

## SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE OPEN MEETING 1998

### PRESENTATION BY ROGER CROFTS CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(Slide 1: Title)

#### Introduction

I welcome the opportunity of giving an account of our past achievements, our current work and our aspirations for the future and introducing our work which you will see displayed around the Centre.

Let me start by reminding you of our long-standing slogan: **(text slide 2)** “Working with Scotland’s people to care for our natural heritage”. This has even greater resonance now than in 1992 when this slogan was devised. Bringing together people and their environment in Scotland is both a major challenge and a major opportunity. The Scottish Parliament will bring greater accountability for bodies like SNH and greater opportunity for policy and legislation which fits Scottish circumstances. Our aim in this new working environment therefore is **(text slide 3)** “to help people enjoy Scotland’s natural heritage responsibly, understand it more fully and use it wisely, so that it can be sustained for future generations”. Greater economic prosperity and greater social equality - alongside, and as an integral part of, using and sustaining the natural assets of the environment. This is the goal of sustainable development to which we are fundamentally committed.

Scotland's natural heritage is one of our most important assets: one for which we are renowned world-wide - **(slide 4: sea bed)** the richness of the sea-bed communities, the rapid change from sea bed to high top, the extensive areas of blanket bog, the unique machairs, the heather moorlands **(slide 5: pine)**, the pine, ash and oak forest remnants.

In Scottish Natural Heritage, we have worked hard to increase **(slide 6: LCS poster)** our knowledge of the natural heritage. The data are available for everyone to see and to use: please have a look at our GIS display later. We have also looked hard at the trends and what causes them. **(slide 7: NCMS poster)** There are many welcome features: for instance, there has been a welcome recovery of certain native species, such as the otter. But increasing numbers of other species, such as **(slide 8: graph geese, Islay)** seals, geese and red deer have created difficulties. There have also been some significant adverse changes - loss of heather moorland, loss of hedgerows, an increase in plantation forestry. All of these present challenges for which there are long term solutions but relatively few short-term fixes.

Our strategy is to work with others to care for what is in good heart, to enhance what is diminished and to restore what has been lost.

We are not a regulatory agency; nor do we have a welter of regulatory powers, **(text slide 9: Operating principles)** as our operating principles given to us by Government make clear. We work through the voluntary principle. We work in partnership with others - and that is absolutely crucial. We devolve activities to our local Area teams to get closer to the grass roots. And we seek to care for our customers - the people of Scotland and their natural heritage.

Our remit is wide: the protection and use of the natural heritage for the benefit of people, wildlife and landscapes; the encouragement of greater awareness and understanding of the natural heritage; and the promotion of greater participation through quiet informal recreation and assured access. We have a web site which you can explore in the display-room afterwards and our many and varied publications give accessible accounts of our work. And we welcome suggestions on any additional information which you would find helpful. I would draw your attention to the 5 special items available for you today. **(slide 10: Progress and Plans 98)**. First, our four-year review looking back and forward in our Progress and Plans; **(slide 11: Facts and Figures 98)** second, Facts and Figures, which is a comprehensive digest of information about our activities; third, our Introductory Briefing, fourth, our Who we are, where we are brochure, and fifth, the latest edition of our magazine.

This morning, I want to highlight our three key priorities - **(text slide 12: Access, Accolades and Public Benefits)** Access, Accolades and Public Benefits. Our work on these topics consumes no less than half of our direct staff effort and two thirds of our external expenditure. For each of them, I shall describe briefly our achievements, our future work and our expectations of our partners. Examples of work covering each of our programmes are described in our literature and can be seen in the displays.

## **Access**

Let's start with access. In 1994 we published **(slide 13: publication)** our statement of policy and action: "Enjoying the Outdoors". In it we made it clear that legislative change was required. We also made it clear that we should further test the voluntary approach to access, and at the same time lead a major initiative in increasing access provision for all.

For the last three years, we have chaired and supported, and where necessary prodded and cajoled, the **(slide 14: Access Forum)** Access Forum, a group representing the diversity of interests involved in access. The achievements which the Forum has delivered are, by common consent, substantial and well beyond what many had predicted. **(slide 15: Concordat)** The signing of the Concordat on Access to Scotland's Hills and Mountains marked a watershed in a more conciliatory approach subscribed to by 10 parties. A further 15 bodies have now endorsed the approach set out in the Concordat.

