

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

Rural Law Research Group  
School of Law  
Taylor Building  
University of Aberdeen  
Aberdeen  
AB24 3UB

**Response**

to

**Consultation on Science in Support of Marine, Environment, Rural Affairs and Related Policies of The Scottish Government: A Coordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment and Rural Affairs Science (CAMERAS) (2011-2016)**

by

**Aberdeen University Law School Rural Research Group**

**Headline Themes**

1. Do you agree that the two broad categories of “Local Responses to Global Change” and “Optimising the Potential of Scotland’s Natural Assets” are helpful in providing an overlying structure to the Co-ordinated Agenda?

***Yes, but they are not mutually exclusive and must not be considered as such.***

2. Are the descriptions of these set out in Section 3 (and Annex 3) comprehensive?

***Yes, but they should be actively refined or expanded as the extent and nature of the issues within these categories develops as part of the policy development.***

3. Do these cover the major policy challenges where science can contribute as you see them?

***The implications of climate change on land use planning and food production must be appropriately considered, particularly in the long term. Policy change in these areas needs to be supported by science and the results translated into accessible and appropriate information for an assessment of alternative and policy development.***

4. Are they likely to remain broadly relevant over the longer time horizon (well beyond the 2016 focus of this Coordinated Agenda)?

**Yes: see answer to preceding question.**

5. Do you agree with the description of support for the National Capability Theme set out in Section 3 (and Annex 3)?

**No. The research providers and other organisations in Scotland have a wealth of expertise, knowledge and research capability. There has also been an extensive amount of research relevant to this consultation undertaken over the years. It is essential to make effective use of existing research and to utilise the existing skills. This is not always done at the present time. The connections, within and between institutions as well as other organisations, need to be improved. In particular, the focus for researchers in Universities on publishing to satisfy the requirements of the Research Assessment Exercise (in future the Research Excellence Framework) inevitably affects the type of work undertaken and may discourage the type of work required in this context .**

**National capability activities require coordination and connectivity. A clear funding model would, however, be beneficial.**

6. What facilities, resources and data do you think are important for Scotland to maintain?

**It is important that facilities, resources and data should be as comprehensive as possible, so that current, foreseen and as yet unforeseen, future needs can be met so far as possible. In this context, it is essential to start with an audit of what already exists and to link relevant projects to each other wherever appropriate.**

7. Are there other resources that Scotland needs to acquire to support future policy development?

**Resources in the marine environment, in particular the more intensive uses of the marine environment; knowledge about marine natural heritage; science and effects of renewable energy including in the marine environment; expertise on GMOs.**

### **Policy Issues**

8. Have we correctly identified the key policy issues and the associated scientific opportunities in Section 3?

**In general, yes. The key is 'high level' drivers with a long shelf life necessarily set at a broad level and encompassing a wide range of complex and interrelating issues.**

9. Are there additional issues that should be included?

***The policies need to be flexible enough to include the long term effect of climate change and the practical effects of this (e.g. the migration of population to central and Northern Scotland).***

10. What do you think will be the most important influences on Scotland's future in the Marine, Environment, Rural Affairs and related areas?

***Economic development and the political drive to implement this will be crucial. This should be realistically tied into sustainable development. Food and energy security will also be top priorities. Also crucial are implementation of land reform; issues relating to ownership of land; relationship between planning policy and law; the effect of the marine bill.***

11. Why do you think these are important?

***Laws are used to implement policy and planning law, marine law and land reform all affect this topic and are relatively new or emerging areas of law. They can influence economic development and sustainable development, in particular the renewable energy drive.***

12. Are there other scientific opportunities which should be highlighted?

***Climate change solutions; renewable energy; SMART solutions to the problems and issues; less waste of resources; Scotland being more self sufficient in energy and food; making sure of existing resources eg the embodied energy within buildings.***

## **The Science**

13. What existing areas of Scottish based scientific expertise should be maintained to contribute evidence to key policy issues?

***This may depend on the outcome of the audit suggested above.***

14. How clear is the relationship between the scientific areas and the key policy issues?

***It is considered that it is not clear enough – there is a great deal of solo working and reporting in different areas with no systematic linkage or even awareness between them. Science, policy and law could and should be much more integrated to provide a holistic approach to any particular issue.***

15. In which areas of science can we continue to make use of expertise supported elsewhere e.g. at the UK, EU and international levels?

***This may depend on the outcome of the audit suggested above.***

16. In the time frame for CAMERAS (2011-2016) what new emerging areas of science are likely to mature and become available for more general use or application?

