

NINETY SECOND SNH BOARD MEETING, 16 DECEMBER 2003, BATTLEBY

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Members Present

John Markland, Chairman
Michael Scott, Deputy Chairman
Peter Chapman
Simon Fraser, Chairman, North Areas Board
Keith Geddes, Chairman, Audit and Risk Management Committee
Isabel Glasgow, Chairwoman, West Areas Board
Nick Kempe
Janet Sprent, Chairwoman, Scientific Advisory Committee
Sue Walker

In Attendance

Ian Jardine, Chief Executive
Andrew Bachell, Director
Ian Edgeler, Director (closed session only)
Colin Galbraith, Director
John Thomson, Director
Jeff Watson, Director
Jane Clark, Head of National Strategy
Iain Rennick, Head of Secretariat, Press and PR
Kate Alexander, Acting Board Secretary
Bill Taylor, for item 5
Peter Pitkin, for item 6
Susan Davies, for item 7
Mairi Cole, for item 7
John Mackay, for item 8
Peter Hutchinson, for item 8
Alan Macpherson, for item 8
Roger Burton, for item 4 of the closed session

Apologies

Alice Lambert
Jeremy Rowan-Robinson, Chairman, East Areas Board (written comments received)

****CLOSED SESSION****

ITEM 1: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1. Susan Walker declared an interest in Item 4 as a member of the Deer Commission for Scotland, but did not consider that this constituted a conflict of interests which would require withdrawal from the meeting.

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ITEM 2: MINUTES (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS)

2. The minutes of the closed session of the 91st Board meeting, held on 10 and 11 November, were agreed as a true record.

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ITEM 3: CURRENT ISSUES

SNH Board Appointments

3. The Executive's recruitment process for filling the vacancies on the SNH Board which would arise in April was now underway. The process was around two months behind previous years, although the Executive still hoped to have the new members in place by 1 April 2004.

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Pigeons & Raptors Working Group

4. It was likely that research on the impact of raptors on racing pigeons would be published early in 2004. This indicated that the level of the problem was considerably less than had been anticipated. It was possible that the results would be disputed by those organisations on the group who represent pigeon fanciers.

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**ITEM 4: DEER AND THE NATURAL HERITAGE - CURRENT ISSUES
(SNH/03/8/4)**

5. This paper sought guidance from the Board on a number of current issues relating to deer management. The Board discussed the following points:

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- a revised policy statement should be robust and address the reality that vast areas of the countryside are degraded by deer. It was important to get the timing of the statement right to keep up to date with rapidly changing developments in this field of work;
- it was crucial to emphasise in the Strategic Statement of Principles that incentives should only be used to achieve specific public objectives for habitat enhancement in areas where there was a need for intensified effort. Incentives should not be used for general habitat restoration and should not reward land managers whose past management had been inadequate;

- there was a need in practice to establish a basic level of habitat condition, below which regulations should be used and above which incentives should be used. This would be explored through the trial schemes;
- the sites recommended as pilot areas incorporate both areas of damage and better managed land where land managers could be encouraged to set an example for others with the help of incentives;
- it was important to endeavour to meet Natural Care targets, but if value for money was not being achieved the Executive should be advised that this was not the best use of SNH's resources. It was acknowledged that the regulations available to DCS were not very effective but SNH could only pay for alternative solutions if that had been endorsed by the Executive. Trial schemes would give SNH the information on the likely cost and success of this use of Natural Care;
- it was necessary to consider at what point Natural Care schemes would end or whether it was likely that schemes would continue indefinitely. Again, this would be resolved on the basis of the trials;
- taking forward of pilot schemes was equally reliant on the willingness of DCS to implement s8 agreements where s7 agreements were proving ineffective;
- the problem of deer damage was wide ranging and systemic. There needed to be a change of heart from land managers and also at a political level. SNH should be willing to consider and encourage radical techniques and approaches to deer management;
- SNH should use its influence to ensure that Deer Management Plans were made publicly available.

6. The Board:

- agreed that a refreshed, short policy statement on deer and the natural heritage should be prepared for consideration by the Board during 2004/05;
- confirmed its support for the overarching principles of joint working with the other Agencies and emphasised the need for not rewarding past poor management being clear in a 'Statement of Principles and Process for managing deer';
- approved the referral of the trial scheme sites to DCS as sites where deer are likely to cause damage and agreed that referral of further sites should be through the main Board at this stage, with input from the Areas Boards and SAC. In due course, lead responsibility should pass to the Areas Boards;
- approved the development and launch of trial incentive schemes as part of the Natural Care programme in 2004/05 and that these should be used to provide information on value for money and the likely duration of schemes.

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ITEM 5: APPOINTMENTS TO THE SAC (SNH/03/8/5 – closed session)

7. This paper outlined proposals for membership of the SAC. The Board agreed to extend the membership of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Rupert Ormond and Mary Gibby, each for a further 3 years from 1 April 2004.

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ITEM 6: RELOCATION

8. The Board was provided with an oral update on developments since the previous Board meeting. The following points were discussed:

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- meetings had been held with the Countryside & Natural Heritage Unit (CANH) to refine the requirements of the business case. Proposals on the redundancy package had been submitted to CANH, and details of the relocation package would be submitted shortly. It was important that correct and up to date information about relocation and redundancy packages should be made available to staff as quickly as possible;
- temporary accommodation in Inverness was being pursued. This would be a important signal of progress and of SNH's willingness to get on with the move;
- the Executive should be made aware that any delays that had arisen in the project to date were the result of awaiting clarification from them of points which had arisen;
- the report from the Auditor General which had accompanied last year's accounts had made clear that he will maintain an overview of SNH's management of relocation, particularly with regard to best value. The report would be copied to the Board;
- the Finance Committee of the Scottish Parliament were undertaking a general review of the Executive's relocation policy, and were considering the union's petition on SNH relocation as part of that process;
- an Employment Tribunal to consider the Public & Civil Service union's case on consultation on redundancies arising from relocation would take place on 14, 15 and 16 January 2004. The Chairman, Chief Executive and Director of Relocation & Finance had all been called to give evidence and would attend;
- it was important that the costs of relocation were recorded and totally transparent;
- it would be helpful to get the message out to potential developers that SNH was planning to obtain accommodation in Inverness on a build to rent basis, and would be going out to tender in the spring. Highlands & Islands Enterprise and The Highland Council could assist in raising awareness of this.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- There were no items of other business raised.

John Markland
Chairman