

**SNH OPEN DAY PRESENTATION
MONDAY 6 DECEMBER 1999**

ROGER CROFTS, SNH CHIEF EXECUTIVE

It is my pleasure to be able to present our achievements in 1998/99 as set out in our Annual Report and also to look forward to our plans for the future - as set out in *Progress and Plans 1999*.

It is fair to say that since SNH was established in 1992, 1998/99 was our best year, but I always add the words "so far": in terms of our achievements the response that we received from Government for our advice on three key areas of policy development in Scotland: on Access, on National Parks and on National Scenic Areas, and for preparing ourselves for the challenge and the opportunities of the Scottish Parliament. I shall address our work under four themes: safeguarding our natural assets, enriching peoples' lives, promoting wise resource use and also enhancing our effectiveness in SNH.

SAFEGUARDING OUR NATURAL ASSETS

Safeguarding our natural assets is by far the most significant area of our work. It is the one that takes up most staff time. It is the one that takes most of our programme resources. It is the one that is the most strongly underpinned by our range of statutory duties. It is the one on which we work as the agents of Government to ensure that it achieves its obligations under International Conventions and European Directives.

(1) Understanding trends and causes

The starting point needs to be that we understand the trends in the natural heritage and their causes. During the course of the year we published the outcome of a long-standing exercise looking at the change in the land cover of Scotland from the late 1940s. This is accessible in various forms, including posters for use in classrooms right through to more erudite scientific publications. We also made sure that we had a much better understanding of the tremendous diversity of Scotland's landscape by completing our Landscape Character Assessment. We did this at the local scale and then we scaled it up so that we had an overall national picture sub-dividing Scotland into some 50-odd Landscape Character Types. We now have a much better knowledge of the character of the landscape and also the impact that certain types of activity might have on it in the future. And looking forward we intend to undertake a whole series of strategic scientific programmes focusing on a range of activities, such as soil biodiversity, the viability of different types of natural species, the problem of alien species, and, the impact of climatic change on the landscape and on the wild life of Scotland. This activity will be supported by our Environmental Audit programme, where, for instance, we will produce overviews which we hope a;; interests will find accessible. We shall produce audits about our coasts, our blanket mires, our freshwater, our sand-dunes, in a way that decision-makers and the general public can find useful in increasing their knowledge and understanding of our natural heritage.

(2) Natura 2000

We play a very important role in delivering the Government's obligations under two European Union Directives: the Birds Directive and the Habitats and Species Directive, which collectively are known as the Natura 2000 Programme. Many sites have so far been identified and submitted by Government to the European Commission. During the course of 1998/99 we undertook a great number of exercises to help the Government implement its obligations: many consultations and submission of a range of scientific cases. We assist Government to complete the classification of all of the bird sites - that's the Special Protection Areas - by the end of the next calendar year. We shall consult extensively on many areas, including the Peatlands of Lewis: a major exercise. The Natura 2000 Programme gives us an opportunity for the first time to have recognition of the importance of our marine environment and to the many and varied plant and animal communities there - many I don't think even we, never mind the public, thought were there until we had done some extensive survey work.

(3) Protecting Wildlife Sites

The third area in terms of protection our natural assets is the wildlife sites themselves. SNH has a particular statutory duty, dating from 1981, on Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There are some fourteen hundred in Scotland of these sites. We also carried on our quite substantial routine work. For instance, during the course of 1998/99 we dealt with over 500 development cases and over 400 Notices of Intent and produced nearly 250 Site Management Statements. Whilst I don't want to give the impression it's all about counting numbers, this work was done to ensure that these sites for wildlife and for geology and for landform protection were maintained in good order. We also believe that it is extremely important that we work productively with the owners and managers of sites. We also link with the wider constituencies of interest - the local communities, the local authorities - and produce documentation which is accessible to all of them as well as being of scientific validity.

(4) Advising on new approaches

Significantly, we have spent a lot of time over the last eighteen months or so, and will in the future I am sure, advising on new approaches to protecting Scotland's natural heritage assets. We completed our advice on National Parks and we did that through very extensive consultation around the country and at national level. We strongly welcomed Donald Dewar's acceptance of our proposals as the basis for new policy and legislation. In the Loch Lomond and Trossachs area, we continue to fund major programmes of activity through partnership arrangements and we did also in the Cairngorms, where we funded many practical initiatives for managing visitors, for providing facilities and including the management of the land at key sites.

