

# **Cross-Party Group on Nature and Climate**

Wednesday 28 February 2024 18.00 – 19.30

Minute

Present

MSPs

Mark Ruskell MSP, Ariane Burgess MSP

Invited guests

Josh Doble (Community Land Scotland), Julie Stoneman (Plantlife Scotland), Pauline McCran (People's Plan for Nature Contributor), Pam Yule (Wynford Residents Union), Naomi Arnold (WWF Scotland)

Non-MSP Group Members

Juliet Caldwell (LINK), Io Hadjicosta (Office for Mark Ruskell MSP), Deborah Long (LINK), Dan Paris (LINK), Fanny Royanez (LINK), Isobel Mercer (RSPB Scotland), Arina Russell (WWF Scotland), Sharon Kessler (Stirling University), Alex Morrison (Keep Scotland Beautiful), Colin Brown (Ecus), Eleanor Gourevitch (Ecus), Josselyn Rizo-Olguin (John Muir Trust), Morag Wells (LINK), Jason Rose (RSPB Scotland), Benji Brown (ERCS), Shivali Fifield (ERCS), Cameron Gilles (SLE), Jessica Jones (Scottish Wildlife Trust), Emilie Wadsworth (Edinburgh Climate Change Institute), Nora Casey (RSPB Scotland), Clare Andrews (Stirling University), Pamela Barnes (Development Trusts Association Scotland)

Apologies

Maurice Golden MSP

**Agenda item 1: Welcome to CPG Nature & Climate**

Mark Ruskell MSP welcomed members and speakers to the CPG meeting.

**Agenda item 2: Speech from Josh Doble (Policy Manager, Community Land Scotland)**

Community Land Scotland (CLS) represents community landowners around Scotland, primarily communities of place – rooted into specific places to make them ecologically, socially and financially resilient.

The climate and nature crises are key drivers for communities wanting to take ownership of land. We need more place-based responses. Local communities need to be able to see themselves in change.

We need to do some myth busting of false dichotomy of nature vs communities. Some concerns from communities and hinges on disempowerment. Financial inequalities – private finance isn't always a constructive long-term avenue.

Scale is being used as a word for protecting and increasing conversation ownership. We need more collaboration, not more monopolies. We have one of the most concentrated pocket of land holders in the world.

With regards to land reform, we need vibrant and successful sectors looking at communities of place and interest working together. Nature Reserves are a good example of a collab of organisation, communities and landowners working together.

Collaborations build in resilience and permanence. Communities of interest can provide capital and expertise. Communities of place can provide local knowledge. The combination of these things will help to sustain projects.

Scotland has a model that works. Communities, landowners, NGOs and public bodies support social, economic and cultural regeneration.

When you can't get full community ownership – you can get partnerships between landowners. This is a huge opportunity for natural capital.

Community partnerships – partnership model is guided by community agency and consent in a meaningful way with landowners etc.

We need to move past false divide of community and nature. We must work collaboratively together to tackle the real problems of the nature and climate crises.

### **Agenda item 3: Speech from Julie Stoneman (Saving Scotland's Rainforest Project Manager, Plantlife Scotland and Chair of the Common Ground Forum)**

The Common Ground Forum (CGF) works with a particular community of interest - stakeholders in upland deer management Scotland.

Definition of CGF: Network of individuals and organisations across Scotland's deer management sector committed at looking at collab deer management programme.

Not long ago some of these people couldn't sit in the same room together. It took three years to get to that point. It all started in late 2020 when Julie was managing the

Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest project. The ASR profile was starting to rise. It caught the attention of the Association of Deer Management groups. Deer are one of the highest problems in the rainforest. They met and brainstormed about what they could do together.

Julie took this back to ASR group and there was initial uncertainty. She got in touch with Centre for Good Relations – an independent not for profit company. They deal with social dialogue and tensions.

A steering group was formed to guide the work - 50 stakeholders across Scotland who work on deer management. The willingness of stakeholders was to do something about this by looking for solutions. The CGF went on for a year and concluded around June. It wasn't plain sailing due to working in a subject of high conflict. People were sceptical. The last workshop was at the end of June and you could feel the difference between the dynamic of the stakeholders as they had built up trust between each other. These workshops were well attended by young people from the stalking sector as they see a need for a different kind of future. The attendees then urged the steering group not to stop. CGD has a website, aims, objectives. It's all about the people – reaching out further to the deer management sector.

A summary of some of the actions from CDG so far:

- Online discussion of 25 people together to discuss the Deer consultation. Enabled people to see different perspectives.
- Pilot event for stalkers at Glen Uig – new equipment and techniques. Looked at challenges ahead. The Centre for Good Relations is still carried on.
- Parliamentary meetings with MSPs to improve the awareness of land managers and the roles in tackling the climate and nature crises.

