

## SCOTLAND IN EUROPE - 13 OCTOBER 1999

### SECURING SCOTLAND'S NATURAL HERITAGE IN EUROPE: ROGER CROFTS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

#### Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to present the role of Scottish Natural Heritage in Europe. I will focus on four areas of opportunity where existing activity and a more integrated approach to new action at regional, Member State and European-wide level would help to secure Scotland's natural heritage in Europe. I will conclude by identifying five ingredients to achieve a more integrated approach in the future.

#### Scottish Natural Heritage in Europe

Scottish Natural Heritage is a statutory government agency established in 1992 responsible to the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament.

Our mission is:

**Working with Scotland's people to care for our natural heritage.**

This signifies the importance of maintaining and improving the close connection between people and their environment.

We recognise the importance of Scotland's natural heritage as an asset locally, nationally and globally which provides a basis for achieving sustainable development through the wise utilisation of natural resources to improve economic vitality and social well-being. With this in mind our aim is multifaceted:

**Scotland's natural heritage is an asset locally, nationally and globally. We promote its care and improvement, its responsible enjoyment, its greater understanding and appreciation, and its sustainable use now and for future generations.**

In order to deliver our extensive but integrated remit we have some 550 permanent staff and the equivalent of 100 contract staff based in 40 offices around Scotland. In addition, we have a budget of £39 million provided predominantly by the Scottish Executive.

Our role on European issues is threefold: advising, demonstrating and implementing.

We **advise** on Structure Fund programmes, plans and projects as a Competent Environmental Authority, we seek to improve the environmental component of major EU policies especially the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, and with equivalent agencies in England and Wales we advise the UK Government on the selection of sites for the Natura 2000 programme.

We play an active role in **demonstrating** how habitats and ecosystems can be restored and enhanced through the application of European funds, especially LIFE Nature, in partnership with others for Wet Woodlands, Peatlands, Atlantic Oakwoods and the Solway Goose Management Scheme. We participate in demonstrating integrated management, for example, of the coastal zone and protection of the marine environment under the Natura 2000 programme, both part funded by LIFE Nature.

As the agent for the UK Government in Scotland, we play an important role in **implementing** the EU Birds and Habitats Directive as part of the Natura 2000 programme.

### **European Environmental Policy Advances**

Any consideration of the integration of natural heritage and wider environmental issues within the European Union must recognise the very substantial advances that have been achieved in recent years. There is clear integration of environmental sustainability in the Amsterdam Treaty, there is clear recognition of environmental sustainability as a critical component of sustainable development in the fifth environmental action programme. We now look forward to the outcome of the Global Assessments of the Fifth Environmental Action programme with a view to its further implementation in practice and to the agreement and implementation of action plans on the Biodiversity Strategy and also in the EU Biodiversity Strategy which so effectively places environmental sustainability into key policy areas such as transport, energy, economic development and agriculture.

In addition, there are a number of specific instruments which have evolved over time to recognise the importance of the environment, for instance, the sustainable development component in Structural Funds exemplified in Scotland by the work in both the Objective 1 Highlands and Islands Partnership and the Objective 2 East of Scotland Partnership; for instance, in environmental conditionality, especially in the livestock regime under the CAP; and in Natura 2000 and LIFE. In addition, Agenda 2000 gives many further opportunities particularly those elements dealing with the National Envelopes and the Rural Development Regulation. We strongly welcome these advances.

### **Areas of Opportunity**

Much progress has been made in practice but there are a number of areas where, given a more integrated approach and the building in practice of environmental integration into other sectors, we could make even further progress. Four areas of opportunity are identified in the context of securing Scotland's natural heritage in Europe.

## **(1) The beef regime and the protection of geese**

On the island of Islay we have seen two parallel developments: intensification of beef production through the CAP and increase in the population of geese protected under the Birds Directive through good feeding on Islay and protection in their Arctic breeding grounds. As a result we have conflict between EU agriculture and EU nature protection instruments.

