
Scottish Natural Heritage
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A Co-ordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment & Rural Affairs Science (CAMERAS)

Thank you for giving SNH the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government consultation on CAMERAS. We welcome its comprehensive and long-term approach to science and research and we are keen to assist in its further development. Having been part of the small working group that met over the last 18 months to discuss this approach, we have restricted our comments to some of the general issues raised by the consultation paper rather than the 25 questions listed at the end. Indeed, most of those questions cover large areas (e.g. knowledge exchange, resource requirements for supporting future policy development, collaboration at UK, EU and international levels) that require full evaluation in their own right. We would be happy to be involved in helping Rural Affairs and Environment (RAE) to tease apart some of these issues as you make progress in further developing the CAMERAS approach.

Context for CAMERAS

The consultation document is helpful in setting out the background to this work, emphasising the role that science can play in realising the Scottish Government's economic strategy and its five Strategic Objectives. SNH fully accords with the statement that 'the quality of Scotland's environment and natural heritage is a key asset and a source of comparative advantage for many sectors of the Scottish economy. Protecting and enhancing Scotland's biodiversity and landscape for future generations is central to both our current and future competitiveness.' SNH continues also to be closely involved with other areas of work highlighted in this section of the CAMERAS document, such as the Climate Change Bill, the Marine Bill and the Scottish Soils Framework.

General Aims of CAMERAS

We endorse the general aims and objectives of CAMERAS. Your key objective 'to enable the organisations involved to progressively align and integrate their individual activities in support of high level priorities....' will be challenging, but if it succeeds it will be a major step forward in the sort of collaborative science that is needed in Scotland. We welcome the explicit aim of strengthening the linkages between organisations providing scientific advice, undertaking monitoring, and carrying out both applied and strategic research. The principle unquestionably is sound, and to some extent such collaboration is happening already through initiatives such as SEARS. However, SNH recognises that there is still some way to go to make these linkages really effective, especially in the area of scientific research where separate research strategies, funding arrangements, bidding procedures and timetables do not necessarily encourage close working.

Your subsidiary aim of enhancing knowledge exchange (KE) is one that we are especially interested in promoting, and through the Evidence Base Unit of SNH we have already begun to make significant progress. For example, we are represented on the NERC Knowledge Exchange Board, and we are also closely involved in KE projects on environmental change (with Glasgow University) on carbon and peatlands (also with

Glasgow), on upland research (with Aberdeen University), and we have recently given support to a consortium bid for NERC funding on KE for aspects of freshwater research. Given this range of involvement we would be pleased to work closely with RAE to develop further this area of CAMERAS.

'Headline themes' of CAMERAS

Annex 3 explains the three 'headline themes' in the consultation paper – 'Local Responses to Global Change', 'Optimising the Potential of Scotland's Natural Assets' and 'Support for Nationally Important Rural, Environmental and Marine Capability and Resource'. As the consultation paper explains, these 'are necessarily set at a broad level and encompass a wide range of complex and interacting issues.' However, for that reason it is difficult to provide a detailed answer to your question concerning possible gaps in coverage. We feel that in the next phase of CAMERAS work is needed to put some flesh on the bones within each of the three headline themes – indeed that is the only realistic way of identifying gaps and agreeing priorities. We are especially concerned to ensure the integration of work that spans the terrestrial-freshwater-coastal-marine continuum. Again, SNH would be pleased to collaborate with RAE in that exercise, drawing on our own experience in developing the SNH Research and Development Strategy, and from focused work that we are now undertaking on 'horizon scanning'.

Local Responses to Global Change

It is encouraging to see the emphasis given in CAMERAS to the subjects of climate change and renewable energy. These two areas of work feature prominently in SNH and we are active partners in a range of policy and science forums at a Scottish and a UK level. We have also responded to the recent increase in Government support for developing marine renewables by enhancing our staff capacity to deal with advice in this area. These topics provide a good example of where the three headline themes cannot sit in isolation – we need to make links between the impacts of climate change and renewable energy development in the marine environment, and we need to do so in the context of sustainable development.

Optimising the Potential of Scotland's Natural Assets

This category is where much of SNH's science output fits, including research themes in our R & D Strategy such as Biodiversity, Geodiversity, Protected Areas, Landscape, Tourism, and Coasts and Seas. There are two particular areas highlighted in CAMERAS which are likely to expand in SNH – ecosystem services and the relationship between human health and the environment. We endorse the comprehensive approach that CAMERAS takes to the former, in which ecosystem services include the support of natural ecosystems as well as the provision of benefits to human society such as energy production, flood management, or food supply. Reference in the consultation paper to economic valuation of natural assets is welcome, as is the recognition that 'it is often difficult to assign value to such assets with the attendant risk that they may be undervalued or taken for granted.' With regard to health issues, we are actively involved in exploring the links between 'healthy' ecosystems and healthy people, and would welcome further collaboration with other Government and other bodies in this field.

Support for Nationally Important Rural, Environmental and Marine Capability and Resource

SNH agrees with the basic premise in this section that research facilities, intellectual expertise and long-term data sets are essential in supporting science in Scotland. In turn,

there is an increasing recognition by SNH and others of the importance of using scientific evidence to support policy development. In SNH we continue to invest substantially in work on trends and indicators as these provide one essential element in our evidence base. At the same time we are keen to see the continued support for long-term data sets such as the Environmental Change Network and Countryside Survey as these yield essential raw material for developing a clearer understanding of how the natural heritage is changing over time.

Future Collaboration

This consultation represents an important step in streamlining science and research in support of marine, environment and rural affairs policies of the Scottish Government. We are aware that RAE is currently in the early stages of planning its new research strategy to take effect from 2011. Our own Research and Development Strategy runs to 2012; we believe there is a strong case for bringing together the research strategies of SNH, SEPA, FCS, FRS and the Mrs. under a Scottish Government umbrella in order to make our research outputs more effective. In addition, we need to find ways of harmonising the planning of research to reduce overlap, and to maximise efficiency. This might include standard approaches to research bidding (SNH currently uses a 'ROAME' process), timing of the research bidding cycle, and seeking more imaginative and effective ways of disseminating the results of our work.

SNH would welcome further involvement with Scottish Government over the CAMERAS initiative.