SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST

SCOTTISH SPENDING REVIEW 2011 AND DRAFT BUDGET 2012-13

Evidence from the Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Scottish Wildlife Trust was established in 1964 and now has over 36,000 members throughout the country, and aims to protect Scotland's wildlife for the benefit of present and future generations. As a membership organisation, the Trust is answerable directly to its members. We own or manage over 120 wildlife reserves across the length and breadth of Scotland totalling over 20,000 hectares.

Given the very tight deadline given in the Committee’s Call for Views please note that this paper represents the Trust's initial view on the Scottish Spending Review 2011 and Draft Budget 2012-13 which was published by the Scottish Government on 21 September 2011.

Rural Affairs & Environment within the overall budget

We note with some concern that the Rural Affairs & Environment head is allocated a cut of 1.79% in the draft budget for 2012-13 and a projected cut of 5.01% from the 2011-12 budget to the planned budget for 2014-15. This is the largest reduction of any spending department and contrasts very unfavourably with the projected increase of 12.31% in the Infrastructure & Capital Investment budget and the overall total budget increase of 2.14%.

EU support & related services

The very large reduction in Agri Environment measures (Scottish Spending Review 2011 and Draft Budget 2012-13 table 11.03) – an immediate cut of 18.20% for next year and a planned cut of 22.29% by 2014-15 calls into serious question how the Scottish Government will further the conservation of biodiversity\(^1\) in an agricultural context. As the European Commission noted in July 2009: “It is clear that habitat types linked to agriculture generally have a worse conservation status, with only 7% of assessments being favourable, compared to 21% for ‘non-agricultural’ habitats. The situation is particularly severe in the Atlantic region\(^2\) where none of the habitats associated with agriculture were assessed as favourable.”\(^3\) [Emphasis added.]

We are aware of suggestions that CAP Pillar I should be “greened” but in the absence of any EU legislation to that effect, cutting support to Agri Environment schemes by over a fifth at this time seems a retrograde step which will damage biological diversity and set back the growth of wildlife-friendly farming to the detriment of the wider environment and national progress towards meeting international biodiversity targets such as those agreed at the

---

\(^1\) Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 s1(1) “It is the duty of every public body and public office holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.”

\(^2\) The Atlantic region includes the whole of the United Kingdom.

Convention of Biological Diversity meeting in Nagoya in October 2010 and the EU biodiversity strategy for 2020.\(^4\)

**Marine and fisheries**

Marine Scotland’s workload is projected to increase over the next period in two key areas: marine renewable and aquaculture. Both are Scottish Government priority areas for development and increased productivity. Both require careful consideration in terms of licensing and advising on individual applications and overall strategy.

In the Scottish Government’s *Economic Strategy*, published in September 2011, much emphasis was laid on £70million support for offshore renewables to “ensure Scotland becomes Europe’s green energy powerhouse.” As the Scottish Wildlife Trust reported in December 2010,\(^5\) in order to be sustainable and to play a key role, as they should, in reducing Scotland’s carbon emissions, marine renewable developments should be scrutinized far more rigorously than they are now. The reduction in Marine Scotland’s budget by 2.86% next year rising to a projected cut of 6.08% in 2014-15 can only make it more difficult for Marine Scotland to perform these important functions.

**Environmental and rural services**

Scottish Natural Heritage’s budget for next year is 4.78% lower than the current year and its planned budget for 2014-15 is 12.69% lower. Given the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s remit, we take a close interest in Scottish Natural Heritage’s work and we have a concordat agreement with them to deliver both direct conservation and public engagement which is supported by a framework grant. We estimate that we increase the value of SNH-derived framework grant income several times over\(^6\) through match-funding, reduced overheads and other sources.

Our comments regarding Marine Scotland are also applicable to SNH. At a time when their marine and coastal workload is projected to increase, a significant budget reduction will either have a negative effect on delivery of the coastal and marine programme or have a damaging knock-on effect on more strategic work streams such as conflict resolution, operationalising the Land Use Strategy and increased land management and licensing responsibilities. It may, of course, compromise both. We are also aware of new surveillance duties under the Habitats Directive in support of maintaining an adequate evidence base for biodiversity conservation. We are concerned that the large projected cut to SNH’s budget cannot be met fully by efficiency savings and that functions central to the conservation of biodiversity will be put at risk. When considered alongside the very large cut to Agri Environment discussed above, we are deeply concerned about the budget’s potential negative effect on nature conservation.

---


\(^6\) One estimate is 7:1, based on the cost of delivering agreed targets.
Other matters

We are concerned that the continuing pressure on local government resources puts at risk the already fragmented network of LBAP (local biodiversity action plan) officers and that this potential loss of expertise to the local authority sector is likely to harm local wildlife sites and impede the development of a National Ecological Network, identified as a priority in the second National Planning Framework. We are also concerned that such a loss of accessible local expertise could result in inappropriate, unsustainable planning decisions detrimental to wildlife and sustainable development.

The potential of preventative spend to deliver multiple benefits and reduce pressure on overall expenditure has been explored by the Christie Commission and well ventilated in the Scottish Parliament. We are disappointed at the apparent lack of recognition of the proven health and other benefits of accessible, high quality, biologically diverse green infrastructure\(^7\) and the role that environmental investment can play in reducing budget pressures across government. We particularly regret that greening our towns and cities does not yet feature in discussion of the Scottish Government’s Cities Strategy when it has been widely demonstrated that public health improves and pressures on health and social budgets decrease in response to a green and biologically diverse local environment.

A high quality environment is a key socio-economic asset for Scotland. It is vital to people’s quality of life, Scotland’s competitive advantage and identity and attracts inward investment and entrepreneurial talent. A recent study\(^8\) found that nature-based tourism alone is worth £1.4 billion annually and supports 39,000 FTE jobs. A reduction in investment in the quality and biological diversity of Scotland’s natural environment risks damaging society and the economy as well as Scotland’s international reputation.