New approaches have been taken in Scotland to moderate the conflict now and to find longer-term solutions. A Voluntary Islay Goose Management Scheme costing some £0.4 million is paid for and administered by SNH to Islay farmers but this is merely a palliative to seek to compensate farmers for the damage done by over-wintering geese. More positively, the Scottish National Goose Forum has been considering new approaches to goose management which entails protected sanctuaries at one end of the spectrum through to areas where geese are scared away at the other end. Allied to this has been scientifically based studies of the biology of the goose populations to ascertain the level of population which is required in order to maintain its viability in the longer-term and to meet the legal requirements of the Birds Directive. Output from this work suggests in the case of the Barnacle Geese the need for intervention which would reduce population numbers without undermining their viability. In taking forward such a recommendation, we fully recognise that there are a number of difficult issues, including interpretation of the Birds Directive, which require to be addressed in Scotland and in Brussels.

We also consider that there are a number of other opportunities emerging as a result of the Agenda 2000 agreements. Decisions in Scotland could be taken under the Beef National Envelope: area-based payments to be given for permanent pasture targeted at less intensively managed farms and targeted top-up payments on suckler cows. We also consider that there are opportunities under the Rural Development Regulation which again can be delivered by decisions within Scotland.

## **(2) The sheep meat regime and biodiversity**

Upland agriculture has become very dependent upon the sheep meat regime and particularly the payment on sheep numbers through the Sheep Annual Premium. The direct effect of these payments is a loss of biological and landscape diversity due to under-management along with either under- or over-grazing. To combat this mismatch, we have undertaken a number of measures in the Uplands of Scotland. SNH has made a number of special local agreements with owners of land to reduce livestock and to allow biodiversity to be restored. Allied to this we have, jointly with other institutes in Scotland, developed decision support systems to help inform the appropriate level of grazing and we have provided practical guidance in the form of manuals so that grazing levels can be determined by those who manage the land.

We consider that further support could be given under the 'area payments' which Member States have discretion to deliver under Agenda 2000 and that the agri-environment regime (the Countryside Premium Scheme in Scotland) can also be used more effectively. Nevertheless, without the fundamental shift from Sheep Annual Premium based on headage to payments based on a range of objectives, which include environmental management along with sheep meat production, we

cannot achieve the desired social, economic and environmental gains which the uplands require.

### **(3) Structure funds and maintenance of ecosystems**

The Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland is internationally important as an area of patterned blanket bog (peat and pools in a elaborate and delicate ecosystem). Not only is this area recognised as a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive, and proposed as a World Heritage Site by the UK Government to UNESCO, it is also important as an area for the storage of substantial quantities of carbon. In order to support the maintenance of the ecosystem on which important plant and animal species depend, SNH has implemented a positive management scheme (£0.3m Euros per annum) to stimulate improved management of the peatlands, has joined with other partners, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to fund restoration projects where the natural system has been damaged, and with the help of EU LIFE funds (£0.2 Euros) has joined with other Member States in restoration projects.

The area is included within the previous Objective 1 programme which delivers (£4m Euros over five years). The programme has, quite correctly, an economic development orientation but it has resulted in a greater focus on manufacturing jobs and these score much higher than those concerned with utilising sustainably the natural resource. We consider therefore that there are opportunities for using the structural funds in the transitional programme in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland for jobs in eco-tourism and in environmental management as well as the development of longer-term demonstration projects in association with other EU Member States such as the Irish Republic and Finland.

### **(4) Local, national and European partnerships for coasts**

The coastal zone is quintessentially an area which requires integrated approaches. Locally in different parts of Scotland, SNH has initiated a series of partnerships focused especially on the major firths: Moray Firth, Firth of Forth and Solway Firth initially and, more recently, Firth of Tay, Firth of Clyde and the Minch. The initiatives bring together a range of partners with differing interests to identify areas of mutual understanding, to identify common aims and objectives, and to agree integrated strategies to bring them about in practice. The opportunity now arises with the help of EU LIFE Nature funds for the delivery of the strategies in practice.

A co-ordinated approach within Scotland is being delivered through the Scottish Coastal Forum and there is potential for the Forum to promote Integrated Coastal Zone Management which recognises the natural dynamics of coastal systems alongside the important economic and social benefits of the coast to host communities and to visitors.

At the European Union level, we welcome the 35 EU funded integrated coastal zone management projects and were pleased to participate in one of these in Scotland. We now see opportunity to assess progress as a result of these projects and to identify how sectoral policies can be modified to ensure more integrated approaches to the coast. At the same time, we welcome consultation by the Commission on next steps on Integrated Coastal Zone Management. We do see a number of opportunities for taking this forward but perhaps these would be helped if funding for projects in the coastal zone was conditional on an integrated coastal zone management scheme being drawn up and adopted.

