



Agency Board Meeting 29 September 2020

Board Report Number: SEPA 38/20

Environmental Outlook – Major Challenges for 2022-2027

Summary:	The purpose of this paper is the first in an initial series of four papers to help frame the Board's early discussions about the development of SEPA's next five-year Corporate Plan. The focus of this first paper is on the major environmental challenges of this decade.
Risks:	The key risk is that we do not do the initial 'groundwork' to shape our thinking before developing the themes and priorities of our next Corporate Plan. The evidence is that humanity has entered a decade of major upheaval and change. We must avoid the risk of planning based on the world SEPA operated in for our first 25 years and, instead, make sure we understand the very different context in which our work will take place over this next five-year period.
Resource and Staffing Implications:	The new Corporate Plan will set out the priorities which will guide our resource needs and deployment over the next five years. As we are starting the Corporate planning process now, we have ample time to work these out and seek input and involvement from staff and Unison as we do so.
Equalities:	The resource deployment and service setting priorities we set in the Corporate Plan will, potentially, have equalities impacts. These will be identified early and considered as the development of the Corporate Plan continues.
Environmental and Carbon Impact:	The resource deployment and service setting priorities we set in the Corporate Plan will, potentially, have environmental and carbon impacts. These will be identified early and considered as the development of the Corporate Plan continues.
Purpose and audience of the report:	For discussion. Board only
Report Authors:	Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive
Appendices:	Environmental Outlook discussion paper

Environmental Outlook: Major Challenges 2022-2027 Pre- reading

(Note: The Board is not expected to read or watch the full materials in links provided, but they have been included in case anyone wants more information.)

"We have to do everything we possibly can to keep our family, friends, colleagues and communities safe and supported in the midst of the [COVID-19] crisis whilst recognising that it will end, and that we will then have an unprecedented and unrepeatable opportunity to invest in the kind of social and economic recovery that will make it possible to avoid the horror story of runaway climate change. 2021 will be the decisive year."

- From Hope in Hell by Jonathan Porritt.

PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This is one of four papers that will be presented to support some initial discussion to assist the Board in its development of SEPA's next five-year Corporate Plan.

The paper includes some key insights into the world's environmental outlook and make some initial suggestions about what this might mean for SEPA's work over the next five-year period.

As a starting point for discussion, AMT believes that the global environmental outlook confirms that:

- 1) We do not need to change strategy – *One Planet Prosperity* is right for the challenges ahead.
- 2) We will need to consider many tactical decisions about how to implement our strategy and deploy our resources.

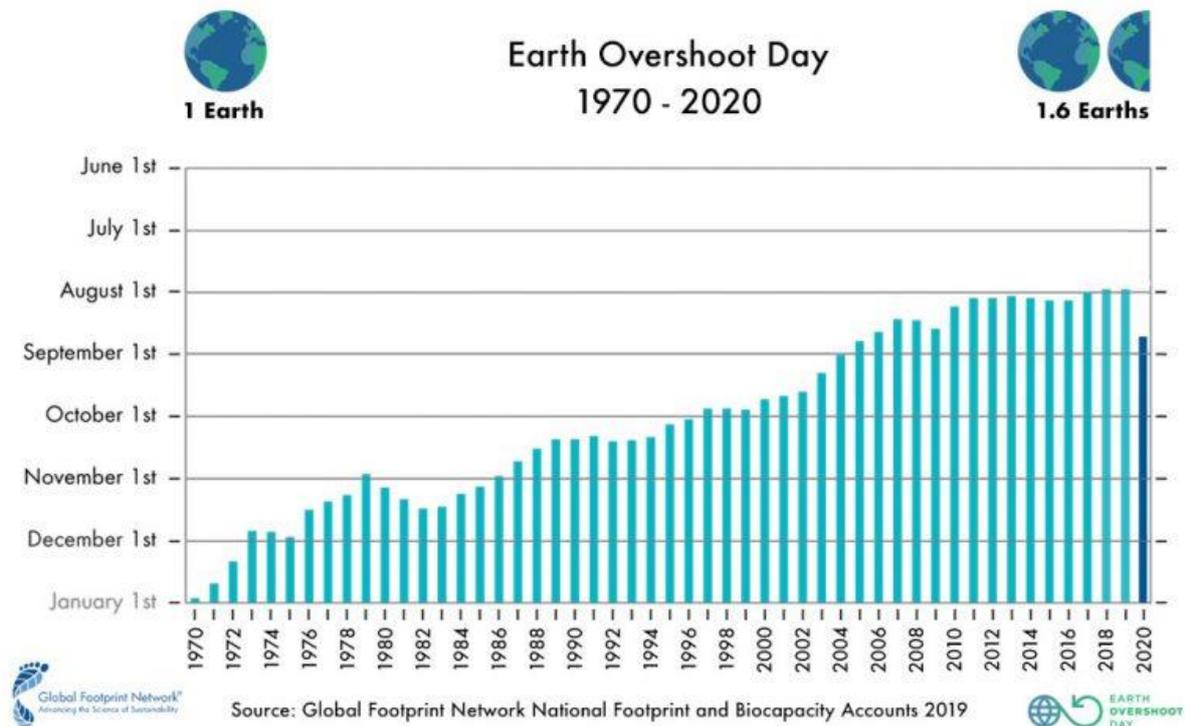
WHAT IS THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL OUTLOOK?