Last year, SNH was charged with the task of reviewing the law on access and making recommendations to Government. It has emerged that there remain fundamental issues which the voluntary approach cannot resolve. There are legal ambiguities: **(picture 16: bad access sign)** in particular there is no common understanding about trespass on private land in Scotland. In taking our work forward for Government, we acted upon its suggestion that we use a consultative process.

The Access Forum, chaired by the deputy chairman of SNH, Roger Wheater, was the obvious way forward. It has worked with vigour and rigour and with a great deal of hard debate, to identify and articulate its advice to SNH. The Forum has come up with a double package: clearer rights for the public on private land, and responsibilities in exercising them in order to protect privacy and safeguard land management needs and to protect the environment; and obligations on public authorities to resolve issues where they arise. The package therefore requires effort by all parties: owners and managers, and local authorities, and SNH and the general public. The fundamental recommendation from the Forum is that there should be, and I quote, **(text slide 17)** “A right of access to land and water exercised responsibly for informal recreation and passage”. The Board of SNH has supported this approach and is now submitting its advice to Government.

We consider that visitors must act responsibly according to a code of good practice; otherwise owners and their representatives will have a legitimate right to ask them to leave. Equally, we are quite clear that **(picture 18: good access to private land)** access to private land should be an intrinsic part of a package of land reform. The vital elements should be recognition by all owners and managers that they have a duty of stewardship of the land for the benefit of the wider public, and that this should be backed up with codes of good practice, preferably statutory. Careful consideration should be given to ensuring that stewardship on behalf of the public is undertaken, with the ultimate sanction being the withdrawal of public financial support to those who do not follow the codes.

Changing the legislative basis for access, however, will not on its own resolve the deficiencies in the provision for access in Scotland. **(picture 19: poor access Central Belt)** We remain convinced that investment both in new paths and in improvement of the state of existing paths is essential.

We have invested substantially in upgrading long-distance routes, **(picture 20: WHW)** particularly the West Highland Way and the Southern Uplands Way. We are about to embark on a major investment in the extension of the Speyside Way. And we hope to embark on delivery of the new **(map 21: Great Glen Way)** Great Glen Way from Fort William to Inverness in the next two years. We have also contributed to other linear routes, **(picture 22: coastal path)** for instance around the coast of Fife, and the St Cuthbert's Way in the Borders, and the Clyde Walkway. **(picture 23: footpath repair)**. And we have invested in the restoration of mountain footpaths leveraging resources from other partners and the EC. Take, for example, the restoration of 80 kms of footpaths in the hills of Wester Ross.

**(slide 24: statistics)** Assured access to the countryside around the cities, towns and other settlements where most of Scotland's people live is inadequate. The **(slide 25: PfA)** Paths for All Initiative, begun by SNH in 1996, heralded the beginning of a new strategic approach. The establishment of the Partnership, a company limited by guarantee, with 18 partners and currently chaired by our own chairman, Magnus Magnusson, is making effective progress. SNH's core funding, along with support from other key bodies, especially Scottish Enterprise National and Scottish Television, means that our targets of having 40 new path networks in place by 2002 should be achieved. The work of the 15 'Countryside in and around towns' projects is of immense help and substantial access improvements have been achieved, for example, in and around Glasgow.

There are many fine examples (**slide 26: Paths, brochures and maps**) of local partnership activity which set an example for others who aspire to achieve the same ends, aided and abetted by the excellent advisory and guidance material provided by the Paths for All team. Access officers in local authorities, funded by SNH, along with the work of our own Area staff, are a significant part of this concerted effort. We look to local authorities and to Local Enterprise Companies to continue their contributions. We ourselves believe that a more effective access option as part of the revised Countryside Premium Scheme would help enormously.

## Accolades for special places

I am turning now to accolades **(picture 27: Assynt)**. Everyone knows that Scotland is special and that it deserves national and international recognition for its landscape and wildlife. It is at the climatic cross-roads and is an amalgam of different geological terrains formed hundreds of millions of years ago. These factors give it a diversity of rocks, topography and soils far greater than any other land area of the same size anywhere in the world **(picture 28: Lawers flowers)**. In addition, many of our habitats and landscapes have evolved through the long connection between people and nature. **(picture 29: Flows)**. For example, The Flows of Caithness and Sutherland, the machair lands of the Hebrides, and the heather moorlands of the Grampians, depend for their very formation on natural features, but owe their present condition to many centuries of human activity. We should feel proud of these priceless assets and recognise their benefit for visitors and local communities alike.

