

DRAFT MINUTES: CPG NATURE AND CLIMATE

COMMITTEE ROOM 4, THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

WEDNESDAY 26 APRIL 6.00 – 7.30PM

ATTENDEES

Mark Ruskell MSP, Io Hadjicosta (Mark Ruskell MSP), Sophie Brett (Keep Scotland Beautiful), Arina Russell (Woodland Trust Scotland), Suzie Saunders (Woodland Trust Scotland), Juliet Caldwell (Scottish Environment LINK), Morag Wells (Scottish Environment LINK), Dan Paris (Scottish Environment LINK), Fiona Hyslop MSP, Beatrice Wishart MSP, Jason Rose (RSPB Scotland), Sharon Kessler (Stirling University), Morag Watson (Scottish Renewables), Clare Andrews (Stirling University), David Pratt (Marine Scotland), Gilly Mendes Ferreira (Scottish SPCA), Kirstanne Land (SSEN), Fiona Baillie (John Muir Trust), Rosie Simpson (John Muir Trust), Niamh Coyne (RSPB Scotland), Esme Clelland (RSPB Scotland), Finlay Carson MSP, Maurice Golden MSP, Nick Cullen (Mighty Earth), Peter Finnie (SEPA), Harriet Cross (National Trust for Scotland), Francis Williams (SSE), Catherine Kelham (RSPB Scotland), Grant Douglas (Scottish Power), Nick Wright (ARCUS), Annie Robinson (CIEEM), Danae Orellana (Scottish Wildlife Trust), Andy Rockall (Community Woodlands Association), Janine Ballantyne (National Trust for Scotland)

CHAIR

Mark Ruskell MSP

AGENDA & MINUTES

1. Welcome to CPG Nature & Climate and Introductions

Mark Ruskell MSP welcomed the members to the meeting.

2. Renewable Energy: tackling the climate and nature crises in an integrated way – Morag Watson, Director of Policy at Scottish Renewables.

Scottish Renewables (SR) represents 330+ organisations across the renewables industry and other stakeholders. The aim is to tackle the climate and nature crises in a synergistic way. Scotland is doing well on the use of electricity. The key horizon is heat and there is not much done to decarbonise this. Progress has been made such as the electrification of trains and cars, however this is still a small percentage of the transport sector. The challenge is to decarbonise heat and transport. The main way to do this, advised to Gov, is electrification from low carbon sources.

Morag discussed the tables in the slideshow on managing a low carbon budget.

The maps in the slideshow indicated where hydro, onshore and solar power is in the UK. Most of solar power is in the South of England.

There is a conflict of synergy against hitting climate change targets and biodiversity restoration – the answer is we can do this. With regards to the Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), the renewables industry is asking ‘how should we do this’ and ‘what mechanisms can we use to do this well’. For example, onshore sites must always have an environmental impact assessment. Every site must have a habitat management plan and if peat is present, then a peat management plan.

There are key issues on how we evidence that and what metric we need to use. SSE have invested a lot of money in investing metrics. There is a nationally recognised standard and an agreed enhancement on every site. £2.5 million has been invested in restoring peatland by Scottish power.

Offshore energy is newer and there is far less data. There are concerns with regards to the impact on seabirds. When they go offshore, we have little idea of what they do. The renewables industry has been helping to fund Scotwind. Habitats regulatory assessment have been introduced to tackle this issue. Offshore renewables are new so there is not a set framework. There are projects coming forward but there is no agreed national framework.

3. Nature Positive Offshore Wind - Catherine Kelham, Senior Marine Conservation Planner at RSPB Scotland.

Catherine emphasised the urgency of climate change the need to reduce greenhouse gas alongside restoring biodiversity.

As offshore wind is new, we need to take nature into consideration more. For example, sea birds can collide with wind turbine blades which has a direct impact on the species. This forces the birds to take different flight paths. For example, puffins aren't very aerodynamic and longer journeys have big impacts. Offshore wind farms can block feeding areas for puffins e.g., where they find sandeels. Adult mortality rates in seabirds are ultimately affected. Nature suffers economically. Kittiwake & puffin are red listed and vulnerable to extinction. Expensive to bring them back.

RSPB report [Powering Healthy Seas](#) focuses on interlinkages of nature and climate. The report calls for a joined-up approach and doesn't just refer to planning and development. Planning isn't a safety net for the environment.

We need to achieve good environmental status in our seas with measures that fall outside development process. We must be advocates for holistic and spatial planning. We currently have sectorial plan and national plan that is being reviewed. There is a potential for a plan with clear direction and positive direction.

We need good design for a Nature Positive direction. For example, the context of development and use of resources play into wider citizen thinking of a circular economy and what supply changes we will use. The sea is a shared cultural and economic asset. If we underestimate the impacts of offshore wind now, we will see the negative impacts sooner, such as harming marine protected areas in Scotland.

