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Graeme Dey
Convener
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee
c/o Clerk to the Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

3 March 2017

Dear Graeme,

Thank you for your letter of 25 November following the Committee's evidence session in relation to Scotland's biodiversity. I regret the delay in replying but I wanted to ensure that we were in a position to provide a detailed response to the Committee's questions and this has taken time to assemble, including material on each of the Priority Projects in the 2020 Route Map.

Progress to 2020

The Committee suggests that there might be a contradiction between the findings and tone of the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) reports on the first annual review of Scotland's Biodiversity – a Route Map to 2020 ('the 2020 Route Map') and the Interim Report on the Aichi Targets, and the State of Nature 2016 report and its supplementary report on Scotland.

The targets referred to in the SNH Interim Report on Aichi are international targets set by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to halt biodiversity loss by 2020. These targets are challenging and require concerted effort if we are to meet them in Scotland. The publication in 2013 of the '2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity' ('the 2020 Challenge') as a supplement to 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands (published in 2004) and the publication of 'Scotland's Biodiversity - a Route Map to 2020' in 2015 reflect the Scottish Government's strong commitment, working with partners, to meeting this challenge.

The targets referred to in SNH's first progress report on the 2020 Route Map are concerned with the delivery of specific outputs for each of the Priority Projects described within it. As is set out in the Route Map, these targets "focus on delivering practical benefits for biodiversity on the ground ... which will help meet the aims of the 2020 Challenge and the Aichi Targets over the next 5 years" but that the Route Map 'intentionally is not a catalogue of all activity that is underway or planned, but rather it sets out six 'Big Steps for nature' and a number of priority projects which focus on collaborative work which the Scottish Government and a wide range of partners are taking forward to help deliver the 2020 Challenge and to improve the state of nature in Scotland'.

The 'State of Nature 2016' report and its Scottish supplement is published by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and is the result of a collaboration between 25 UK conservation organisations. It is a very helpful contribution to the debate about biodiversity across the UK and in Scotland but as the data and measurements used are different from those used to report on progress of the 2020 Route Map and of the Aichi targets, it is difficult to directly compare these reports. The State of Nature report describes changes in specific species over time using trend data and indicators and it uses long-term data (1970 to 2013) and short-term data (2001-2013) for 1,085 terrestrial and freshwater bird, butterfly and plant species that occur in Scotland. The report highlights a Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) which assesses historical loss of nature across centuries and it uses a UK analysis subdivided by species found in Scotland.

Policy framework and reporting structure for biodiversity

We have a multi-layered reporting structure in relation to biodiversity. This is because we are required to report at a Scotland, UK and international level and, inevitably, this can appear complex. The diagram at Annex A shows the different reporting requirements and how they fit together. There are clear linkages between the Aichi targets, the outcomes of the 2020 Challenge and the priority projects and targets in the 2020 Route Map. SNH has a more detailed diagram on its website showing these linkages, which can be viewed here <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1614946.pdf>.

The Committee has highlighted the role of the Land Use Strategy (LUS). The LUS has a role in providing a high-level national policy framework for the use of Scotland's land. This is expressed through the Strategy's three strategic Objectives and the Principles for Sustainable Land Use. As such, the LUS encourages a strategic, integrated and informed approach to land use with the aim of delivering multiple benefits from our land resources. Biodiversity, clearly, is one of the benefits which land use can provide, and both the 2020 Challenge and the 2020 Route Map are aligned with the strategic policy direction in the LUS.

On the review of biodiversity and land use governance structures, the Committee will be aware from my letter on this of 26 July 2016 that a governance review was completed but not considered by Ministers before the Scottish Parliament election in May 2016. The review concluded that revised arrangements should be introduced under the ambit of the Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (RAFE) Delivery Board, which brought together the chief executives or equivalents from public sector environmental and agricultural organisations under the joint chairmanship of the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead MSP) and the then Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Dr Aileen McLeod MSP). Since May 2016, the RAFE Delivery Board has continued to meet informally at official level to work on issues of common interest. Ministers have yet to consider what formal arrangements they wish to see in place of the RAFE Delivery Board, and also how they wish to deal with biodiversity and land use governance. However, I can confirm that the delivery support structures in the form of working groups and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Co-ordination Group, chaired by Scottish Natural Heritage, have continued to meet regularly to support and coordinate the delivery of the 2020 Challenge and the 2020 Route Map.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, a RAFE 'Leading Together' stakeholder event held by Mr Lochhead in March 2016 under the auspices of the RAFE Delivery Board drew together leaders from public bodies and key stakeholders to discuss the portfolio's outcomes and priorities. A further meeting was held on 28 July 2016 specifically to consider follow-up to the EU referendum on a range of environmental and climate change issues. Officials expect

to arrange further stakeholder meetings on biodiversity and land use in the course of this year.