The **(map 30: Protected areas)** special natural heritage places of Scotland form a relatively small area of Scotland's land and sea. This year we shall spend over £9 million on these special areas. **(slide 31 : newspaper headlines)** The designation and management of these areas has in some cases been highly controversial with views ranging across the spectrum from the "too much and too restrictive" to the "too little and too feeble". Yes, at times we feel caught between the proverbial rock and the hard place. We must be clear about our role and carry it out responsibly. So let me remind you of what our role is. **(slide 32: Consultation on a site)** We have a statutory duty to notify Sites of Special Scientific Interest based on published criteria applying to England, Scotland and Wales, and we have responsibilities to secure the continuation of the special features - the species and habitats, geology and landforms - of all the 1441 sites for the benefit of the nation.

Our role in protecting special places is predominantly as an advisor to Government, both locally and nationally. We make great efforts to respond to case work for the various statutory bodies.

Not all sites are being managed as well as we would like, but total losses of notified sites have been rare in Scotland. We are keen to move towards a more comprehensive basis for encouraging positive management of sites, and welcome the Government's support for this in its recent consultation paper 'People and Nature'. SNH has already moved in this direction through, for example initiatives such as the Peatland Management Scheme. This year we are also trialling a new site condition monitoring programme to ensure that we, and you, are better informed about the condition of our 'special' sites. We are encouraged by the Government's wish to try new approaches.

Perhaps designations with the highest profile in recent years have concerned those sites to be protected under the **(map 33: Natura sites)** EC Birds Directive and the EC Habitats and Species Directive - the Natura 2000 sites. The Natura 2000 programme fulfils the UK Government's commitments as a member of the European Union. On these we act as the agent of Government: advising, with our colleagues in England and Wales, on the identification of sites on a scientific basis, consulting owners and occupiers and other interests on behalf of Government about the proposed site, notifying them as Sites of Special Scientific Interest in accordance with Government policy and setting **(slide 34: Site management statement)** out in clear language the scientific basis for the site and its management needs. SNH has undertaken an extensive programme of consultation leading to the classification of 65 SPAs since 1992 under the Birds Directives, and the submission to the European Commission of 123 candidate SACs under the Habitats Directive. The tight timescales for some of this work have caused difficulties for ourselves, and others, and have prompted us to consider how we could improve designation procedures. In the past few months we have developed, with Government, a tangible example of this approach in our support scheme for **(picture 35: corncrakes)** corncrakes. We look forward to increased use of this approach.



There have been some significant recent disputes **(picture 36: Coire Cas Cairngorm)** but nevertheless most of the sites have been identified and consulted upon and accepted by local interests. The recent judicial review case in relation to the Cairngorms consumed a great deal of SNH resources and showed the complexity of the work which we are required to undertake to fulfil our duty to the Government. Obviously we are pleased that the Judge in this case endorsed SNH's approach.

Let us remember that it is not the designation itself which is important. What matters is securing the long-term survival and, where appropriate and possible, the improvement of the wildlife assets of these areas. **(picture 37: Islay Geese)** We are acutely aware of the perilous state of agriculture and the need to re-focus resources to deliver quality agriculture, quality environment and quality of life. Here we feel strongly that incentives for agriculture should be more helpful in achieving the Government's other rural objectives including protection of the environment. We have argued strongly, and will continue to argue, for more positive incentives, and additional resources devoted to the Countryside Premium Scheme and targeted at Natura 2000 sites.

**(slide 38: list designations)** We welcome the completion of the Government's review of designations. In particular, we welcome the Government's proposals for National Parks, its desire to strengthen the basis of National Scenic Areas, its radical review of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and its confirmation of our new policy on National Nature Reserves.

We also welcome the role which the Government has asked us to play in advising it on National Parks and National Scenic Areas and the input which we are able to make from our extensive knowledge and experience of the working of the SSSI system. It is not our role to provide definitive answers over the next few weeks on all of these issues, but rather to help take forward the process of deliberation and decision-making which will, we hope, ultimately result in new legislation tailor-made for Scottish circumstances which learns the lessons from experience in this and other countries.

Our proposals and options (**slide 39: National Parks Consultation Paper**) for National Parks are now out for public consultation and we look forward to thoughtful and considered responses in order to help us provide our advice to Government. The basis of our approach is for a contract between national and local interests to be enshrined in the first National Parks legislation for Scotland (**slide 40 text of 4 purposes**) with four key purposes: protection and enhancement of wildlife and landscape, sustainable use of the resources of the areas, social and economic benefits for local communities, and the informal enjoyment of these areas. We look for active engagement by the key interests, both national and local, in the identification, planning and management of these areas. We also consider that Scotland's magnificent marine natural heritage should be included in the National Parks. It will be for the Scottish Parliament to decide on the legislation and on the areas to which it should be applied.

