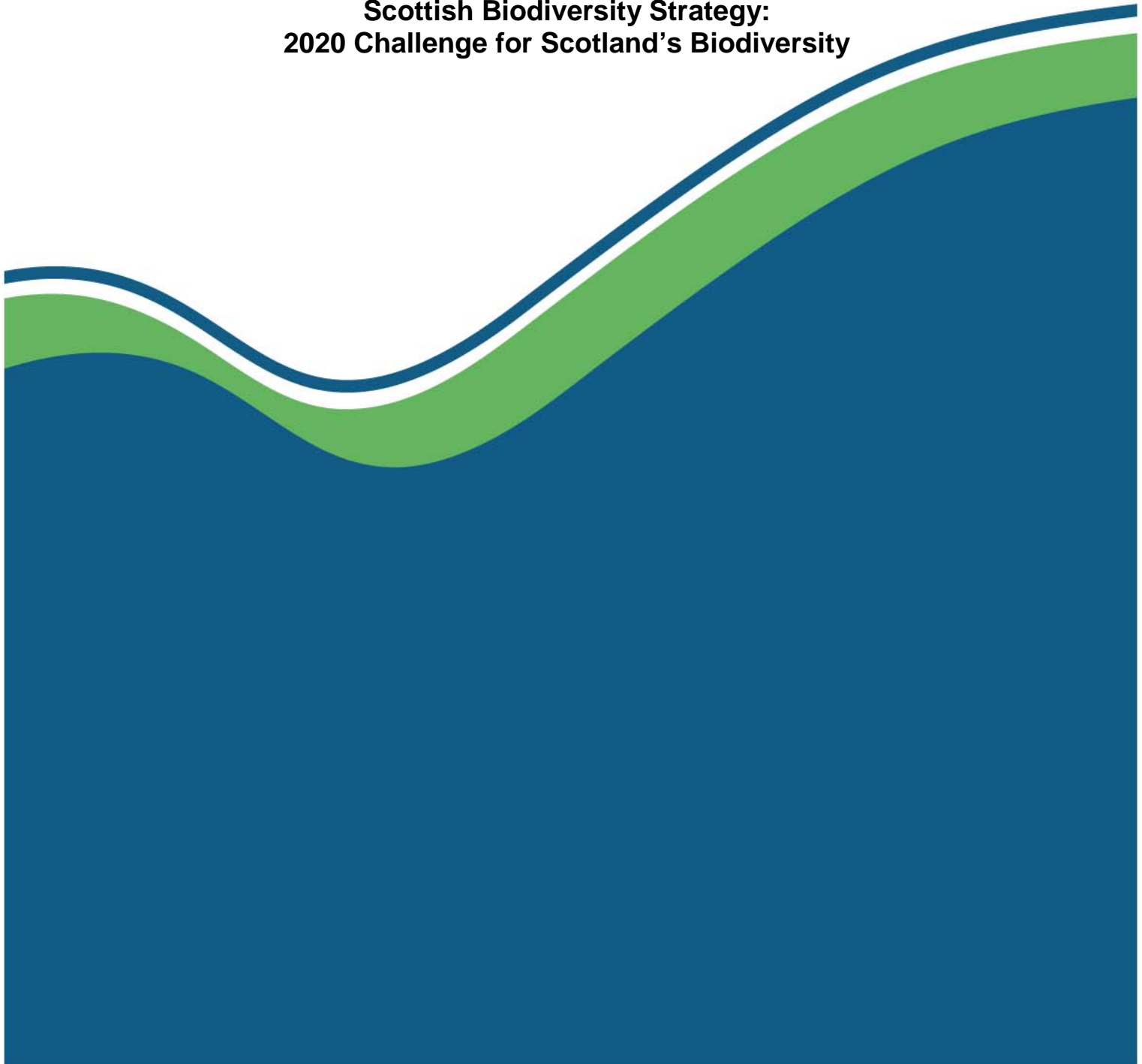




SEPA's Biodiversity Delivery Agreement with Scottish Government

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy: 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity



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SEPA Delivery Agreement with Scottish Government

1. Introduction

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is Scotland's principal environmental regulator and environmental monitoring body. The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Biodiversity Committee, has asked SEPA to confirm how it will contribute to the objectives of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity in a Delivery Agreement. SEPA has clear statutory duties to protect and safeguard biodiversity through its regulatory, environmental permitting and other functions¹. SEPA works in partnership to raise awareness, influence practice and integrate biodiversity protection into plans and projects. Our [Biodiversity Position Statement](#) (March 2015) provides more detail on all of our biodiversity work.