Information and monitoring

In relation to the Committee's specific question on the completion of the Habitat Map of Scotland, which is an objective of the 2020 Challenge and a specific target in the 2020 Route Map, I can confirm that a complete map of Scotland is on track for publication by 2019. This timescale meets the target in the 2020 Route Map. SNH is co-ordinating the preparation of this interactive map, which will be made freely available through the SEWeb portal.

The Committee has referred to the development of ecosystem health indicators (EHIs). These are a suite of 13 metrics which characterise the condition, natural function and resilience of ecosystems. They are a ground-breaking part of the wider suite of biodiversity indicators, with strong links to Scotland's Natural Capital Asset Index developed by SNH. The partnership work on developing the EHIs is being overseen by an EHI subgroup of the Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy Science Support Group. SNH has already published some of its EHI components, such as condition results for protected areas. These, along with the other EHI components, will be processed through the SEWeb Spotfire application for viewing at a landscape scale, defined by 10 river sub-basin management areas. The original 13 indicators are on schedule to be published on SEWeb by September 2017, with a further five indicators published by March 2018.

Implications of leaving the European Union

The Committee will recall that I wrote on 18 November 2016 to provide an update on the work being undertaken in my portfolio on the implications of the EU referendum. I outlined in the letter and during the Parliamentary debate on 27 October 2016 that, while the EU referendum outcome does not affect our ambitions for the environment, we must recognise that a future outside the single market would make these ambitions a lot harder to achieve. For example, we have been able to develop and maintain our high standards because the EU has created arrangements for trade between partner nations that respect and promote progress in social and environmental protection. In [Scotland's Place in Europe](#) published in December 2016, the Scottish Government set out proposals to protect Scotland's place in, and relationship with, Europe. This acknowledged that the environment has been an important EU competence and argued that maintaining, protecting and enhancing Scotland's environment will be best achieved through on-going co-operation at the European and International levels and by ensuring that future trading arrangements recognise the mutual gain to nations and their citizens from requiring high environmental standards.

The Scottish Government's preference is that the whole of the UK should retain membership of the single market in all its aspects, guaranteeing the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and people. We believe these arrangements are the right ones for Scotland and for the UK and we will continue to press the UK Government to pursue them in the forthcoming negotiations. The Scottish Government is exploring all options to protect Scotland from a 'hard' Brexit, where defaulting to the World Trade Organization rules has been assessed by economists as costing 80,000 jobs across the Scottish economy.

I am pleased that the Committee has highlighted the significant impact leaving the EU may have on research and academic funding. My portfolio directly supports a number of world leading research institutes in Scotland to provide cutting edge advances in agriculture, food and environmental research and which have helped boost the performance of our rural economy and enhance our environment. I met the Directors and Chairs from Scotland's

Main Research Providers on 24 November 2016 to consider how Brexit may impact non-UK employees and future access to EU funding.

Indeed, EU funding benefits Scotland significantly by supporting jobs, delivering infrastructure, sustaining rural communities, providing valuable support for the farming and fishing industries and delivering research funding for universities. The Chancellor's statement on 3 October 2016 begs more questions than answers regarding longer term funding, and the Scottish Government continues to seek clarity from the UK Government on what will replace European Union funding streams after the UK leaves the EU.

I am attaching at Annex B a response to the Committee's detailed questions relating to each of the 2020 Route Map Priority Projects.

I am grateful for the Committee's interest in biodiversity as an important area of policy and I look forward to continuing to work constructively with the Committee on this over the coming months.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roseanna', written in a cursive style.

ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM

Relationship between Reporting Requirements for Biodiversity in Scotland

INTERNATIONAL- Convention on Biological Diversity

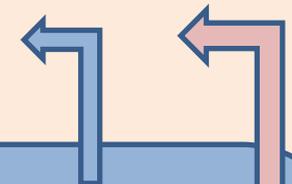
The Convention on Biological Diversity (CoP 10) adopted the Strategic Plan and the 20 Aichi Targets setting global targets for 2020. The UK is a signatory.

UK

Convention on Biological Diversity – Sixth National Report - UK level – December 2018

Monitoring based on four country Aichi reports and biodiversity strategy reports

Plus **Global Plant Strategy – December 2018**



SCOTLAND

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy – 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity

The 2020 Challenge is Scotland’s response to the Aichi Targets (2010) set by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (2010) and the European Union’s Biodiversity Strategy for 2020 (2011).

Reporting – Ministerial 3-yearly report to Parliament on progress – Jan - 2014, 2017, 2020

Monitoring through delivery of International Aichi Targets and Scottish biodiversity and people engagement Indicators

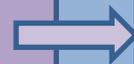


Scotland - Route Map to 2020

Sets out 12 Priority Projects – undertaken on a large scale and requiring partnership working

Reporting – Annual – September – from 2016

Monitoring through delivery of projects and Route Map targets (Lead SNH)



Scotland Report on Aichi Targets

Sets out the progress made towards the Aichi targets in Scotland.

Reporting – Annual – December – from 2017 (interim report published September 2016)

Monitoring through Scottish biodiversity Indicators, natural heritage trends and indicators plus development of new indicators (SNH lead)

Progress on the Route Map to 2020 Priority Projects**Priority 1 – Restoration of Peatland**

The 5,100ha peatland restoration target within the 2020 Route Map is on track. Since January 2013, funding provided to SNH has enabled the condition of over 10,000 ha of peatland to be improved through restoration management.

Peatlands are found throughout Scotland and, although the Flow Country clearly is a ‘flagship’ area in terms of quality and extent, scientific research and peatland restoration effort, a considerable amount of peatland restoration also takes place elsewhere in Scotland. For example, of the 157 restoration projects funded via SNH’s Peatland Action Project since 2013, 12 have been in the Flow Country. Peatland Action has actively encouraged projects from across Scotland, from the Borders to Shetland. Every funding round has been over-subscribed with applications, with private landowners submitting a larger proportion of applications year-on-year – more than 50% of all applications in 2015/16. There is certainly no lack of engagement with landowners/managers. In terms of funding, there are undoubtedly increasing demands as more land managers, NGOs, community groups and private estates appreciate the multiple benefits of healthy peatlands.

I would agree that certainty of funding is important to giving confidence to land managers and contractors. It also allows for more strategic planning and the development of coordinated activity and can thus be more efficient. Support, of various kinds, for land managers is recognised as essential, with ready access to experienced project officers having proved the most effective to date.

Building on the programme which restored 10,000 hectares of peatland since 2013, the Scottish Government has identified an ambitious programme of further peatland restoration in the draft Climate Change Plan - 10,000 hectares in 2017/18, increasing to 20,000 hectares a year. The Plan highlights the direct carbon contribution as well as the substantive co-benefits such as to biodiversity and natural flood management. As part of delivering this ambition it is recognised that an indication needs to be provided as to financial and other support, such as technical capacity and skills. We recognise that this is not just an issue for Government but one of wider partnership working, eg linking to the Heritage Lottery Fund and to the Peatland Code. The additional £8million that has been identified to support Peatland Action in 2017/2018, is a clear indication of the Scottish Government’s commitment to support peatland restoration.

In terms of the specific point in relating to forestry, the Scottish Government has a policy not to establish woodland on deep peat. The position is articulated in the UK Forestry Standard, the agreed standard for sustainable forest management in the UK, which states that as a result of the potential for significant negative habitat and climate impacts owners are required to: *“Avoid establishing new forests on soils with peat exceeding 50 cm depth and on sites that would compromise the hydrology of adjacent bog habitats.”*

Priority 2 – Restoration of Native Woodland

I look forward to receiving the Committee’s views on the SNH report on deer management, following the evidence sessions the Committee has been holding with stakeholders and with SNH. Scottish Ministers will respond to the Committee and to the SNH report in due course.

