

**ANNEX B – DISCUSSION OF BROADER OUTCOMES OF WORKSHOPS  
AND CONSULTATION**

## B1 INTRODUCTION

During the visit to the Western Isles to undertake the Biodiversity Workshops, the opportunity was taken to meet with partners, Steering Group members and other interested individuals. These meetings were organised on an *ad hoc* basis depending upon availability and interest. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss:

- the three specific habitat and species plans in a free ranging discussion;
- biodiversity planning in a more general context for the Western Isles;
- the challenge of gaining more community involvement in the process.

Although structured, the meetings were left free ranging and as a consequence several broader issues were discussed including, as might be expected at community workshops, broader land management issues. These in some cases went beyond issues relating to biodiversity and the specific action plans. This was particularly the case in Barra where due to the limited numbers of people present the format of the workshop was a round-table discussion. Discussions with the CnES confirmed that it was important to keep a record of these comments, discussions and suggested actions that related to broader land management on the islands. The purpose of this section is therefore to present the key themes relating to broader environmental issues relating to biodiversity on the islands, which were brought out from our discussions and meetings with organisations and people during our visit.

This annex therefore, presents the key themes below and lists more general actions that were suggested at the workshops and in meetings with people on the islands.

## B2 KEY THEMES

*Table B2.1* lists a set of issues which are representative of the key themes which came out of discussions with organisations and other individuals on the islands. Each of the key themes listed will be discussed in more detail below.

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***Table B2.1 Key Themes***

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- The requirement for an integrated approach to land management;
  - A move towards managing land for environment instead of agricultural production;
  - The requirement for engagement with crofters at a ground level;
  - The importance of engaging young people and working with schools;
  - The importance of capturing the imagination and interest of the local community in environmental initiatives;
  - The potential for cynicism amongst crofters and the community with regard to ‘initiative fatigue’.
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## **B2.1 AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO LAND MANAGEMENT**

The question was asked in one of the workshops “*What do we want our landscape to look like, did we want to preserve it as a museum piece or move towards managing it [and perhaps changing its appearance] in line with the present day?*” It is a theme which reoccurred throughout our visit. It suggested that perhaps it was not clear what the overall vision for the islands were and that landscape as a result was being managed in an *ad hoc* way with crofters tending to respond to financial incentives and various other initiatives without a clear goal.

It was suggested that a more integrated approach to land management was required which brought the various land interests together to develop a ‘vision’ for the landscape and long-term land management of the islands. The ‘vision’ would ideally help to guide local Government and agency policy and initiatives. The vision would also allow financial incentives to be used in such a way as to ensure that the long term agreed vision for the islands was achieved and achievable. It would, perhaps most importantly, provide a framework and context in which all conservation, environmental, enterprise, agricultural *etc.* initiatives could sit.

On a smaller scale crofters and other land managers could, with assistance, develop a long-term land management vision for their area of land that fits with the larger vision for the island in which they live, incorporating environmental, social and economic aspects. This would ensure ownership of the scheme and provide a long-term road map for crofters to manage their land into the future. It would also assist land managers to understand which initiatives and incentives to use to help achieve the long-term vision for their land.

### *Suggested actions:*

- CnES, the Steering Group and other appropriate partners including crofters should hold a workshop to discuss and agree a programme to define a vision for the landscape of the islands, which would then underpin the individual LBAPs. Communities should be involved.
- This vision should also provide a framework for other initiatives and for focussing which grants were most appropriate. These should be identified and agreed as part of the workshop.
- The vision should be cascaded to all land managers to ensure that it is interpreted at a local level as well as at an island level.

## **B2.2 MOVE TOWARDS MANAGING LAND FOR ENVIRONMENT INSTEAD OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

This theme is very closely related to the theme above. Part of the reason that there is a feeling of a lack of vision for the islands is because traditional land markets are not as strong as they once were. The value of land on the Western Isles has traditionally been based on agricultural production. The value of agricultural products has been declining and crofting activities have been heavily subsidised throughout Scotland.

Subsidies are based upon the number of livestock kept by each croft. Agricultural policy in Scotland has since recognised the potential for environmental degradation due to the coupling of subsidy to livestock numbers. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform is the agricultural policy document that addresses this issue. The central policy of the document is decoupling the need to produce agricultural goods and the receipt of support payments. The Scottish Executive hopes that the policy will create opportunities for a more market-oriented, competitive agriculture, with greater emphasis on its role in protecting and improving the environment.