***We do not feel in a position to comment on this question.***

17. Do we have the expertise available to be able to use these new opportunities?

***We do not feel in a position to comment on this question.***

18. In which areas does Scotland need to be self reliant?

***Scotland should aim to be self-reliant in as many areas as realistically possible, but particularly in relation to energy. Further, while complete self-reliance across the spectrum of types of food products is not feasible in the foreseeable future (please see our answer to Q12 above), Scotland must aim to develop resilience in depth in outputs of basic food products and the potential under adverse circumstances to maximise these. Key elements in achieving this will be modernisation of the reflection in law of all relevant strands of environmental, planning and agricultural policy and the overhaul of agricultural legal business structures.***

## **Delivery**

19. Knowledge Exchange is essential for scientific activity to achieve impact. Do you agree that KE should be an explicit and integral aspect of the delivery of this Coordinated Agenda?

**Yes.**

20. How can we continue to improve the integration of evidence from a diverse range of sources into forms that are accessible to end users?

***Express programmes of integration in the short term until it becomes integral to the process.***

21. How can we reconcile the requirement for science to be responsive and flexible to short term demands while at the same time ensuring that longer term strategic research continues to progress our knowledge and understanding?

***By developing research capacity, being flexible and funding a variety of projects at different levels.***

22. How can we ensure that the 2 way flow of knowledge from science to policy and from policy to the academic community is optimised?

23. Are there alternative structures/systems or new approaches/organisations that could enhance these flows?

24. Are there science delivery models which could provide examples of good practice for Scotland to follow?

***As suggested above, an important first step would be carrying out an audit of what is happening in different institutions at present. For example, Aberdeen University have a range of experts on renewable energy but no formal mechanism for cross-disciplinary working and indeed funding strictures and the focus of the former Research Assessment Exercise have not thus far encouraged this; Energy Seminars at the University of Aberdeen relied on personal contacts and good will to bring staff from 3 colleges together and to invite appropriate outside participants. Once that audit is complete, it should be published and steps taken to facilitate linkage between existing expertise and projects where appropriate. Publication of present and future research requirements (actual or contemplated) is also critical. Multi-way communication between policy-makers and researchers/potential researchers is key and specific responsibility for facilitating this should be given to an appropriate person or body. One specific suggestion to enhance the flow of knowledge would be funding of PhDs. A good example of science and policy working together might be the Crichton Carbon Centre.***

### **General Comments**

25. We would also welcome any other general comments you may have on any of the issues raised in this document.

***The Scottish Government is to be commended for trying to bring about joined-up thinking in relation to marine, environment, rural affairs and related policies. An integrated approach to policy making is clearly at the heart of the concept of sustainable development. However, it is noted that the primary objective of the current Scottish Government is not sustainable development but sustainable economic growth. The two are certainly not the same and may not even be compatible goals. Sustainable economic growth in itself is clearly an unobjectionable end but where does that leave Scotland's sustainable development strategy? Has the drive for sustainable economic growth entirely replaced the drive for sustainable development or do the two work side-by-side? In either case, what exactly is the meaning of 'sustainable economic growth' and what is its relationship to the wider and more established principle of sustainable development? Possible conflicts between 'sustainable development' and 'sustainable economic growth' are easily identified, for example, in the promotion of renewable energy, which is central to the strategy for sustainable economic growth. Although the Scottish Government claims the promotion of renewables leads to environmental sustainability there are, in reality, clear conflicts between***

***global environmental goals (tackling climate change), national economic drivers (an economically vibrant Scotland and world leader in renewable energy) and the local social and environmental impacts of renewable energy developments. At present the policy and regulatory mechanisms in place to promote renewable energy are inadequate to achieve either of the first two ambitious goals. Despite recent attempts to improve the situation new renewable energy developments continue to be hampered by a slow and obstructive regulatory process, local development issues, local objections and failure to adequately address local environmental objections.***

***Embracing science to help to inform Government strategy is clearly a desired aim but there is still a real need to clarify underlying policy goals. Science can help answer questions and inform decision-making but we need to be asking the right, specific questions. Vague policy goals make this extremely difficult.***

***In order that the Scottish Parliament can readily obtain co-ordinated, cross fertilised advice and evidence when considering policy and Bills, we suggest that a standing Scottish Parliament Science Law and Policy Advisory Forum be established which would continuously discuss issues which are or might become of concern to the Parliament and the Scottish Government. In that way, the channels for cross-disciplinary consideration of issues would be open and functioning before they are called in to action, so that opportunities might be identified and difficulties might be anticipated. We think there is a definite role for the Scottish Universities in bringing together scientists, lawyers and policy advisers on equal terms in such a Forum to work together both formally on particular issues as well as informally. The Forum could provide Ministers, Parliamentarians and Departmental Policy Advisers with a range of useful inputs and could furnish witnesses for Committees who have had the considerable advantage of studying issues with the direct assistance of expertise beyond their own disciplines. We would be glad to enlarge upon our proposal.***