I note the Committee's point about the percentage of Western Atlantic Oakwoods SACs which are in unfavourable condition. The most recent figures show that for the 21 SACs for Atlantic Oakwoods in western Scotland, 57% were classed as in favourable condition in November 2016. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) condition is monitored by SNH through their Site Condition Monitoring assessments.

In response to the Committee's concerns regarding the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) within the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), I am confident that this mechanism can support our commitment to deliver improvements in native woodland condition through restoration projects. I believe that the FGS can accommodate applications to plant smaller diverse woodlands where they are appropriate.

The FGS is competitive and only the highest scoring projects are approved. The threshold for approval is dependent on the level of demand and available budget at the time of application. Applications for improving the condition of designated native woodlands are a priority in terms of woodland restoration and are considered as part of the process to consider applications.

We are working with key partners to improve the condition of Scotland's Native Woodland and are confident we will deliver the 2020 Challenge target to "increase the amount of native woodland in good condition". Funding is available, under the FGS to land owners to improve and restore native woodland condition.

In terms of the wider issue of compliance with international targets, the Committee will be aware that, while biodiversity policy is a devolved matter, responsibility for reporting on the international Aichi targets is a matter for the UK Government. We are unaware of any sanctions for non-compliance with the Aichi targets.

In response to the Committee's specific question regarding the National Rhododendron Strategy, I can confirm that the Scottish Government, through joint work by Forestry Commission Scotland and SNH, is finalising a national approach to controlling invasive rhododendron in Scotland. The approach encourages landscape-scale partnership work, specifically within designated sites. The aim is to publish a final draft in March 2017, which will reaffirm the position that control of invasive species is the responsibility of landowners.

Priority 3 – Restoration of Freshwaters

In response to the Committee's request for further information on the work underway to identify and understand climate change impacts on freshwater habitats, estuaries and associated biodiversity, I can confirm that SNH and others have collected data for key freshwater species, habitats and wildlife sites in recent years, including freshwater pearl mussel, lampreys, and plant communities in freshwater lochs. Monitoring networks such as the Upland Waters Monitoring Network and the Environmental Change Network also provide important baseline information about freshwaters in montane environments and help us understand potential climate change impacts. In addition, palaeoecological research, such as ongoing PhDs that are describing baseline conditions and examining recent climate change effects in freshwater lochs, also contribute to our understanding and ability to help manage these effects. Work is underway to help freshwaters in montane areas adapt to future climate change. For example, the Pearls in Peril LIFE+ project has completed the planting of riparian woodland along more than 80km of riverbanks in the upper reaches of the River Dee and River South Esk catchments to help reduce peak summer temperatures which could damage resident salmon populations.

In relation to other significant risks to freshwater habitats, the River Basin Management Plans for Scotland and Solway Tweed identify a number of pressures on freshwater habitats including water quality, the physical condition of the water environment, restriction of fish migration, water flows and levels, and the spread of invasive non-native species. To address these pressures, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is working with partners to undertake restoration in five catchments in Scotland namely: River Dee, River South Esk, River Nith, Glazert Water (part of River Kelvin catchment) and River Leven. Scoping studies have been completed which have identified sites that will deliver multiple benefits through restoration action including; improvements of physical morphology (shape and structure), flood management, ecological status, biodiversity and public access. The next phase will involve detailed design of the restoration work required to deliver these public benefits and will involve local communities and communities of interest.

More specifically, the wild fisheries reform agenda continues to make good progress, supported by the work of a stakeholder reference group which has established five working groups. The group outputs will enable us to pilot modernised structures, improved fisheries management plans and a national training/continuous professional development matrix in 2017. These products will deliver better national and local management of wild fisheries and will help build the foundations for a more secure and sustainable sector, in advance of planned future legislation.