2. SEPA's lead contributions

a. Regulation

Protecting habitats, species and ecosystem services is an integral part of SEPA's regulatory remit. SEPA is responsible for setting standards in environmental licences that protect and help improve the state of water, land, soils and air and the services that ecosystems provide. We take account of the impact of our regulatory activity on aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity, incorporating the delivery of our biodiversity duties into the implementation of the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. SEPA's Nature Conservation Procedure for Environmental Licensing already ensures that our statutory duties to protect nature conservation sites are incorporated into our environmental licensing regimes in a consistent manner. SEPA will continue to use regulation to address diffuse pollution while delivering multiple benefits for freshwater and terrestrial biodiversity. We will develop an air biomonitoring strategy to improve our understanding of air pollution impacts on sensitive ecology, to inform environmental licensing decisions.

b. River Basin Management Planning

River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) provides a process through which SEPA and partners will continue to work together to achieve 'good ecological status'² of surface and ground water bodies. Delivering this objective will directly benefit aquatic and riparian biodiversity. In addition, SEPA's [Water Environment Fund](#)³ will continue to support projects to improve the physical condition of the water environment, restoring important habitats and delivering multiple benefits for biodiversity, as will be demonstrated through a programme of pilot catchments. This will be an important contribution by SEPA to the Scottish biodiversity target for restoration of 15% of degraded ecosystems. SEPA will also continue to incorporate ecosystem services into RBMP.

c. Flood Risk Management Planning

SEPA's responsibilities under the [Flood Risk Management \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) include the development of Flood Risk Management (FRM) Strategies to manage the risk of flooding, and to ensure that sustainable measures to address flood risk are identified. Natural flood management measures provide the opportunity to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem objectives into the flood risk management process. Measures include creating more naturalised river landscapes, restoring functional wetlands, floodplains and associated habitats, and will be a key component in providing sustainable flood management solutions. The value of wetlands and biodiversity benefits of natural flood management measures will be recognised, demonstrated and promoted through sustainable flood risk management. SEPA's Strategic Environmental Assessments of the FRM Strategies will incorporate an ecosystem/ecosystem services assessment.

¹ Wildlife & Countryside 1981 as amended, Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011

² or similar objectives for heavily modified (artificial) water bodies

³ SEPA's Water Environment Fund - http://www.sepa.org.uk/water/water_environment_fund.aspx

d. Ecosystem services and natural capital

SEPA is developing a framework based on ecosystem services to allow us to take account of the benefits of nature in decisions we make and influence. As part of this, we will ensure that biodiversity is accounted for as a key building block of healthy ecosystems. We will also continue to chair and lead the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's work on natural capital, through the Natural Capital Group and with other partnerships, such as the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital.

e. SEWeb and biodiversity data

SEPA wishes to make its environmental data and information more accessible and is developing the [Scotland's Environment Web](#) with a wide range of partners. This website provides access to environmental data, including biodiversity data e.g. from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). SEPA aspires to make its biological data available through the NBN. SEPA is working with the Scottish Biodiversity Committee to develop ecosystem health indicators on SEWeb.

SEPA's supporting contributions

f. Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) freshwater lead

SEPA is the statutory habitat lead body for INNS in still and flowing freshwater habitats⁴. SEPA will continue to develop this habitat lead role collaborating with Scottish Natural Heritage which has the overall co-ordinating role for INNS in Scotland. We will aim to influence all major water user groups and key commercial stakeholders to implement biosecurity to prevent the introduction and spread of INNS. We will also continue to develop our ability to respond to new outbreaks in freshwaters.

g. Green infrastructure (GI) and ecological connectivity

'Green infrastructure' refers to the use of ecosystems, green spaces, engineered habitat and water features in land use to deliver environmental, health and well-being and quality of life benefits. SEPA will identify ways to promote green infrastructure and its benefits for biodiversity through its provision of advice to the planning system, and through River Basin and Flood Risk Management, consistent with SEPA's Climate Change vision⁵. SEPA will support SNH in developing its European Regional Development Fund GI programme, in developing a national ecological network, and in improving ecological connectivity through the EcoCo LIFE project.

