

Biodiversity Report

2015 - 2017



Scottish Information
Commissioner

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Section 1 – Introduction

1. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (the NCS Act) places a statutory duty on all public sector bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity.

“It is the duty of every public body and officeholder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”
2. On 1 January 2012, the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (the WANE Act) amended the NCS Act and introduced a requirement for all public bodies to make a report publicly available on their compliance with biodiversity duty. Biodiversity duty reports are required every three years.
3. Public bodies already established in 2011 were required to produce and publish their first report by 1 January 2015 to cover activities carried out during 2012 - 2014 inclusive. The second report was due by 1 January 2018 and covers activities carried out in 2015 - 2017 inclusive.
4. The Scottish Information Commissioner (the Commissioner) is the independent public official responsible for promoting and enforcing Scotland's freedom of information (FOI) law, i.e. the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (the EIRs).
5. The Commissioner is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen, on the nomination of the Scottish Parliament, and serves for a fixed term of six years. The Scottish Parliament meets the Commissioner's salary and provides funding for the Commissioner's office.
6. The Commissioner is based in St Andrews, Fife and is supported by a small team.
7. Our main functions are:
 - investigating FOI appeals
 - promoting the public's right to know
 - promoting good FOI practice to public authorities
 - intervening when public authority practice is not compliant with FOI law.
8. The Commissioner and the Senior Management Team (SMT) are committed to improving efficiency in how we function as an organisation, and in how the office is managed. This commitment extends to furthering the conservation of biodiversity in identifying and taking action where possible. The biodiversity duty is about connecting people with the environment and managing biodiversity in the wider environment all around us.
9. This is the first biodiversity report that the Commissioner has produced and mainly relates to the period 2015 - 2017.

Section 2 - Mainstreaming

10. Our Environmental Policy has an aim which is directly linked to operating in a manner that supports and encourages biodiversity which is sets out a list of objectives to help us fulfil this aim.

“Our aim is continually to improve our environmental performance and to protect the environment by reducing pollution and resource consumption and to operate in a manner that supports and encourages the natural diversity of plant and animal life.”

11. The Environmental Policy also sets out a list of objectives to help us fulfil the above aim which state that we will
- (i) minimise carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions which result from energy use, through in-house energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy
 - (ii) reduce the consumption of resources, in particular office consumables and packaging
 - (iii) minimise waste production by identifying ways to reduce, reuse and recycle materials
 - (iv) purchase in an environmentally responsible manner
 - (v) reduce the impact of travel and transport to and from her office, by encouraging the use of more sustainable transport and reducing the need to travel where appropriate
 - (vi) support and encourage a natural diversity of plant and animal life within its grounds and premises
 - (vii) reduce its impact on local, national and global plant and animal life
 - (viii) seek to positively influence those who use and visit the building through communication and by demonstrating good environmental practice
 - (ix) identify and comply with legal and other requirements that relate to the environment
 - (x) promote best practice
 - (xi) develop and implement management systems that will allow us to continually monitor and improve our performance with respect to the stated aims of this policy
12. We strive, where we can, to minimise impact on the environment and to make sustainable choices. Examples include our commitment to reducing, re-using and recycling waste.
13. In the period 2015 - 2017 the following actions have been undertaken:
- improved sustainability – regulation of heating is via timer and thermostats, we use on/off monitor switches (e.g. to switch lights off in empty rooms)
 - reduced our carbon footprint
 - encouraged staff to use public transport
 - used telephone conferencing in addition to face to face meetings
 - introduced the use of more resource efficient equipment, enabling us to reduce waste - the printers we have use auto-on/off technology to save energy and can print double sided, kitchen equipment is A rated for energy usage where applicable

- we continue to recycle as much as possible, including recycling used toner cartridges and all packaging and recycling food waste, cardboard, tins and glass
- our office paper is responsibly sourced and printers are set to print double sided
- operate a switch off policy for all electronic equipment which encourages staff to switch off monitors and other electrical equipment when not in use
- whiteboards are used where possible
- where possible, we select the most environmentally friendly products for cleaning
- our staff coffee fund purchases fair trade tea and coffee
- we have an artificial Christmas tree allowing re-use