I wrote to the Committee on 24 November about the outcome of the consultation on the 2017 salmon conservation assessments and they have now been taken forward through the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations. As previously advised, the 2017 assessments have been made on a more localised basis, categorising salmon populations at the level of river where the data is available and incorporating available local data and knowledge. In addition to this, the Committee might be interested in Marine Scotland's work on a national temperature network. Further details can be found at <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/Freshwater/Monitoring/temperature>

Priority 4 – Benefits from and Investment in Natural Capital

The Committee's letter refers to the views expressed in the State of Nature Report 2016 that the 'on track' assessment for this Priority Project is 'preliminary'. The assessment relates to Priority Project 4 in the 2020 Route Map, not to the State of Nature Report. All three ongoing actions under this Priority Project are in progress and only the planned work to identify opportunities for new investment by business in green infrastructure in the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) area is not yet progressing. The inclusion of the Natural Capital Asset Index (NCAI) as an indicator in the National Performance Framework (NPF) is evidence that we are raising awareness of our reliance on natural capital and that we are committed to valuing it better. However, the NCAI does not track business investment in natural capital, and existing metrics to monitor such investment are imperfect, hence the assessment in the 2020 Route Map Progress Report that further work is needed on this action.

Funding for the Scottish Forum for Natural Capital (SFNC) comes from a number of sources and the SFNC itself is currently considering how it can maintain or increase funding for the next financial year. SNH provides funding to the SFNC via their grant to Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Scottish Government made a modest contribution to the SFNC in the previous financial year. A further contribution is being considered.

The SFNC continues to engage Scottish businesses, via seminars, briefings etc and also provides help to Scottish organisations interested in applying the Natural Capital Protocol.

The Protocol was developed by the Natural Capital Coalition and was launched in July 2016. It is a framework designed to help generate trusted, credible, and actionable information for business managers to inform decisions. It aims to support better decisions by including interactions with nature or, more specifically, natural capital. The Protocol offers a standardized framework to identify, measure, and value impacts and dependencies on natural capital.

Crown Estate Scotland and Scottish Land and Estates are currently exploring the scope to test the Natural Capital Protocol for potential application in future land use decision making and sustainable land management. Scottish Government and SNH officials and the SFNC have been involved in discussions around the project, which currently is at outline project proposal stage.

Priority 5 – More People Experiencing and Enjoying Nature

I do not share the Committee's view that improving infrastructure, information, campaigns and provision of activities and events contributes to only a marginal increase in adult outdoor visits. The growth in the number of weekly visits to the outdoors since 2006 is significant in terms of change to public attitudes and the behaviours it represents (a 1% change involves circa 50,000 people). But I do agree with Committee that there is no room for complacency, and there is more Scotland needs to do collectively to engage more people who are currently less likely to visit the outdoors.

The Route Map to 2020 contains a number of actions to specifically address this, including the general provision of quality greenspace through development planning and place-making; the establishment and promotion of the National Walking and Cycling Network; and investment in green infrastructure serving areas of disadvantage through the European Regional Development Fund green infrastructure intervention fund. However, as the progress report on the Route Map to 2020 noted (at page 19), further focus is needed on ensuring that investments in infrastructure are supported by sustained campaigns and outreach projects focused on people who are not currently visiting the outdoors regularly (for an overview see <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1480512.pdf>).

The Scottish Government and its public sector partners have funded – and continue to fund – a number of research projects to help us understand more about why some groups are less likely to visit the outdoors or enjoy nature (and therefore experience biodiversity). The research tells us that there are a number of common barriers – both real and perceived – relating to the decision to visit the outdoors, the journey to get there and a person's experiences once they have arrived. A range of actions are needed to redress the imbalance. These include: providing quality greenspaces that meet people's needs; creating opportunities for active participation; prioritising areas of deficiency in the most deprived urban areas; and building commitment to inclusion and competence in equalities among greenspace providers.

SNH have also previously undertaken research with Scotland's two National Parks on the barriers to using the outdoors. This looked specifically at young people, people with low incomes, people with disabilities and black and ethnic minority groups – see <http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/park-authority/how-we-can-help/outdoor-learning/education-resources/getting-scotlands-national-parks-national-nature-reserves-report/>

An action research programme with a range of groups was also delivered in 2009/11 – see <http://www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-recreation-and-access/increasing-participation/broadening/learning-through-doing/>.

Since then, SNH have developed an in-house resource of the research on the barriers which is updated regularly in conjunction with RAFE bodies.