It is our intention that we continue to advise on the development of this most important piece of legislation: National Parks for Scotland. We remain clear ourselves that the purpose which we set out in our own advice to Government remains critical. What we seek it to achieve a range of interests but if there is a conflict between those interests then the critical feature is that the natural resources of these areas are kept intact and, where possible, improved.

We shall increase our financial support over the next two years to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms by half a million or so next year and by two-and-a-half million in the following year. We are very grateful to Government for its recognition of the importance of giving adequate funding to establish the new National Parks which it proposes in these areas.

Also, we have completed our advice on the National Scenic Areas: the forty areas of Scotland regarded as the "scenic gems". We did this following extensive consultation with key interests. We intend in the future to work with local authorities in different parts of Scotland where the National Scenic Areas exist at the moment, perhaps, particularly, in the Highlands and in Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders, to develop management plans for them to improve the management of these areas.

ENRICHING PEOPLE'S LIVES

It should be obvious already from what I have said that we work very much with people in order to secure the long term health of our wildlife and landscape, but we also have a critical role in enriching people's lives in relation to the natural heritage. Improving Access, celebrating the "Crown Jewels" as we call them, and enhancing lifelong learning are elements of that work.

(1) Improving Access

We completed our Advice to Government on Improving Access. Scotland was well behind other European countries and it is pleasing to see that the Government's reform proposals and the new resources which for Access will help to drive this forward. We are working very actively with a wide range of interests in a very consultative manner through the Access Forum, chaired by Roger Wheeler. Based on the overall right of access to land and water exercised responsibly for informal recreation and passage we are preparing a detailed code which secures the balance of benefit between users on the one hand and owners and managers on the other. We have submitted our advice to Government and intend to develop the material further with partners in the Access Forum.

Also, there are lots of activities going on on the ground, so to speak. For instance, the hill phone access network which perhaps many of you have used - phone up a particular number if you are going to walk in a particular part of Scotland and you will get some information about their management activities, deer stalking and the like, so that you know where you can go and have a good day out without disturbing those particular management activities. We upgraded the West Highland Way, we established the Long Distance Route Forum and, perhaps most significant of all, through our Paths for All partnership with some twenty other bodies we are

developing, in Central Scotland especially, access to the countryside through paths for use by walkers, by cyclists and by horse riders. And I am pleased to report that that partnership project was well ahead of target for path networks and they were delivered with less resources than anticipated.

For the future, we will continue to provide advice to Government on the legislative programme for Access, complete the Access Code, seeking to resolve the outstanding issues, many which are of a very technical nature. And with the additional resources that Government proposes, and which we hope the Parliament will confirm early in the New Year, we are going to undertake a programme of mapping Access provision, work with local authorities and others to provide strategic assessments of access, fund access officers, deliver improved access through local authorities and the Paths for All project, as well as continue the development of the long distance route system by starting on the new one from Fort William to Inverness - the Great Glen Way.

(2) Celebrating the 'Crown Jewels'

In Scotland there is a suite of National Nature Reserves - 71 in total - and to us these are the very essence of bringing together prime nature and people so that we secure management of wildlife, we provide research opportunities, we engage local communities and we provide public access. We assessed all 71 of the National Nature Reserves against specific criteria. The Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace, launched our Statement of Intent for working with local communities on the sites which we own, like Beinn Eighe, Creag Meagaidh, Cairnsmore of Fleet and Rum, being the very large ones. And, at the same time, we opened new facilities such as the Stevenson Centre at Forvie, which was partly funded from private donation from North America and opened by Magnus Magnusson and one of the members of the Stevenson family.

We hope that as many people as possible will have a reminder for every one of the 365 days of the year 2000 about Scotland's National Nature Reserves, by purchasing either our wall calendar or our desk calendar. We intend next year to celebrate these Reserves with a series of events and to complete our review confirming many of the reserves, deleting any of those which no longer qualify and adding others which will be managed by approved bodies which may be trusts, bodies like the National Trust for Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB etc. On the Reserves that we own, we will provide new facilities and we hope, with the help of funds from the Lottery, to finally bring Kinloch Castle on Rum back to better health. And, for instance, at Knockan, in the Inverpolly area north of Assynt, to develop a new visitor centre to display this marvellous geological site.