Crofters will soon have the flexibility of decreasing stock numbers without any effect on the subsidy that they receive. There is an understanding amongst many of the groups that we spoke to that this represents a great opportunity for working with crofters to manage the landscape for the environment. Most believe that there is a will amongst the crofting community to manage land in this way. When the SAC asked crofters what land management initiative that they would most like to take part in, an overwhelming majority said habitat management. Many people, at the workshops and in meetings said that it was very important to ensure that the CAP reform is carefully managed to ensure the greatest environmental, social and economic benefit. A land vision for the islands would help to address this.

The requirement for financial incentives for the management of land for environment was a constant theme. Most people believed that financial incentives, along with the engagement of crofters, would be the greatest tools in realising the biodiversity actions suggested in the plans.

#### *Suggested actions:*

- Ensure that the agreed vision underpins the interpretation of CAP reform in the Western Isles.
- All opportunities to encourage habitat management as part of the de-intensifying of grazing to be promoted.
- Ensure all relevant financial incentives are researched and relevant ones, which fit within the vision for the islands taken up.

### **B2.3 ENGAGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY**

#### *Engagement with crofters at a ground level*

This was a theme brought up constantly at the workshops and in the meetings. The implementation of environmental and biodiversity initiatives must by their nature be implemented at a ground level. It was said many times that land managers have to be connected and engaged in environmental initiatives if they were to be successful. People felt that this was not something which could be achieved through ‘top-down’ approaches but would have to be achieved by someone on the ground directly communicating with crofters.

One group suggested that the ranger role could be expanded to take on this role. They thought that it might be possible for the rangers, as part of their jobs, to make visits to

crofters to discuss particular land management issues, including managing land for biodiversity.

Another group thought that it was essential to identify crofters who were successfully managing land for environment and biodiversity on the islands. A scheme could be set up whereby these crofters could impart advice and guidance on how they had successfully managed their croft. For example, an internet forum could be set up, supported by quarterly meetings and gatherings where information could be exchanged. Open days could be held on site, where other land managers could visit these crofts and receive hands on advice on how to manage particular aspects of the croft, and particular habitats.

Regardless of the means it was clear that most felt that this was an essential means of implementing biodiversity actions. Without the engagement and ground level communication it was understood that it would be very difficult to implement the initiatives.

*Suggested actions:*

- Identify means of ensuring bottom-up involvement in identifying and implementing a vision for the islands.
- Capitalise on a web based information system to share ideas, knowledge and experiences.
- Research feasibility and potential benefits of using rangers to liaise between crofters (each other and the groups developing the vision).

*Engagement of young people and working with schools*

Environmental issues are taking a higher priority within the school curriculum. There are several initiatives that are being launched in schools to promote the principles of sustainability. These include for example Eco Schools, designed to encourage sustainable action and management by young people undertaken as part of the school curriculum and Citizenship, a grant scheme for students to get involved in citizen related projects.

Our visit to the Castlebay Community School (see *Annex A*) indicated that there was a desire of both school management and students to be involved in biodiversity initiatives on Barra. At the same time it was mentioned at every workshop and most meetings that it was important to involve children and young people in these initiatives. It was thought to be important so that sustainability principles are instilled in young people to work towards the adoption of a sustainable way of life into the future and also as a means for indirectly communicating these principles to parents and the wider community.

It was suggested that the ranger service could help to work with schools to foster an interest in environment and culture. Rangers working with teachers to develop a study component related to environment and community could do this. A large part

of this component of the curriculum could be fieldwork and hands on study, adapted to suit the age group involved. It was suggested at one of the workshops that the ranger could also help to develop, through the school, a Student Natural History Group. The Group could be run by students, but not be limited to the involvement of young people so that parents and the greater community could get involved in interpretative walks *etc.*

*Suggested actions:*

- CnES to research the opportunities with school head teachers and others (Scottish Executive, SNH, ranger service *etc.*) to introduce a more structured element in the school curriculum on local natural and cultural heritage.
- Young people to be consulted on the attractiveness and feasibility of creating their own Natural History Group. To be taken forward, if sufficient interest in the initiative.

*Importance of Capturing the Imagination and Interest of the Local Community in Environmental Initiatives*

During the workshops, we asked each group during the breakout session to consider what they thought could be done to better engage communities in the proposed biodiversity initiatives. Due to the poor turnout at the Barra Workshop, it was (without prompting) a key topic of discussion during the evening. We wanted to continue to explore the theme at the other workshops, as it is important for the future of biodiversity and other land management initiatives on the islands. We therefore included it as a topic in the breakout groups.