You refer to the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). The CSGN is already a large and ambitious project which is the biggest of its kind in Europe. The CSGN has a particular focus on disadvantaged communities, where the biggest health and quality of life improvements can be made: 86% of Scotland's severely deprived areas are found in the current CSGN area. By targeting activity in this way, work to develop green infrastructure, strategic routes for active recreation and travel and habitat connectivity are all contributing to the step change in approach the project is seeking to deliver on the ground. Through development planning, there is scope for other cities in Scotland outwith this area to learn from the CSGN and develop green networks, though the issues of connectivity these urban areas face are different and would produce different types of networks.

Priority 6 – Taking Learning Outdoors

The benefits of outdoor learning are fully acknowledged and supported by the Scottish Government. SNH has been at the forefront of engaging with the education sector over a number of years and a summary of SNH's contribution was provided to the Committee on 1 December 2016. Their approach to engagement is outlined in that submission and remains relevant.

However, the Committee is right to highlight the importance of this area of the 2020 Challenge and the issues it raises are well recognised. Baseline research commissioned by SNH with partner public bodies including Education Scotland shows that there has been progress in increasing the amount of outdoor learning, especially pre-school and primary years since 2006 – see <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2225>

Working with Education Scotland and other public bodies, SNH are planning to develop and promote a common pathway for outdoor learning which will provide the framework within which the range of projects and provision of places for regular, frequent and occasional activity can be better understood. I am hopeful that this will help address the Committee's concerns in this area.

Priority 7 – Developing Scotland's Natural Health Service

The role which biodiversity can play in contributing to health is increasingly recognised, and our health services have a key role to play. The scope of the ambition for Scotland's natural health service, as reflected in the current Natural Health Service Action Programme, is broader than that articulated in the 2020 Route Map target. There is considerable scope to embed this agenda into plans for a new public health strategy, as well as the increased investment around mental health as highlighted in the Scottish Government's latest Programme for Government.

As the Committee notes, a key barrier to further progress is around the capacity within national and local health boards, given all the pressures on traditional frontline services. Finding additional funding for this new programme is also an issue for both existing health and environment budgets. Rather than a single fund, resourcing for implementation of each

element of the programme is being sought from a range of national bodies and local health boards. The steering group for the programme has also agreed to focus available resources on parts of the programme, including the second phase of the NHS greenspace intervention and the development of local green exercise partnerships.

Further detail of the work underway is available in SNH's recent briefing to the Committee dated 1 December 2016.

Priority 8 – Protecting Areas in Good Condition

I note the Committee's comments in relation to the favourable condition target and the questions from stakeholders around the definition of favourable condition. The measure of the 2020 Challenge target to achieve 80% of natural features in favourable condition is the 'Improve the Condition of Protected Nature Sites' National Performance Indicator:

<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/naturesites>

The data for the National Performance Indicator comes from SNH's Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) programme, which is a rolling programme of monitoring of natural features on protected sites to determine their condition and management, and wider environmental influences on them.

The National Performance Indicator defines 'favourable condition' as:

- SCM Assessed Favourable or Unfavourable Recovering
- SCM Assessed Unfavourable, but since the assessment management measures have been taken to address all causes of unfavourable condition, such that recovery can be predicted, given an appropriate period of time - known as Unfavourable Recovering Due to Management.

The Unfavourable Recovering Due to Management category is a recognition that it may be a prolonged period between repeat SCM assessments (SCM monitors approx. 50% of natural features in a 6 year period), where progress made on the ground improving condition would not be recognised, if SCM results were the sole indicator of improvements made.

Resilience of the Data

The National Performance Indicator has been assembled, and reported on, in the same way since 2007. Since 2011, the integrity of the data has been further reinforced through the status of the National Performance Indicator as an Official Statistic and the rules and regulations which apply to its production.

Work to Maintain Condition

The Delivering Favourable Condition project is reliant on incentives for land managers to make changes to their management practices, where they are not currently consistent with maintaining/restoring the natural feature to favourable condition. In recent years, this has been provided through three main sources – Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme (and predecessors), Forestry Grant Scheme (and predecessors) and SNH's Management Agreement programme.