### **A more integrated approach**

The four examples show that once parties come together and can share common aims and objectives, then strategic and practical solutions can be delivered. Equally, they demonstrate that there remain many opportunities for securing greater integration of policy and practice and through that integration more effective use of scarce financial and human resources.

There are five principal ingredients if we are to achieve a more integrated approach.

#### **(1) Place environmental sustainability into all sectoral policies and programmes**

Implementation in practice of the Amsterdam Treaty and related strategies, such as the Fifth Environmental Action Programme and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, will bring substantial benefits. At present there are large sums of money under different instruments being devoted to the same areas but it is very clear that the policies are not connected. Environmental sustainability and biodiversity as key components of mainstream sectoral programmes is the way forward. This is particularly important for example with the Common Agricultural Policy where we look for a significant switch of resources from commodities support to the activities under the Rural Development Regulation. In order to monitor progress we need targets and indicators to be developed and implemented. We also consider that more pilot projects for sustainable development, like those developed most effectively by the Highland and Islands Partnership and the East of Scotland Partnership would be worthwhile and we consider that there are opportunities under both the transitional funds and in the new Objective 2 areas.

#### **(2) Securing species and habitat protection in the wider countryside**

We recognise that site-based approaches, such as those undertaken through our own domestic legislation and those within the context of Natura 2000 programme, are an important component of the protection of species and habitats. However, it is clear from international experience in Europe and else where that non-site measures are equally critical as habitats and their dependent species do not recognise the artificial boundaries of protected areas. New environmental measures and associated cross-compliance in CAP and Structure Funds are important components in this approach as are the possibilities under the Rural Development Regulation. Stimulation of networks and corridors connecting protected areas have also been

proven to be a valuable mechanism in for instance, countries like the Netherlands, and could be encouraged elsewhere.

### **(3) Putting environment and people together to make the law work**

We are committed in SNH to achieving durable protection of species and habitats to sustain them in the longer-term. However, such an objective can only be achieved if it takes into account natural processes and the importance of human involvement. Good wildlife protection should always follow sound ecological principles and recognise the dynamics of natural systems. Predicting the effect, for example, of climate change on the distribution of species and habitats might call into question the viability of the present site-based approaches to maintain species and habitats which are at the geographical limits of their range. Also it is absolutely vital to ensure that local stakeholders have full engagement in the protection of wildlife and the management of the environment to achieve this in the longer-term. Wherever this has not occurred there has been conflict between local communities and conservation which has been a loss to both interests. We call therefore for the legal delivery of obligations under key directives such as the Birds and Habitats Directive without being legalistic in the interpretation of the measure which gets in the way of the overall objectives of bringing nature protection and human society much closer together.

### **(4) Integrated demonstration projects**

Projects which can demonstrate in practice new ways of doing things and achieve wider objectives have proven to be vitally important. The opportunity now exists for demonstration projects which link the different sectors and policies in a way which overcomes present conflict and poor use of scarce resources. Opportunities exist under the Rural Development Regulation, the EU Fifth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities, and Structure Funds within the new Objective 2 areas. For example, where renewable energy or waste disposal projects can come into conflict with nature protection, using existing programmes to demonstrate that an integrated approach which provides benefits to wildlife, helps to achieve targets under the Kyoto Agreement and achieves waste minimisation in tune with the EU's own strategy ought to be possible.

### **(5) Integrated spatial planning**

European programmes are delivered regionally and locally. Quite often high priority areas are defined for different reasons, and, although they may apply to the same geographic area, are not always well co-ordinated. Building on the spatial planning work undertaken in communities around the northern North Sea, we advocate the development of spatial planning units which makes sense environmentally at local, regional and Union-wide scales. Our own work on developing integrated strategies and action plans for the delivery of our remit is now focused on 21 Natural Heritage Zones which recognise the need to provide solutions that make sense for the local environment and to the local community. We see this approach evolving to link Scotland with similar biogeographic regions, particularly Member States in the Nordic countries and those states that have associate status such as Norway and Iceland. Ultimately, the achievement of sustainable development to accord with the

Amsterdam Treaty has to be delivered locally and recognise the diversity of society and of environments and the need for different solutions to be delivered locally.

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