RSPB have been asked where offshore wind farms should go. RSPB can't answer that. This isn't helpful to developers and investors, but RSPB knows putting something in shallow seas

isn't great and deeper seas is potentially better – when you consider the whole thing holistically.

4. David Pratt, Head of Marine Planning, Development & Crown Estate Strategy at Marine Scotland.

With regards to synergy and conflict, there is no binary answer. We must focus on resolving conflicts. Scotwind will be the equivalent of £90b expenditure in infrastructure in Scotland. It's a huge scale. The gain is a carbon free generating system working in synergy with nature.

The offshore space is in early development compared to the onshore space. Primary data gives us more certainty that it can work well with nature. ScotMER has begun that process.

We need to look at the broadening impacts of offshore and how it leads to different patterns and how different species use the environment. Environmental enhancements plans are being submitted in the Netherlands.

We need to look at how offshore wind will exclude certain activities e.g., trawling. A lot of species will not be subject to fishing practices, and you will find more vibrant ecosystems – an example that synergies will exist and emerge as the infrastructure beds into place.

The conflict pertinent at the moment – e.g., energy bill south of the border. How much impact is it willing to accept for clean energy. The system right now won't achieve the goals set out. The habitats directive has stringent tests and there needs to be a like for like compensation. The ability to have that like for like isn't there within the Scottish environment.

We have to start looking at broader environments such as biodiversity net gain. Difficult decisions will have to be made. This is ½ of the challenge and the other ½ is implications of building all this infrastructure. We need localised manufacturing, so we are building this purely within our ecosystem. We must move our footprint towards net zero regeneration.

5. How can wind energy coexist with wild? - Rosie Simpson, Senior Policy Officer at John Muir Trust.

Rosie highlighted how we can expand our wind energy and renewables whilst looking after wild places.

The Energy Strategy is out for consultation. There are two ways to achieving energy transitions and supporting nature; biodiversity enhancements and minimising habitat degradation.

The [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) (SBS) includes that windfarms are situated where their impacts upon peatland, birds and other wildlife are minimised.

[NPF4](#) policies can guide us in managing trade-offs which opens up the question of co-existence. There are strong policies within NPF4 to protect nature such as Policy 4g (Wild Land) and Policy 5c (Protect peatlands).

We must focus on consolidating expansion and setting nature requirements. As a general rule, we must avoid any development on peatlands. We must step back and ask, 'can the trade-offs adequately be managed'. We must use a carbon calculator and there must be longer consultations for communities to have their say on new developments. There must be

more meetings between developers and communities to discuss proposals. There should be further biodiversity assessment to support objective of the SBS. Developers should prepare and implement biodiversity restoration plans to incorporate species recovery plans.

The Scottish Renewables [case study](#) on wind power and protecting peatlands is positive. SSE have done a good job of managing Griffin wind farm and it is rewarding to see birds of prey, rare newt and mammals thriving in that site. It would be great to see more case studies and reports from the renewables industry on how renewables can work in synergy with nature.

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) transmission networks now recognise wild land areas. We must now develop a tool for assessing natural capital.

Live case studies where trade-offs are happening in Scotland:

- Coire Glas is the UK's largest hydro scheme. This has now increased the water level of two lochs. There is a question of whether this site is the right place due to the sensitivity of the land.
- There is a wind farm site at Glen Ullinish in the North West of Skye. This is a wild part of Skye which has peatlands. Peatland is a non-renewable carbon resource.
- Viking Wind Farm is a large-scale development, and the turbines are in a sensitive environment. There is now a reduced population of birds due to this.
- Transmission lines in Dalmally – the grid is important for connectivity to renewables. However, the community in Dalmally have lost part of the peninsula.

6. Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places - Grant Douglas, Head of Planning and Environmental Policy at Scottish Power.

There is so much importance on a planning system. The planning system must be democratic, plan led and transparent as here are a huge number of competing priorities.

Climate and nature must be taken as synergy rather than conflict. We have to address both, as NPF4 sets out clearly. The challenge in terms of climate, it has taken 20/30 years for action to happen and now we have 7 years to address it. There is a need for urgent action and NPF4 provides the right priorities for nature and climate. We must work together.

Examples from renewables sector:

- 10,00 hectares under habitat management plans.
- Planted ½ million native trees.
- Network business looking at linear nature of our network e.g., B Lines and pollination.
- SSE now has a [tool](#) for measuring biodiversity net gain.
- Offshore energy is not as developed but there is good innovation happening.

As an industry, we need expertise and stakeholders. Natural capital solutions such as practical companies providing it providing holistic solutions. £8 billion is being put in to halting the decline of biodiversity, however that can't just be put on the renewables industry. We must look at it as how do we work together. Nature based solutions are a key tool.

We must utilise resource, time and expertise looking for collaborative solutions working across sectors and industries rather than having the same argument. How to engage different sectors is a challenge for the renewables industry.