Priority 9 – Conservation of Priority Species

I accept the Committee's point that some species and habitats are in decline, although it is also true that the picture is mixed and not always as stark as presented in the State of Nature Report. The 2020 Challenge and 2020 Route Map seek to address declines through

targeted action on priority species, but also more joined up action to improve ecosystem health and to address the drivers of biodiversity change. We have no evidence to suggest that this twin track approach does not remain valid. This is also the approach supported and promoted by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Committee has asked whether the species focused projects in the Route Map to 2020 are focused on the 'right' species. The species section in the Route Map to 2020 was largely based on existing activity or proposals and was developed in close discussion with environmental NGOs and our public sector delivery partners, such as SEPA, SNH and the National Parks. These projects were identified and developed in response to species conservation requirements. As noted in the Route Map to 2020 progress report SNH will complete a review in 2017 to help set future priorities. The need for this review is also reflected in Outcome 4 of the 2020 Challenge, which includes a key step to develop a wildlife management framework to address the key priorities for sustainable species management, conservation and conflict issues.

The Committee highlights the potential role of adaptive management. Adaptive management means following best practice in policy development and project planning: monitoring, evaluating and reviewing actions and being flexible to change actions to reflect new knowledge. It is relevant to a wide range of situations where there is uncertainty and its value is already recognised in the 2020 Challenge in relation to an adaptive approach to land and conservation management. SNH, on behalf of the Scottish Government, has used the approach specifically in wildlife management situations such as the adaptive management pilots for geese. Taking an adaptive approach is also one of SNH's eight principles for helping nature adapt to climate change.

The Committee has also requested further clarity of purpose and coordination in relation to the 2020 Challenge. The 2020 Route Map is very clear on the priority activities that need to be pursued and SNH will continue to co-ordinate and lead this work on behalf of the Scottish Government. As the 2020 Route Map Progress Report indicates, further work will also be undertaken to identify any areas of new activity to combat the negative drivers of biodiversity change. Key factors to consider in this process include:

- progress on Aichi targets;
- changes to the drivers of biodiversity change and their significance;
- changes to natural heritage trends identified through monitoring activity; and the
- views of stakeholders, including reports such as the recent State of Nature Report.

An initial review exercise at the first stakeholder workshop in March 2016 did not identify any significant changes needed at that point. But it did flag up concerns over the need to do more to address the perceived public disconnect with nature and lack of awareness and value placed on the benefits it provides to people.

Priority 10 – Improving Ecological Connection

I note the Committee's concerns regarding ecological connectivity. This is an important aspect of biodiversity resilience, particularly in response to climate change. In this context, SNH are leading some work on developing ideas for a national ecological network, including asking several environment NGOs if they can develop a collective view on what such a network should comprise in practice. This will help inform further work on this topic over the coming year.

It is also important that we incorporate green networks into our built environment. Local development plans across Scotland contain a range of policies and proposals which protect and promote natural heritage and green networks, all of which contribute to ecological connectivity. Planning authorities across Scotland have taken different approaches to planning for green networks and identifying enhancement opportunities. An initial assessment undertaken by SNH indicates that 25 of the 34 local planning authorities either have green network plans or strategies in place (either in the local development plan or in statutory or non-statutory guidance) or are in the process of preparing them. This includes 17 of the 19 planning authorities within the CSGN area.

Individual planning decisions are made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. As such, the impact on and provision for ecological networks is taken into account where relevant in planning decision making.

Priority 11 – Sustainable Land Management

In terms of ensuring that best practice is shared and adopted across the land management sector, I would like to highlight two excellent examples of how we are approaching this challenge. The first of these is the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) which was launched on 15 May 2015. The KTIF is part of the SRDP 2014-2020 and has a budget of £10M. The KTIF has two main aims. Firstly, it will provide financial support for vocational training, skills development and knowledge transfer projects focused on agriculture. This will be delivered through workshops, training courses, coaching, information dissemination actions and farm visits. Secondly, the scheme will fund eligible agricultural demonstration / benchmarking and similar types of projects (e.g. Monitor Farms); and experimental and/or pilot projects that aim to introduce new and innovative approaches in agricultural practice. To date, 14 projects have been approved under the KTIF. There are a range of projects that support environmental aims, biodiversity and High Nature Value farming and crofting. Recently a Soil Association project was funded to support High Nature Value farming. Currently nine monitor farms and five demonstration farms are being recruited. These farms will all have environmental objectives.