(3) Enhancing lifelong learning

Also, we consider it important to play our part in enhancing lifelong learning by everyone in society. Amongst our many achievements we completed work on school grounds projects. We also core funded ranger services with a new focus on environmental education, launched an Arts and the Environment initiative with the Scottish Arts Council and ran World Oceans Week to celebrate the importance of not only the seas around Scotland but globally.

For the future, we shall continue to provide advice on the curriculum, develop secondary school sustainable development project, fund Scotland's ranger services, all fifty-odd of them employing something like 300 rangers during the year, develop learning resources, and lead national events, for instance on geology and on oceans.

We also believe it is vitally important that we work with local communities. Following the policy launched by our Minister, Sarah Boyack, and using our new communities grants scheme we will develop our Urban Green Space Programme. We shall be running many other projects including one which is being funded by the Heritage Lottery to develop a series of pilot projects at community level all around Scotland with the hope that they will be sufficiently successful we will have a much larger and longer term programme. Places like parts of urban Scotland, like Craigmillar, here in Edinburgh, are an important part of that process. And, of course, we will continue to make our own material available in existing series, like the geology series, annual documents, but also through our website, and through videos, through CD ROMs.

PROMOTING WISE RESOURCE USE

The third major area of our work is what we call promoting wise resource use. Under this theme we promote environmental sustainability in our advice to Government and others on policies for and use of natural resources, demonstrate integrated management in practice on the ground and deliver economic benefits locally.

(1) Promoting environmental sustainability

Promoting environmental sustainability can sometimes be tricky, especially in relation, for example, to large numbers of geese overwintering on places like Islay where the farmers think it is their livelihoods that are not being sustained and that the geese are benefiting. Trying to find solutions to those problems is extremely critical and that is why we take part in the National Goose Forum. We are also seeking to advise and influence major policy at the National and, indeed, at the European, level, especially the rolling out of the Agenda 2000 package as well as more local issues. We are also developing new ways of looking at improving the national heritage on intensively managed farmland by hijacking technology through our Targeted Inputs for a Better Rural Environment with its beautiful Romanesque acronym (TIBRE). And, of course, we seek to ensure that people who own and manage land have the best advice possible, either through our own staff distributed around the country, or, through the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups in Scotland of which we are the major funder. We should forget also the importance of the connection between improving the quality of the way that agricultural land is managed and what all of us buy in the supermarkets and the local shops. That connection is made through our

Quality Countryside Quality Produce theme. It is not a kite mark - it is a theme to promote new practice, it is a theme to stimulate consumers to putting some pressure on decision-makers about agriculture and to improve the quality of the management of that environment.

We have undertaken a lot of work to promote environmental sustainability in relation to transport, in relation to energy and in relation to the land use planning system. So, for instance, in our response to the many and varied wind energy applications in Argyll we have we have considered the sensitivity of the landscape and wildlife to proposals, so that we are in a much better position to advise as objectively as we can on those developments and help the local authorities in their decision-making process.

(2) Demonstrating integrated management

Demonstrating integrated management is also critically important. I think it is far too often that we plough right to the edge of the field removing hedgerows in sharp contrast to other parts of the country, where hedgerows are being reinstated, provision made for cycling and with a viable arable system still in place. Pulling these threads together is an important part of our activity. So, for instance, we have launched with Eagle Star, the insurance company, a major initiative on the land that it owns adjacent to our Battleby Centre. We have also been involved in a whole range of other initiatives, like the Southern Uplands Initiative, seeking to promote integrated approaches so that good quality heather moorland predominates as opposed to over-grazed and degraded moorland. In future, we intend to maintain our input into these initiatives ensuring that there are agreed outputs delivered and that we do learn the lessons and transmit those to other interests.

Also we have played a key role in major woodland restoration and expansion initiatives, especially the Government's Central Scotland Forest Initiative, together with others, for instance, in the Highlands and in the Clyde Valley. We intend to maintain our input to these initiatives seeking to demonstrate the link between native woodland expansion, its proper management and the product which consumers are prepared to purchase.