## Agenda item 4: Speech from Naomi Arnold (Restoration Forth Project Manager, WWF Scotland)

This is a location-based example - a marine restoration project with ambition to plant up to 4 hectares of seagrass, including remnant and introducing European flat oysters (historically appeared in abundance – were deemed extinct).

There are 12 partners – mix of communities of interest in terms of interest/skills/knowledge/expertise and communities of place looking for their local places to be restored.

WWF Scotland manages this work as well as fundraising. They work with a range of organisations, some of which have hubs (e.g. the Seabird Centre in North Berwick) based in the communities and have a great network of volunteers. Universities and WWF Scotland wouldn't necessarily have those local connections. Local expertise and combining them with 'service leads' who understand the sector have been important for this project. RBGE are leading on a community engagement perspective as they have a wide reach across community groups in Edinburgh. They will be planting seagrass in March – all events are booked out.

The local communities want to be involved. One of the seagrass plantings will be started at 7am. They must respect the tides and timeframes. Most popular events are

art based – e.g. oyster-based mural in Newhaven. If restoration is to be successful ‘we are managing decline’ because of interactions with agriculture run off, aquaculture and fisheries.

They need more partners talking together in a room. The aim is for this project to be community led. People deserve to be paid for their work.

## Agenda item 5: Speech from Pam Yule (Wynford Residents Union) and Shivali Fifield (Chief Officer, Environmental Rights Centre Scotland)

Environmental Rights Centre Scotland have been working for 4 years to assist individuals and groups to exercise their right to environmental law. The aim is to increase awareness of what we mean by environmental law. Environmental decisions affect our health (housing food, security). ERCS is a free legal advice bureau. They have had 250 enquiries from some of the most deprived areas of Scotland. ERCS is an environmental justice network with past and present advice clients who share support and advice.

Pam and Shivali asked the question of ‘How do we bring local representatives to the fight for nature and climate’. The following is an example of an urban development and impoverished area.

Wynford 426 towers – against one of the largest housing providers. Demolition have more environmental and climate impacts and cost more than retrofitting. The Local Authority refuse to do an environmental impact assessment. The residents managed to win a judicial review to pause the demolition, however the Local Authority refuse impact assessment. It is too often that public and corporate bodies will put profit over people. It is ignorant and arrogant that people living in disadvantaged areas don’t care about climate or pollution.

Wynford was built in the 60s. There is 45 square metres of park land and mature trees adjacent to a wildlife corridor of the River Kelvin. Shockingly there has been a process of neglect (damp, holes, leaks, rising crime going unaddressed). 600 tenants of the flats received notice that their flats would be demolished – consultation with no alternative to demolition.

They started their demolition despite their judicial review – supported by ERCS. ERCS have supported them through the consultation (deemed unlawful). ERCS are supporting them through a judicial review on Glasgow City Council’s refusal to do an environmental impact report.

You normally can’t get planning permission for a children’s nursery without an environmental assessment. So, if you can demolish an important neighbourhood then it’s illegal. The Wynford Union have been discussing ideas of how to rework the

space that works for people and nature. There is new housing that can be built along the Wynford Road but they refuse to speak to the residents about this. They have been failed by their representatives who seem to be powerless – they're burying their heads in the sand.

Why are bankers moving in the CEO positions of housing committees. Why are they hellbent in demolishing sturdy buildings to replace them with rickety new builds. Decisions are being made behind closed doors.

Policy of managed decline is rampant in the housing sector – representatives need to step up and be their voice. They need to listen to residents in addressing our climate, housing and nature emergencies.

## Agenda item 6: Speech from Pauline McCran (Contributor, People's Plan for Nature)

People's Plan for Nature was created in 2021 – they've had 30,000 responses from the public. It was formed via a Citizens Assembly. The aim was to review evidence about the nature crisis – supported by world leading experts. Resulting plan is a vision for nature – governments, businesses have all worked together.

Participants got together four weekends in Birmingham – 103 people in total. Pauline has become a vocal spokesperson on all things nature. Key things learned – we need education. We can't have a discussion or collaborate without the facts.

There was a variety of people with different views. Pauline learned things e.g. impact of oil rigs in the North Sea, impact on the oysters around the rigs, pollution they cause. You can't have an effective discussion on this without collaboration. Pauline has learned a lot about the four UK Governments. Wellbeing and Future Generations Act in Wales – Pauline dug deeper into this due to personal interest. The ideal would be to have legislation for governments to govern with future generations in mind. Every piece of legislation that comes into force must have that embedded. Restoration is progressive – language was significant in this process.

Pauline is currently trying to introduce a mandate – there should be a Director of Nature in all businesses/organisations. They must understand what impact as a company they have on future generations. Unsure how they would monetise it.