For (**picture 41: Eildon Hills**) National Scenic Areas we see the need for new legislation, a wider commitment to their protection and management with the preparation and implementation of management strategies, as the guide for all those involved.

As I said, we welcome the Government's (**slide 42: 'People and Nature' paper**) consultation on proposals for Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We have argued that new, more people-friendly, approaches are required and we have long since stated a preference for a shift from compensation to a more positive management approach. We do recognise, however, that there may not be significant resource savings in some of the changes proposed. Indeed, consultation with a wider range of local interests, and a shift from compensation to positive management incentives, are likely to take up a proportionally greater amount of SNH's resources than the existing system.

In seeking to deliver our own, and the Government's, obligations for these special places of Scotland, we are ever mindful that much of Scotland is special, in a national and international sense. We, like many, do not wish to see islands of protection in a sea of devastation. **(slide 43: Scottish Biodiversity Strategy)**. So we welcome, and take an active role in delivering the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan in Scotland. **(slide 44: beaver)**. The possible re-introduction of the European beaver is what has grabbed attention recently but it is only the tip of the iceberg. We have taken forward action on 51 separate species action plans and 38 habitat action plans and are acting as lead partners for 12 species and 4 habitats. This is a tremendous start but is only one contribution to enhancing our rural biodiversity, we need to consolidate the real benefits through putting into practice action plans for habitats where a range of species can benefit simultaneously. Of greater significance, given its prominence in the Convention on Biological Diversity signed by the Government, is the establishment of a more active approach in Scotland to the sustainable use of natural resources such as water, timber, fish and soil.

### **Benefiting people            (slide 45: People enjoying environment)**

My third topic is how to benefit people. The 1990s have been a decade of partnership. We have great pride in the way in which this approach has been embraced in SNH. However, our vision, the bringing together of people and their environment in a full and harmonious partnership, is still far from being achieved. And yet we all depend on our environment in our everyday lives and we certainly depend on it to achieve the ultimate goal of sustainable development. Deriving social and economic benefits for the population is not an environmental cop-out: it is the essence of sustainable development.

Partnership working embodies many things and we continue to seek to improve our contribution: in a number of ways. The seven secrets of benefiting people.

**First** we are clear that we need to work out our own strategy and define the action which we should take ourselves and which, we hope, our partners will share with us. Rather than have a grand strategy for the whole of Scotland, we wish to recognise the diversity of our natural heritage and the opportunities which that brings in a sort of mosaic. **(slide 46: NHZ map)** We have been working hard on a new system of looking at Scotland's natural heritage in terms of Natural Heritage Zones - 21 of them - in order to create a proper framework within which to operate. We are assessing the trends in the natural heritage assets and those aspects of activity which affect those assets for each of these zones. From that we intend to devise our own vision and to determine more specifically what actions which we can and should take in order to fulfil our statutory obligations and our duties on behalf of Government. We have also begun the process of engagement with key partner bodies - local authorities and other parts of government - to define and agree the contribution which each of them can make. This way we shall have clear and transparent locally based strategies to guide our own work and our working relationship with other partners. It will therefore feed into the important work which local authorities are leading on Local Agenda 21 plans and local biodiversity action plans as well as into the statutory planning process and the important new work on community planning.

But plans and the action flowing from them are not the only approach. A **second** critical element is the demonstration of new ways of doing things on the ground in practice. On the land we own **(map 47: SNH NNRs)** - our 80,000 acres of Natural Nature Reserves - we would not claim to be the perfect landowner. But at least we have a clear view of what we are trying to achieve in protecting the assets, and, more importantly, improving them for their own sake and for the benefit of people: **(picture 48: Cairnsmore)** managing a moorland sheep farm in Galloway, demonstrating the re-growth of over-grazed vegetation at Creag Meagaidh, **(slide 49: Beinn Eighe)** replacing the lost trees and shrubs on Rum and Beinn Eighe - these are all part of this effort. But at the same time we seek to demonstrate that public access to these areas for quiet enjoyment can go hand in hand with protection and improvement. **(slide 50: Stevenson Centre)** The educational use of reserves is a vital aspect of management and this year, for example, Magnus opened the new Stevenson Forvie Centre on the Sands of Forvie NNR.