The second example is the Farm Advisory Service. Access to the best and most up-to-date advice is essential to any farming and crofting business. The new Farm Advisory Service is aimed specifically at farmers and crofters across Scotland, and provides a faster and less complicated entry point to a range of relevant practical advice, information and tools, including business efficiency, green farming, environmental, biodiversity and climate change advice. Full details are available at <https://www.fas.scot/>

The Committee's letter refers to future approaches to, and funding of, high nature value farming if the UK leaves the EU. We recognise the benefits to biodiversity and other ecosystem services offered by high nature value farming systems in Scotland. High nature value farmers and crofters currently receive income support through Pillar 1 payments and the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme. Additional support is available under relevant SRDP schemes, such as the Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme, and under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme and Croft House Grant Scheme. The EU Referendum result does not reduce our ability – nor our desire – to protect the environment and rural economy. While there is assurance that funding contracts for structural funds, fisheries and farming projects that are entered into before the UK leaves the EU will be paid in full, there are no guarantees on EU funding streams after the UK leaves the EU. Our priority will be to ensure that Scotland receives at least the level of funding received under the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) at the time of leaving the EU, irrespective of funding levels in

England, plus the convergence uplift that the UK government failed to secure during the current CAP.

The Committee has also sought the Scottish Government's view on whether the Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES) Initiative has enough coverage across Scotland. WES is delivering across Scotland. There are now approximately 1 million acres already under WES Level 2 independently accredited quality management, which includes two of the biggest NGOs, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the National Trust Scotland. There is growing diversity there too, with different types of estates, farms and owners as well as sporting estates.

Priority 12 – Increasing Environmental Status of our Seas

The Scottish Government has made considerable progress towards having an ecologically coherent and well managed Marine Protected Area network as required under Aichi Target 11. There are already around 20% of our seas in protected areas, and the scale of our network puts Scotland at the forefront of marine conservation. We continue to work towards delivering requisite management measures for existing protected areas. Over the course of the next year the Committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise some of these proposed measures.

The Scottish Government continues to make progress towards having an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas. Recent work has focused on requirements under the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives. In September 2016, I designated Europe's largest Special Area of Conservation for harbour porpoise, one of the marine mammal species. Since July 2016, SNH and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) have been consulting on proposals for 15 Special Protection Areas to protect a wide range of bird species which use the marine environment.

There are four MPA proposals still to be considered. If taken forward these would protect basking shark, and marine mammals (namely minke whale and risso's dolphin). A decision on whether to proceed to public consultation is likely to be taken in late 2017, once other priority work is completed.

The Scottish Government has some of the largest reef protected areas in Europe. In fact, the European Commission recently concluded that the UK had designated sufficient reef Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. The sea trout has never been listed as a species for which MPAs are potentially appropriate. The European spiny lobster is listed as a species for which MPAs are potentially appropriate, but to date no suitable evidence based sites have been identified.

There are two monitoring strategies in development. The first is being developed by the Scottish Government specifically for monitoring protected areas in Scotland's Seas. This is expected to become operational in early 2017. The second is a UK-wide marine monitoring strategy. This is being developed by the JNCC on behalf of all the UK administrations. This is at an earlier stage of development, and an exercise of considerable magnitude. At this point there is no implementation date for this strategy, but current monitoring work continues in the meantime. This is contained within the Monitoring Programme outlined for the purposes of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. There will be significant resource challenges for successful delivery of both of these strategies given budgetary constraints.

Aichi Interim Report

The Aichi Interim Report is the first time data has been collated and analysed to assess progress against the Aichi Targets and Scotland is leading the way in the UK in undertaking this work. It is vital that this work is undertaken in advance of 2020 so that we are in a position to properly assess and report against the Aichi Targets in due course. SNH acknowledge that there are challenges associated with some of the data and that further work is required. For example, some of the required data has to be derived from UK indicators and will require disaggregation or updating. However, as set out in the Interim Report, work is already underway and includes key specialists or experts. Progress reports will be available in 2017 for the remaining seven Aichi Targets not included in the recent Interim Report. Effective resourcing of this work and a collaborative approach across the Scottish Government, its agencies and key stakeholders will be utilised to deliver the full suite of assessments.