All groups agreed that it was very important to better engage communities in environmental issues, as direct community involvement was considered necessary for successful implementation of some actions. Most considered that the more that a community became involved the more that they would recognise their ownership and responsibility for their local environment.

Once again, community engagement was thought to be a role that could be taken on by the Ranger Service. It was however recognised that the Ranger Service may be instrumental in involving and engaging crofters, young people, tourists and local communities. It was suggested that the role of the ranger should be clear and defined and that adequate levels of resources (especially staff resources) should be provided so that a ranger could undertake his or her role effectively. On this point it was thought that perhaps some land management roles that were already operating on the island could be combined with a ranger role to create a number of land management officers throughout the islands. These officers could work together to address a broad range of land management issues and provide an on the ground point of contact for crofters, tourists and local communities. It was thought that this should be investigated to determine the merits of developing such a role.

Other people suggested that more effective marketing would be required to get communities interested and involved in such initiatives. For example, it was

suggested that to involve crofters it was important to put biodiversity issues in a context in which they would be interested. For example, biodiversity issues could be advertised as '*how the Rural Stewardship Scheme can help crofters to enhance habitat and biodiversity*'. To engage the greater community it was suggested that you have to tell people about where they live and market as such. For example to get people along to a biodiversity workshop in Barra it was suggested that we tell people about Barra – advertise it as '*What is special about Barra?*' and accompany the evening with visual images of their island.

*Suggested actions:*

- Give further consideration to the means by which local communities can be encouraged to become more involved in local land management and biodiversity initiatives. This could be undertaken at the same time that the vision exercise is taken forward.
- Local people should be involved in eliciting views on why there is only apparently limited interest at present and what potential there is to grow this interest throughout the communities.
- Organisers of any workshop, meeting *etc* to give careful thought to the ways such events are advertised and seek to ensure that the events are as relevant and of as much interest as possible to local people.

#### **B2.4 THE POTENTIAL FOR CYNICISM AMONGST CROFTERS AND THE COMMUNITY WITH REGARD TO INITIATIVE FATIGUE**

It was brought up in several meetings that crofters and to a lesser extent, the wider island communities have a certain degree of cynicism regarding many of the initiatives taking place on the islands at present. It is perceived that many of the initiatives start with a flurry of activity and then dissipate without achieving what was expected. There may be two reasons for this (or a combination of both of these):

- Several initiatives haven't been seen through to the end due to lack of resources, finances *etc*.
- Initiatives are very good at involving community members at an early stage but are not effective at reporting back to communities on how the initiatives are progressing and how community efforts have helped the scheme to succeed or alternatively not succeed.

One initiative that was mentioned several times by all the groups, including some students at Castlebay School was the corncrake initiative. All perceived that this initiative had been very successful in its planning and implementation. The key reason that it had been perceived as such a successful initiative is that people could see the outcome of their efforts. It was an initiative that required significant crofter involvement in slight changes in land management practices but it became evident over a relatively short period of time that the initiative had been successful.

In this case there wasn't as much of a need to report back to communities on the outcome of this initiative as the benefits were evident over a reasonably short time

frame. It however highlights the importance of feedback and understanding how effort feeds back into results.

It was thought that some initiatives could be combined to prevent an overload of different names and schemes. It was pointed out that many initiatives are clearly trying to achieve the same type of thing, but because they were being put forward by different agencies they were being managed separately. It was thought that it was important for agencies to work together to approach initiatives collectively. This may be something that a long-term land management vision could help to address (see Integrated Approach to Land Management, above).

It was also said at one meeting that to address this point it was important to get the project design right from the outset. It is necessary at the beginning of all initiatives that long-term funding is considered for on-going management and maintenance. The Millennium Forest Initiative was used as an example to illustrate this point. It was said that the project itself was a great idea and the person in charge of managing and implementing the project on the islands was very good and successful in achieving what was set out to be achieved. However, the funding eventually ran out and his post finished. There are now a number of Millennium Forests in need of maintenance but there is no one to follow it up.

It was understood that these issues were extremely important to ensure that community members and crofters did not lose enthusiasm or belief in the environmental initiatives on the islands.

*Suggested actions:*

- The council, agencies and other stakeholders to develop strategic plans for land management within a framework of a long-term vision for the islands.
- Ensure there is an integrated approach to developing and implementing all land management and natural and cultural heritage initiatives to avoid overlap and maximise benefits from available funding.
- All programmes to include effective involvement of local people at all stages (planning, development, implementation, monitoring and feedback).