h. Land use planning

As a statutory consultee in the development planning process⁶, SEPA provides formal environmental advice on development proposals across Scotland. Biodiversity protection and ecosystem services are considered crosscutting themes and will be integrated into staff guidance and subsequent advice to planning authorities. SEPA has identified a number of habitats as 'biodiversity priority features' which are most relevant to our remit. In responding to the planning process, SEPA will advise on the protection and enhancement of these features, e.g. to require peat land restoration as a compensatory measure where peat is lost through development.

i. Research

SEPA's 'Framework for the Use of Research 2014-19' highlights the need for a better understanding of ecosystem services and the science of ecological and wider environmental restoration. Through our own research and the influencing of others' research programmes, we will continue to develop evidence and understanding to support our biodiversity roles.

3. SEPA Actions

The SEPA actions described above are summarised in Annex A as priority actions for biodiversity delivery up to 2020.

⁴ Through amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA1981)⁴ a [Code of Practice on non-native species](#) has been adopted. This Code describes the framework of responsibilities for statutory bodies in Scotland.

⁵ See SEPA's Climate Change Plan 2014-18 'Our Climate Challenge' http://www.sepa.org.uk/climate_change.aspx

⁶ Under the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006

Annex A: SEPA's priority actions for biodiversity delivery for 2020

SEPA's priority actions for biodiversity, to support delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy are set out below in terms of the contribution they make to SEPA's [corporate outcomes](#)⁷.

Scotland's environment is protected and improving

1. We will take account of the impact of our regulatory activity on aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity, incorporating the delivery of our biodiversity duties into the implementation of the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.
2. Biodiversity protection and ecosystem services will be incorporated into internal land use planning guidance and subsequent advice to planning authorities.
3. SEPA's regulation and advice to planning will be informed by improved access to data, including sensitive ecology outside of designated conservation sites. There will be open exchange of current biodiversity data between SEPA, SNH and NBN systems.
4. SEPA's wetland advice on development management will seek to minimise biodiversity loss through clear, risk-based ecological assessment that includes advice on suitable mitigation, alternative working methods or location of infrastructure.
5. Delivering measures to achieve the WFD objective of 'good ecological status' through the RBMP process will directly benefit Scotland's biodiversity outside and inside of water-dependent protected sites. We will continue to incorporate ecosystem services assessment into RBMP.
6. Through the diffuse pollution priority catchment programme, SEPA (and partners) will select catchments and prioritise measures to deliver both diffuse pollution targets and wider benefits for biodiversity.
7. The pilot catchment project will demonstrate river restoration and flood risk management techniques for the delivery of multiple benefits, including for biodiversity.

Scotland's environment is understood and SEPA is a respected and influential authority

8. Through the Water Environment Fund, SEPA will promote delivery of good practice restoration of the water environment and delivery of wider benefits for people and biodiversity
9. We will influence all major water user groups and key commercial stakeholders to implement biosecurity measures to prevent the introduction and spread of INNS, and have confidence in our ability to respond to new outbreaks in freshwaters.
10. The value of wetlands and biodiversity benefits of natural flood management measures will be recognised, demonstrated and promoted through sustainable flood risk management.
11. SEPA will develop an air biomonitoring strategy to improve our site-specific understanding of the impacts of air pollution on sensitive ecological receptors.
12. Through our own research and the influencing of others' research programmes, we will continue to develop evidence and understanding to support our biodiversity roles.

Scotland is preparing for a sustainable future and is taking steps to tackle climate change

13. While integrating an ecosystem services framework into its environmental decision making processes, SEPA will ensure that biodiversity is accounted for as a key building block of healthy ecosystems. SEPA will continue to lead Scotland's Natural Capital Group.
14. The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Flood Risk Management Strategies will incorporate an ecosystem services assessment.
15. SEPA will support SNH in developing their European Regional Development Fund Green Infrastructure funding programme, in developing a national ecological network, and in improving ecological connectivity through the EcoCo LIFE project.

SEPA is a high performance organisation

16. SEPA offices with control of their grounds will implement a biodiversity action plan, which will result in improved conditions for wildlife.

⁷ See SEPA Corporate Plan 2012-17: http://www.sepa.org.uk/about_us/publications/corporate_plan.aspx