

## A COORDINATED AGENDA FOR MARINE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS SCIENCE (CAMERAS) (2011-2016)

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### **HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE) RESPONSE TO A COORDINATED AGENDA FOR MARINE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS SCIENCE (CAMERAS) (2011-2016)**

#### Introduction

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is the Scottish Government's economic and community development agency for an area which covers more than half of Scotland. We work with high growth businesses and public and voluntary sector organisations to build sustainable economic growth across a diverse region which stretches from Shetland to Argyll and from the Outer Hebrides to Moray. We are committed to developing the Highlands and Islands as a competitive region which is home to strong communities, successful, high growth businesses and excellent quality of life.

This consultation is welcomed. In forming our response, HIE is not an academic or scientific body, but recognises the huge importance academia and science offers to the region. We have invested significantly over the past 15 years in research in our role in supporting the developing University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) and other HEI's working in the region. As a result, this research base has grown from circa 25 researchers in 2000 to upwards of 150, across a range of themes, predominantly marine science, health and renewable energy related. We therefore respond to this consultation with the following emphasis:

- To highlight the contribution the Highlands & Islands can make to the wider science base, in relation to marine, environment and rural policies
- To ensure a supportive science framework to enable our key sectors to grow and be more successful
- To particularly identify opportunities in this co-ordinated agenda for the future development of renewable energy

To this end, we will respond to specific areas in the consultation. HIE does not have comprehensive knowledge of the complex 'landscape' of people, organisations and systems which deliver the scientific evidence that underpins policy development and implementation in the Marine, Environmental, Rural and related areas. For this reason, we have responded according to the areas of our expertise.

### Government Economic Strategy (GES)

HIE is fully engaged with the GES. Whilst Section 1 makes clear reference to the importance of GES and need for alignment of priorities, the areas where Marine, Environment, Rural and related policies impact on performance, as outlined in Annex 4, are less clear in section 3 of the consultation. If the content and direction of the consultation was more heavily sector or business related, these links would become more apparent and easier to interpret. The government's desired improvement in Scotland's economic performance must be closely aligned to key sectors developments, therefore CAMERAS may benefit from being more reflective of these. It is this fact that leads us to believe that the review places more emphasis on working from the bottom up - ie. basing it upon the structure of existing academic heritage, as opposed to challenging this and working from GES down - ie. what does Scotland need to have in place.

### Appropriateness of the current structure including Main Research Providers (MRPs)

HIE questions whether the current range of 'main research providers' are appropriate, recognising that they were established many decades ago against a backdrop of very different economic, political and social circumstances. The consultation is therefore timely. Between now and 2016 a different range of challenges will impact on Scotland, in particular those concerning the different usage of our natural resources to provide a significant proportion of our energy through renewable sources, which the Highlands and Islands has in abundance. Within the context of our food and drink sector, we are also conscious of increasing attention being paid at a global level to scientific advances in food production and future security of food supply. It is not clear from the consultation document that existing MRP's or Strategic Research departments reflect these priority agendas at this point in time.

In the context of Energy, HIE believes the Highlands & Islands has an excellent proposition to offer Scotland in terms of leading on marine energy environmental research. It is already driving forward this research agenda having invested (or in process of investing) approximately £9m in both physical infrastructure and research capacity in this area over 2006 - 2013. Add to this the powerful creation of the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MAST) - an SFC Research pool which incorporates 10 research institutes across Scotland (including SAMS) - and Scotland has the opportunity to grasp this agenda. HIE believes our region is well placed to lead on this, and to help fill a gap that exists within the current structure across the Marine, Environmental and Rural Affairs arena. The government is currently working hard to develop policies to support development of renewable energy. A main research provider would undoubtedly make a significant contribution to this.

In terms of the growing interest around health and wellbeing, the H & I is also very well placed to provide both the natural resources which form ingredients for new Pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals and cosmetics, but also the beautiful landscape, peacefulness, remoteness that underpin aspects of

wellness. The region is currently investigating this market with a view to developing a clearer proposition.

#### National Outcomes and Indicators

Reference Annex 4 - It is felt that these could be stronger and more focussed. They could go further to help relate back to the activity carried out within the government initiatives and organisational strategies and more work is required to make them more relevant.

#### Communicating with the wider public

This is referred to on one occasion throughout the consultation document. We would emphasise the importance of consulting, informing and engaging with the wider public on areas of research and policy development in the areas covered by this consultation. This would go some way to addressing the suspicion that can surround scientific advancement, which can lead ultimately to public criticism and rejection of new policy developments. HIE's North of Scotland STEM Partnership has made great progress in the Highlands and Islands in addressing this through programmes of engagement and education, however more could be done to engage the public in responding to global issues in a local context.

#### Links to economic success in key sectors

The headline themes are adequate, but an additional theme directing attention to key sector requirements would provide a close relationship to the GES and better guidance for any restructuring of initiatives or organisational strategies. HIE believe this is key to ensure the contribution of marine, environment and rural affairs science is maximised to the benefit of the economy, and not just science for science sake. Comments above in relation to energy and health & wellbeing apply here.

#### Theme 2: Optimising the potential of Scotland's natural assets

We endorse this fully and confirm our particular interest in resources, and activities, relating to both energy and food production and security. The Highlands & Islands have particular strength to offer these areas, whilst at the same time are particularly vulnerable due to our geographical positioning and dispersed population.

#### Theme 3: Support for Nationally Important Rural, Environmental and Marine Capability and Resource

Ensuring Scotland has a strong foundation of science to underpin current and future strategic needs is vital, but it is not clear if the current structure is fit for purpose. An audit of these may be required (this may be a direct output of this consultation). As mentioned above, the existing structure may have been fit for purpose many decades ago, but the challenges Scotland currently face in the form of climate change, infectious diseases or epidemics, environmental disasters, and the careful development of our renewable energy resources, were not necessarily being considered at that time.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has been instrumental in establishing strategic research pools. These need to be seen as new foundations to build upon for future scientific needs. These collective groupings of experts could

be utilised and thereby recognised as a fundamental addition to the national capability and resource. The consultative document makes little or no reference to these new research pools.

### Innovation and Transfer of Knowledge

Both innovation and knowledge transfer are vital if Scotland is to address its future challenges. Publicly funded science research, shared with private sector partners, will help Scotland to realise its potential. It is well documented across the UK that there is an historic difficulty in translating research into meaningful activity to support economic success. The consultation document is light in detail, underlining the fact that "the Rural Affairs and Environment portfolio budget alone is not expected to deliver all the evidence required. The wider academic sector has access to much larger budgets from the SFC and the UK Research Councils ". This is true, and HIE's response would be to suggest a greater expectation is placed upon the institutions supported by the Rural Affairs and Environment portfolio to actively transfer knowledge into working practice. Indeed, promoting and educating the research community in innovative and entrepreneurial practices would go some way to help address this. The clever use of funding streams could drive forward a change to support this aim.

### Summary

Some key points worthy of reiteration:

- Change and actions need to be more closely aligned to key sector requirements
- Outputs and indicators need to be more informed and sharpened.
- Current organisation of the scientific base supporting this agenda may need to be reviewed in light of new challenges eg. Energy - who is the main research provider?
- SFC's Research Pools are crucial new developments that need to be built into the complex 'landscape' of people, organisations and systems working in Scotland
- The Highlands & Islands has a specific proposition to offer in the field of the renewable energy and food sectors.
- Health and wellbeing is an emerging area which requires focussed scientific attention
- The importance of communication and education of science advancements with society across Scotland should be integral to any new structure.