**Third**, we work with others to demonstrate new practices. A major effort has been to discover how predator and prey can live in harmony on grouse moors. **(slide 51: Langholm harriers)** Yes, hen harriers eat grouse chicks, but if they are provided with alternative food in the short term, that should give time for the longer term improvement of the habitat. Then the grouse will have an opportunity to return and the hen harrier will flourish.

We also demonstrate, by working with farmers, how agri-technology can be used to benefit the environment: something which people seldom consider possible. **(slide 52: TIBRE manual)** Our Targeted Inputs for a Better Rural Environment Programme has already demonstrated to the enthusiastic welcome of major arable farmers how forty different techniques are not only good for the environment on their farm but also good for their business balance sheets. These and many other demonstration projects with key partners - local authorities, farmers, crofters and landowners - looking at things in a different, more connected and integrated way, are now beginning to bring benefits.

**(slide 53: Focus on Firths manuals)** **Fourth**, we seek to stimulate new approaches through partnership working. Recognising the importance of our estuaries, for economic development, for recreational activity, for transport and for the environment, we established our Focus on Firths initiative. Working with partners in the Forth, Solway, Cromarty and Moray Firths and, more recently, in the Firths of Clyde and Tay, we began the long process of developing a common agenda and devising a shared strategy. We are there, or almost there, in the first four estuaries. Now the parties recognise one another's interests, communicate effectively and share a vision and have drawn up strategies for achieving it.

**Fifth**, we provide resources to others allowing them to undertake work on our behalf. **(slide 54: Rangers in action)** Some £2m a year goes to supporting around 300 rangers in more than 90 services - providing environmental education to schools and the public. We also give grants to schools to back up their environmental education effort. We support major environmental charities in the management of their land. We have just concluded more effective and administrative efficient arrangements with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the National Trust for Scotland. We fund activities in and around towns and cities as part of our Countryside around Towns programme. We core fund the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Scotland, enabling it to employ some 20 advisers to the farming community.

**Sixth**, we help other bodies, most especially local authorities, to fulfil their functions by providing information and advice and responding to casework.

**Seventh**, and last, we need to be more effective and efficient ourselves. The resources of SNH come almost entirely from the Government in the form of grant-in-aid with a modest contribution from receipts. **(slide 55 : Money real terms)** SNH grant-in-aid has fluctuated from £34 million at the outset to £42 million in 1995/96 to the present level of almost £37 million. We welcome the Government's injection of an additional £5 million over the next 3 years. It is clear that we must use our resources wisely. Our Organisational Development Programme is improving our internal effectiveness and has clearly reduced costs. Our annual efficiency plans have enabled us to make savings of more than £8 million in 4 years.

We have put into action our External Funding Strategy and have been successful in leveraging resources from the lottery funds and from European Funds for projects which benefit both local people and visitors.

But it is also vitally important that our budget does not have to be used purely to counteract the application of resources from other government financial pockets. **(slide 56: Government Funding)** We look for more integrated and coherent approaches, we look for a cessation of subsidies from different pockets which are in conflict, we look for more financial packages which seek to satisfy a number of objectives, social, economic and environmental. We hope that the Scottish Parliament and its executive will bring about the "joined-up thinking" for which we have argued for a long time and ensure that resources which are devoted to our land and sea areas are more effectively used in the future than in the past.

To conclude, it is clear **(slide 57: Jobs book)** to us that our activities create real jobs, more than 8,000 of them being directly related to caring for the natural heritage. It is also clear that the environment itself creates jobs; there are some 29,000 jobs in open air recreation, for example.

**(slide 58: Local community activity)** We insist on people being included in, not separated from, the environment; that is an important part of the social inclusion ethic to which many now subscribe. The best manifestation of this is for local communities to make an input into the management of their vital asset: the land. We are about to launch our community grant scheme through which we hope communities will be stimulated to have a more active engagement in improving their local environment. And we want to encourage increased participation by local communities in the management of our own land. And we shall maintain our support for grants to schools for natural heritage projects which benefit pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community.

**(slide 59: cartoon)** Ladies and Gentlemen, I have given you just a flavour of our work and our aspirations. I hope you will take the opportunity to raise questions with any of my colleagues here, and to look at all the displays and exhibitions at your leisure this afternoon.

**(slide 60: name and logo)**

Thank you.