(3) Delivering economic benefits

We also believe that our efforts and the efforts of many of our partners delivers economic benefits locally. We set these out in our booklet *Jobs and the Natural Heritage* which was launched by Lord Sewel, our then Minister. This illustrates that there were some 8,000 jobs related to the natural heritage together with another 29,000 related to open air recreation. A significant portion of these, and this is important, is in rural Scotland and a very high proportion of those in turn are in the Highlands and Islands. For the future, we intend to work with the Enterprise Networks to promote jobs in the natural heritage and to provide opportunities for increasing these for the benefit of local communities, provided of course they provide benefits for the management of the natural heritage and access to it.

ENHANCING OUR EFFECTIVENESS

Finally, it is extremely important that a quango, a Non-Departmental Public Body to be accurate, should be as effective as possible. We seek to perform to targets, to develop our strategic approach and to work with partners.

(1) Performing to target

In 1998/99 we were set 17 targets by the Government. We did not succeed in them all but overall our performance was, I think, extremely commendable given the additional work that we had to undertake during the year. I always take the view, to be perfectly honest, that if one exceeds all the targets then the targets are not sufficiently testing. The one we failed on was the production of statements about Natura 2000 sites - a fairly onerous task. Also, during the course of the year we achieved our financial targets and also made efficiency gains of £ 1 million. The Government concluded its five-yearly review of SNH with, I think it is fair to say, a clean bill of health. We still exist, we still have the same powers and functions and the Action Plan which we have to implement comprises one action. For the current year, the Scottish Executive has set our performance against 20 targets. To date, we anticipate that we will meet target on 16 of these, but fail on 4 of them.

Also, you and the wider public, have a right to know how we spend our money and how we intend to spend it in the future. The material in *Progress and Plans* is accurate for 1998 and for the current year, but I am pleased to say that it is inaccurate for the next two years because the Government have proposed, subject to Parliament's approval, that additional resources should be given so that we can help it implement its reform on National Parks, on Access and on Wildlife Sites by increasing our budget from £39 million in this year to £42 million next and to £49 in the year after. Over the next couple of years we intend to put relatively more resources into enhancing people's lives and that means relatively less into some areas of activity, but the bedrock of our work to safeguard our natural assets remains much the same in percentage terms.

(2) Developing our Strategic Approach

We need to make sure that we develop our strategic approach, we are preparing our Corporate Strategy, setting out a vision for the next 5 - 10 years ahead: what we aspire and hope to achieve in practice. We intend to consult on these proposals during the early part of next year. We have also made substantial progress on our Natural Heritage Zones programme which basically divides Scotland into its natural zones and then developing visions, and strategies and action plans increasingly with our partners to put those into practice.

We have also progressed our own internal management programme, what we call the Management Strategy, with its overall aim of SNH being a credible, effective and efficient organisation delivering its natural heritage purpose and living within its means, under 7 strategic programmes. And we also have strategic approaches to external funding - for instance for every £1 we spend we lever another £5 from other sources and also our new European and International influencing strategy.

(3) Working with partners and people

And last, but the most significant of all, the way we work with our partners and people is epitomised in our three Operating Principles. We work in partnership by co-operation, negotiation and consensus where possible with all relevant interests in Scotland, public, private and voluntary organisation and individuals. Indeed, we have progressed many partnerships around Scotland and also with key constituencies in Europe. We regard partnerships with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament, amongst others, as essential for the future.

Second, we operate in a devolved manner, delegating decision-making to the local level within the organisation to encourage and assist SNH to be accessible, sensitive and responsive to local needs and circumstances. So, for example, we have devolved our decision-making throughout the organisation but most especially to our 11 Area teams and our spread of 39 offices around Scotland. Whilst I, as the Chief Executive, recognise that that is not the cheapest solution, I regard it as by far the most effective and so do all of my colleagues. We work closely at the local level with all the key constituencies and we back that up, for instance, through our Board structure, including our three Areas Boards, so that we make better use of local contacts.

Thirdly, we operate in an open and accountable manner in all of our activities. We have expanded considerably our approach to openness with our Website, this our second Annual Open event, open Board Meetings event. So that, perhaps we might, in the words of the Ross-shire Journal, that people will be 'learning to love' SNH.

Thank you very much.

Roger Crofts
6 December 1999