureScot would be beneficial in relation to your continued scrutiny of the matters set out, then please do not hesitate to ask.