7. Q&A

Finlay Carson MSP: Asked a question on spatial pressures on land and at sea. For example, the impact of developments and how it might increase fishing efforts/put pressure on land use. There are issues with NPF4 such as local and community involvement doesn't go far enough. It is undemocratic when local communities can't properly assess local plans. There are 9 major wind farms in Finlay's constituency in Dumfries and Galloway and applications are referred directly to the Scottish Government. Nature based solutions are the best option as we have a nationwide grid issue. E.g., in Dumfries and Galloway there are 9 overhead lines that have massive local opposition and are put over a habitat rich area. Greenwashing is an issue.

Morag Watson: Local authority capacity is a shared concern. Local authorities have 16 weeks to reply and research which has shown over last 10 years there has been a 20% drop of people working in Planning departments. The Onshore sector deal is looking for a solution of how we get more people in the system. Many issues end up in Public Local Inquiry (PLI) which takes 2/3 years and cost £100s. The question is how we keep out of PLIs. The network part of businesses (SSE & SPEN) – they're natural monopolies and dependent on Ofgem so what they can and can't do is heavily regulated. Grid is very expensive – £10-12 mill. Ofgem's main remit is to keep consumer bills down.

Rosie Simpson: We don't want to see PLIs happen. We need earlier consultations so communities can be part of the whole process. Resourcing is an issue - planning authorities are struggling with this. We need a ring fencing of planning fees. We need to enhance skills in planning departments.

Morag Watson: In an ideal world you have a pre-consultation period. What we see because local authorities are so constrained, they have a statutory obligation to deal with active planning consultations instead of pre-consenting applications. They prioritise active consultations.

Grant Douglas: With regards to resourcing, the number one ask is resourcing must be put into the planning system.

Finlay Carson: An option for full cost recovery on applications should be reviewed. Resources within local authorities, applications to Scot Gov e.g., water quality – those conditions aren't being policed due to no resources.

Mark Ruskell: The NZET committee has just done an extensive enquiry into climate change and local governments. Investing in the whole planning sector is one of the top recommendations.

Catherine Kelham: The cost of overhead buyers and transmission. We must be careful when passing cost to consumer. We need to persuade Ofgem that it should be looking at the lowest best cost for consumer. We need to change the question we are asking – valuing cost with nature.

Francis Williams: We have to put the value on biodiversity under Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process so you can begin to understand what your impacts are. This is impossible to do without Biodiversity Net Gain or natural capital. You must convince Ofgem that you aren't doing the lowest costing but providing best value to consumers. You must have right metrics in place.

Nicholas Wright: Could larger turbines reduce land take for biodiversity and improve the picture.

Morag Watson: Scotland has some of the shortest turbines in Europe. The taller the turbine the better the gain of energy. You can gain more energy more efficiently in Scotland when turbines are 120 m to tip. If you have larger turbines, you need fewer of them. Working with Scot Gov on higher gigawatts (GW) target and size of turbine. Storage is currently in the form of hydrocarbons, piles of coal, gas storage – batteries are good for 4 hours of storage then become expensive and you need pumped fuelled hydro. We are looking at how we store out energy in the summer. Large scale hydrogen storage hasn't been done anywhere in the world. We need 30 GW in storage for addressing climate change.

Annie Robinson: Upland areas deliver for multiple uses e.g., tree planting, agriculture, and renewables. What role can Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) use to support decisions on land use. CIEEM share concerns of low resourcing in local authorities.

Rosie Simpson: JMT are involved in the North West highlands RLUP. It could depend on the priorities RLUP set up for itself.

Catherine Kelham: There is a question of how a site should be repowered. If you can have a turbine with greater capacity, not a one size fits all. It is asking a lot of our land when it is already used for farming, food and energy. There needs to be a stock take on how much land do we have to give to energy.

Grant Douglas: There is the low hanging fruit of a nightmare of a challenge – when a site gets to the end of its life. There is a huge amount of data on these types of sites. RLUPs were part of the planning system that is not there anymore.

Rosie Simpson: We must collaborate with ecologists to plan better. Land management plans – encompassing active deer management etc. With regards to tree heights and turbines, upland/moorlands areas provide a wealth of opportunity. An important player in this is the landowner and the nature restoration on their land.

Suzie Saunders: Montane woodland is an important habitat within Scotland. It is all basically scrub so this is an opportunity to integrate this habitat with renewable energy.

Francis Williams: With regards to grid connection, there are long linear impacts on different landowners. We would like to develop larger strategic sites. We must work with eNGOS, communities and landowners to begin to enhance biodiversity before you have had any impacts. That will need coordination with planning departments within Local Authorities. Land is becoming competitive – e.g., carbon credits. There is a bigger conservation of what we can deliver.

8. AOB & Closing Remarks

It was suggested that we should return to topics such as natural capital and investment.

CPG members to get in touch with Io (io.hadjicosta@parliament.scot) or Juliet (juliet@scotlink) with thoughts on future meeting topics.