## Agenda item 7: Questions and Answers

Cameron Gilles: Disputed the comment that communities have already bought into nature plans. Looking at what is going on with farmers and land managers in Cardiff and Europe – there is still a lot of concern about these plans around producing food and managing land. How do we have these discussions with the people who aren't on board – rather than assuming. There is still a lot of work to be done on this.

Josh: Can't speak for agriculture sector. Community landowners who are growing food and working on climate and biodiversity – e.g. CLS members on crofting estates are also doing work on peatland restoration. Deer management plans – they see a regeneration perspective. They're not interested in profit as main driver in land holding, they are interested in that land being as economically and environmentally resilient. If that means they have to shoot more deer etc. then they are focused on holistic approach.

Pamela Barnes: Farmers and the farming sector are about stewardship of the land. Communities of place don't speak with one voice. Mediation of deer management (e.g. Common Ground Forum) can apply to other areas. E.g. with regards to new National Parks, there has been concern about what that might mean for them/also excitement for tourism. This emphasises the importance of dialogue and the intersection of community of interest and place. Just because you're an expert of the environment doesn't mean you're an expert on community engagement.

Arina: WWF Scotland have been working on agriculture and nature. Farming is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest cause of emissions in Scotland. We can have action that delivers for climate, nature and food production – not seeing it as one or the other. We need to showcase the positive work farmers are doing and bring their voices to the Scottish Parliament. We are trying to fix a system that doesn't serve people who are doing amazing things for nature. Protests are concerning – we need something something robust to bring those voices into the conversation. Us and them nature – stop perpetuating this narrative.

Heather Hayes (Fife Coast Countryside Trust): We need a holistic look at landscape scale restoration. We need to produce a management plan that work for nature and people. These things are not exclusive. Engaging with investors and communities – number of policy barriers to making changes to the landscape. There is a wide range of landowners. It was found that lots of the farmers are interested in exploring ways to be more nature friendly. The plea is to start looking at barriers.

Sarah Gardener: Discussed the intersection between environmental issues and social justice. The cost-of-living crisis – many Local Authorities are strapped for cash – we need a neat way of trying to include corporates in tackling this. For example, a tax on supermarkets (5/10% profits) should go towards areas such as veg growing, allotments, restoring woodland, tackling litter etc.

Pam: Glasgow City Council haven't communicated effectively with the residents of Wynford. They have handpicked a small group of tenants working on the vision for the greenspace that will be developed when the flats will be demolished. In terms of what we would want from developers – policy documents from Glasgow say retrofitting should be the first option.

Naomi Arnold: Older generations won't see the success of the work the Restoration Forth project is doing today. 'You plant a tree for the next generation to sit in the

shade of'. We will not see specific oyster beds for at least 10 years. The conversation must be intergenerational. Similarly with seagrass regeneration. Needing a whole scape approach – taking in all the impacts that this one particular area is carrying. Heritage is prevalent around Granton – memories exist so strongly. Creating a story that we won't be able to see.

Julie Stoneman: The key is not to make assumptions. When we were selecting the stakeholders – there were a lot of the same faces. Stalkers workshop brought in the younger people. Older people feel fear about what happens to their livelihood. Younger stalkers have more fear about the biodiversity and climate crises. They can see the changes but can't articulate their feelings. Dialogue is crucial in order to get people's perspectives.

Eleanor Ecas: Comes from a farming family. Cousin owns a farms different to how her grandfather farms. Changes to land use discussion – 'this is what my grandfather does why would I go back in that direction'. Important that that knowledge is passed down generations.

Josh: Community benefit model is an interesting idea. Corporations could be putting more money back into nature/climate. Community landowners are uncomfortable with tying their grandchildren to something that might be dead further down the line – mechanism is the woodland carbon code – idea of permanence. What are other mechanisms we can use.

Isobel Mercer: There have been comments around how members are concerned about pace and scale of change. Key point – advice on how best that can be navigated. There are concerns around the challenging timescales from nature/climate perspective. There is a time pressure to operate at a landscape scale.

Josh: Concerned which pace and scale are mobilised. This comes down to dialogue to enforce landscape changes needed. We need to pause and think carefully. Rethink the whole system. The danger is that if we take some vested interest, we don't address systemic problems that will bring an end to this crisis.

Naomi: That comes up in WWF project. Facing mass extinctions – pace at the restoration work is tiniest details. This is a live conversation with the Marine Directorate – we need to do something drastic to restore at scale given the devastation. We aren't seeing that being acknowledged appropriately. We need this to be done responsibly.

## Agenda item 8: AOB and Closing Remarks

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

Topic ideas:

- Tensions around carbon and nature markets. What is the appropriate way forward.
- Tackling the twin crises at scale.
- Industry needs to be brought on board – how we legislate and how they can become responsible, vocal and integrate nature into their business model.
- Dialogue – who is at the table and don't entrench those most disadvantaged. Talk to people who have the solutions – families etc.