

BOARD MEMBERS SEMINAR: 21 JANUARY 2002

Reflections on a Decade Let us be proud of our success

Roger Crofts

Introduction

- Preliminary reflections pending Magnus' Magnum. Cover things that have helped us, things that have got in the way and measures of our success.

(1) Things that have helped us

- Excellent starting point as a result of weak record and poor perceptions of predecessor bodies, Ministers who were prepared to look forward with vision, and cross-party and public support.
- International, UK and Scottish legislative base all helped: Rio agenda including CBD, a broad basis of legislation forcing integration and coherence and removing old barriers such as countryside own sustainable development duty, creative financial and other instruments.
- Quality of people in the organisation: excellence of expertise, strong commitment and desire to move forward by staff; getting right balance between change and stability; active interaction between top management and staff, eg visit regional and organisation-wide conference; continuity in leadership; major organisational change at appropriate time; significant input of effort and value added by Board members.

(2) Things that have got in our way

- Environment low on political and public agenda: many outmoded views untouched by Rio; no real environmental leadership in government in Scotland; government resistance to sustainable development; environmental NGOs sniping;
- Lack of integration in policy and action: Government policies and government departments and NDPBs in silos – Forestry Commission notable acceptance.
- Undue interference from on high: micro-management from government especially civil servants, and at time boards; risk aversion to the new; reluctance of staff to accept delegation.

- Resourcing: resource profile erratic and against good planning; annuality rules outmoded; staffing/running costs restrictions regressive.
- Protected Area designation dominated the agenda: stop/go on introduction of Natura; unenlightened approach by government officials on protected area mechanisms; unwillingness of government to publicly support our agency role; as a result much public criticism.

(3) Measuring our success

- Best measures are that we still exist, survived unscathed the quinquennial review process and the more recent NDPB review, are involved in and consulted on relevant matters, are a organisation attached rather than ignored, often quoted, and widely albeit privately respected.
- Here are a few quotes: -

Depends on your perspective, what about Ian Mitchell: "might I ask when Roger Crofts shaved off his beard? Given that his face must have an AONB. I take it that a full public consideration was carried out was granted before this "plan or project."

"top staff who lacked wildlife experience undermine staff to please landowners and developers (... Deeside scientist)".

"SNH, I believe are the hidden influence behind all the ills of farming and sheep clearances" (Strathspey resident).

"SNH has had its wings clipped for being too good at its job" (Journalist).

"the excellent job which SNH are doing" (Director EC DG Environment).

"the TUS are delighted that the evidence of the benefits of partnership working is there for all to see" (PCS Negotiations Officer).

"part of the settled will of the environmental and related communities" (former Head of Sponsor Dept).

"congratulations on the smooth coming together of the two organisations" (former Board Member).

"I would like to pay tribute to SNH as being worthy to protect and defend out natural heritage" (Strathspey resident).

- Identify seven specific successes which should we are particularly proud of:

(1) most prosaically met financial targets, only one minor qualification to Accounts on technically outside our control. Achieved 75/80% of

targets more not expected. Excellent planning system instigated at out set key basis for success.

- (2) Achieved more staff progressively over period, with one down turn, essential for labour intensive type work and dispersed activity.
 - (3) Instituted new ways of working which others have followed: regional boards/area boards, close board/staff working, dispersed structure; led on openness agenda including national and local open meetings and provision of detailed information.
 - (4) Developed forward looking, strategic and integrated policies and programmes: local and national Natural Heritage Futures programme, strategic assessment of critical assets such as landscape; focus policies on main issues affecting natural heritage such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries used by many other organisations including government.
 - (5) Achieved many things on the ground: school ground projects, Plant for Wildlife, paths development, mountain path maintenance, ranger services, TIBRE and consultation with owners and managers and of key sites especially Natura.
 - (6) Major progress on key issues accepted by Government: national parks, access and positive management of SSSIs.
 - (7) Lead the way in developing partnerships: set up countless partnership activities on different scales around the country, increasingly skilful brokering partnerships. Major successes are Moorland Forum, Access Forum, Focus on Firth initiatives, Southern Uplands Forum.
- Not always good at recognising our successes and promoting them. Perhaps we are too much on the back foot too often when we have a lot to be proud of. So promoting ourselves better as well as maintaining our quality standards and developing initiatives would be my outgoing message.

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11 January 2002