There are many sources we could cite, so we have just highlighted three international examples of major assessments/statements about the global environmental outlook.

Nine Planetary Boundaries

"The Planetary Boundaries concept identifies nine global priorities relating to human-induced changes to the environment. The science shows that these nine processes and systems regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth System — the interactions of land, ocean, atmosphere and life that together provide conditions upon which our societies depend. Four of nine planetary boundaries have now been crossed as a result of human activity: climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, altered biogeochemical cycles (phosphorus and nitrogen). Two of these, climate change and biosphere integrity, are what the scientists call 'core boundaries'. Significantly altering either of these core boundaries would drive the Earth System into a new state."

Source: [The Global Footprint Network](#)



The Edinburgh Declaration

An international agreement to ensure action is taken at all levels to protect biodiversity is being supported by the Scottish Government. A statement of intent, known as *The Edinburgh Declaration*, has recently been agreed between subnational, regional and local governments across the world calling on the Convention on Biodiversity to take strong action to halt biodiversity loss.

“It is my firm belief - one shared by all signatories of the Edinburgh Declaration - that State-led action alone is not sufficient to put us on a path to recovery, achieving what is required to protect biodiversity across the globe.

The Edinburgh Declaration makes it clear that the Scottish Government, together with subnational governments, cities and local authorities across the world, stand ready to meet the challenge of delivering the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and play a stronger role in its implementation.”

- Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Source: [Insider](#)



Summary

The consensus on the state of the environment tells us that this is the last decade to take meaningful action on the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and the overuse of earth's resources. Everything we do in this last, defining decade, must be transformative, have maximum impact and happen at rapid pace.

SEPA'S NEXT FIVE YEARS - WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS?

What does all of this mean for SEPA?

Well, it is clear that the consensus from the latest systemic science, major UN fora and other authoritative sources show that this decade is the one in which humanity has a last chance to make the major changes to ensure a prosperous future. If major strides are not made in global environmental challenges such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, halting biodiversity loss and reducing the escape of plastics into the marine environment, the future looks grim.

Fortunately, for SEPA, our *One Planet Prosperity* strategy was designed with this understanding of the state of the global environment in mind. The challenge for us is to accelerate the changes we need to make to successfully implement *One Planet Prosperity*.

Over the next five years, we must devote our resources to helping Scotland reduce its use and waste of materials, energy and water. We must also do this in a way that makes Scotland more resilient to the impacts caused by climate change. We must allocate our knowledge, time, expertise and resources towards high impact solutions that deliver multiple benefits – these solutions must address both local environmental problems (e.g. traditional instances of local noise, odour, water

pollution, etc) and help solve global environmental challenges (e.g. climate emergency, biodiversity loss, marine plastics, etc).

Given what this means for SEPA, we know we will need to make some hard decisions. In phase 1, most of our programmes and resources were focused on solving local environmental challenges. This delivered strong outcomes for Scotland’s environment such as improvements in water quality, increased recycling rates, reduction in industrial pollution, etc. However, many of these local environmental challenges remain and we must continue to make inroads into these problems.

At the same time, in phase 2, we will need to build on this work and play a stronger part in supporting Scotland’s transformation to a low carbon, circular economy. How we plan the allocation of our resources now will determine how and what we can deliver in this next vital decade for humanity and the environment.

We need to implement *One Planet Prosperity* in a way that deploys resources to solving local and global environmental challenges at the same time and through the same set of actions.

Let’s finish by looking at some specific examples of issues we will face. The contrast in the table is very ‘black-and-white’ and simplified somewhat, but the core point is valid – we will need to retain a focus on solving local environmental challenges and add a much stronger focus on tackling global environmental challenges.

Table 1. Environmental Outlook – Examples of Future Focus

Phase 1	Phase 2
Water quality (primary focus on sets of pollution sources)	Water quality (combined focus on sets of pollution sources and reinventing the management of water)
Air pollution (primary focus on sets of industrial air pollution sources)	Air pollution (combined focus on sets of industrial air pollution sources and transform patterns of living, working and moving)
Waste sites (primary focus on sets of waste sites and management of waste transfers)	Waste sites (combined focus on sets of waste sites and management of waste transfers creating a circular economy)
Farming impacts (primary focus on reduction of farm run-off)	Farming impacts (combined focus on reduction of farm run-off and helping to create secure food systems)