Section 3 – Actions taken to improve biodiversity conservation

14. Using flexible working arrangements, a member of staff has been able to attend a horticulture course at Elmwood College and has studied a number of modules which relate to biodiversity conservation including botany, plant nutrition plant production from seed, protected crop production, pot plants, plant husbandry and vegetative propagation.
15. Staff have grown tomatoes in grow bags in our staff garden.
16. Wild flowers grow in parts of the garden

Section 4 – Partnership working and biodiversity communications

17. We work with Fife Council to ensure that all feasible waste streams are suitably covered.
18. In order to actively lower our carbon footprint, we try to use local suppliers where possible.
19. Our stationery supplier is ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 accredited and we minimise deliveries by carefully monitoring stock and buying in bulk where appropriate.
20. By informing all staff of the part that they play in helping the organisation become more resource efficient, we have been able to change behaviours and use our resources in a more efficient manner. We have regular contact with a number of environmental non-governmental organisations through umbrella group Environment LINK. We provided training to this group on the EIRs in 2015, stressing the link between access to environmental information and their work on environmental justice. We invite environmental NGOs to participate in our civil society training (we've had participants from e.g., Friends of the Earth Scotland, RSPB, Whale and Dolphin Society and local community groups campaigning for environmental improvements).
21. The Commissioner is a member of the Advisory Board for a new research project at the University of Dundee on access to environmental info and the link between this right and the other pillars of the Aarhus Convention.
22. We publish detailed guidance about the EIRs, which include specific provisions about publication of information about biodiversity. We promote that guidance in our roadshows and we frequently invite biodiversity experts such as Scottish National Heritage and SEPA to contribute to our training, with reference to good practice in publication.

23. We have promoted the importance of applying the EIRs when responding to environmental information throughout our enforcement work; particularly stressing the relationship between access to information and the Aarhus Convention. The outcome of a request may be quite different for the applicant, depending on whether the FOISA or EIRs route is followed (see seminal decision 182/2006).¹

Section 5 – Biodiversity highlights and challenges

Aims for the Future

24. Our main challenge is that we are a small organisation with limited resources.
25. Our aims for the future are:
- to keep improving on our resource efficiency year on year
 - to continue to work in a more efficient manner and strengthen our commitment to minimising wasted resources
 - we will look for ways to simultaneously benefit the environment and improve staff health and wellbeing, such as encouraging the greater use of green spaces near to the office and promotion of our Health Living Initiative
 - continuing with and expanding our purchasing policy which ensures that we use resources more efficiently and purchase sustainable sourced products, for example, organic/seasonal food.
 - continue to reduce waste to landfill through recycling and composting
 - staff project to plant herbs in the garden which staff could cut and take home with them
 - clear the ‘shrubs’ to the left of the bike shed and sow wildflower seeds to see if they will grow there
 - our gardener alerts us if there are invasive plants growing and we agree how to remove them
 - place bird feeders in suitable locations
26. The Commissioner looks forward to embracing the challenges of the next three years and remains committed to striving towards greater resource efficiency within the organisation.

Section 6 – Monitoring

27. In the next three years:
- we will continue to monitor our carbon footprint with the aim of reducing it year on year
 - we will continue to report on sustainability
 - we will provide information and links to staff to enable them to access databases which can be used to record wildlife sightings (e.g. iRecord, BeeWatch)

¹ [Mr Bruce Sandison and the Fisheries Research Services www.itspublicknowledge.info / Decisions](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Decisions)

- we will also continue and, where possible, expand on the actions set out at paragraph 12 above
- we will implement and monitor the actions planned in paragraph 24-26 above

Section 7 – Contribution to targets

28. As we are a small organisation with limited resources, it is difficult for us to link our activities directly with the various biodiversity targets set by the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. However, we will consider these steps and, where possible, seek ways of contributing towards them, even in a small way.

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