

SCOTTISH CONSORTIUM FOR RURAL RESEARCH

The 120th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee was held at
Heriot-Watt University, Riccarton, Midlothian EH14 4AS
on Monday 26th May 2014

Present:

Stuart Monro	(Scientific Director)
Ian Bainbridge	(Chair)
Nick Fraser	
John Oldham	
Martin Price	
Kathy Velandar	
Ruth Wolstenholme	
Alastair A Macdonald	(Secretary/Treasurer)
Brian Austin	Ex officio
Chris Quine	Ex officio
Philip Wookey	Ex officio

1. **Welcome & Apologies**

Apologies were received from Colin Campbell, Willie Donachie and Steve Yearley

2. **Minutes of 119th executive meeting**

Accepted as accurate.

3. **Centres of Excellence and Networks: update on all networks**

The James Hutton Institute [note provided]

[A new EU training-partnership including the James Hutton Institute aims to promote wild plant conservation underpinned by the use of native plant seeds. The programme will train a new generation of higher-level researchers, improve the connections between research institutes and native seed producers and allow the provision of high quality seeds vital for environmental restoration.

The Native Seed Science, Technology and Conservation (NASSTEC) initiative is funded by an EU-Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN) award made to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the James Hutton Institute – and to Scotland's Scotia Seeds, the leading commercial partner. To complete the EU partnership, two Italian research institutions and a Spanish and Dutch seed company are also part of the initiative. The National Trust for Scotland and seven other associate partners will help to integrate the resulting research, production and use of seeds of native plants. The role of the James Hutton Institute is to co-ordinate the project's training elements.]

Sniffer

Ruth indicated that there was nothing new to report in addition to what was in the minutes of the preceding Executive meeting. Sniffer had continued focusing its work on climate resilience and setting up partnerships on climate change and adaptation, health and wellbeing. Sniffer is also doing some work on urban air quality.

SRUC

Positive discussions are continuing with the University of Edinburgh regarding the possibility of forming a closer liaison. Governance and due diligence issues are the current focus of attention. Stuart indicated that he understood that August 2015 was the target date for realignment and that discussions should reach a conclusion within the term of this parliament. John commented that there had been a very long and close alignment between the Agriculture College and the University up until 1990, and so the prospect would appear to be a return to an earlier normality. The appointment of a new Principal and Chief Executive will be delayed until discussions are completed. There had been recent news of very positive reviews of SRUC's Further and Higher Education performance.

In response to the question whether all the component parts of SRUC would be included in the realignment, John indicated that this was part of the discussion. The further education element of SRUC's remit is an aspect unusual to the University, as is the management of a large business centre (ca. £30m per year). SRUC is now eligible for REF and was included with Roslin and the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies as a significant component of the last submission. Stuart gave a brief overview of the history of the appointment of the University's first Professors of Agriculture (<http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/33n1a6.pdf>). John indicated that a certain Robert Burns had also been 'in the frame' for the chair. Stuart also reported that the SRUC's Rural Policy Centre's 3rd report, *Rural Scotland in Focus 2014*, will be launched on the 2nd June. Dr Sarah Skerratt is its editor.

CAMERAS

Ian indicated that the CAMERAS Board met on 14 May and is looking more at the 'bigger picture' with respect to how it should progress. The CAMERAS Rural Affairs and the Environment Research Strategy 2016-2021 is now very close to completion and should be published in June. It is a 'big picture' strategy. The follow-up is to develop specific Evidence Plans within that strategy (e.g. Ecosystem resilience to climate change) in common with the existing CAMERAS Monitoring Strategy. There are discussions over the need for an over-arching document to be prepared in the next 12 months. Governance and funding of CAMERAS are being reviewed. It would seem that 'the demand side' of the work will remain dominant, but where appropriate, some of the 'supply side members' should be more centrally involved in discussions. CAMERAS also

discussed how they should look at 'Hot Topics', up and coming issues of relevance to Scottish Government Policy. CAMERAS would continue to work with the Scottish Enterprise group and the Scottish Futures group to do 'Horizon Scanning', but this group may be too broad-based to pick up the detail of rural affairs, agriculture, environment and marine issues. The CAMERAS bodies (SNH, SEPA, Scottish Government and Scottish Water) may join together to do Horizon Scanning on those issues and discuss the way forward; the absence of external views might decrease the potential value of such discussions.

Ian also mentioned Scottish Government's RESAS Strategy for the funding round 2016-2021. There had been a high-level spring consultation on the principles, and there will be a detailed consultation on science and research needs this autumn. The current three Centres of Expertise (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/About/EBAR/StrategicResearch/future-research-strategy/CoE>) had been a success, and may be added to, with a Centre on Plant Health. Themes of research may be sought at the next round of consultation, and thus new groupings and ideas not previously considered should be put forward into the process. Stuart reported that he had made input on behalf of the SCRR to both processes, and said it was important to keep an eye on these consultations. He felt it important that SCRR members fed in their wide range of opinion.

John brought up the topic of changes in some elements of EU funding which now required funding from other sources - would Scottish Government ensure that the research Institutes were not financially disadvantaged in these new circumstances?

Other

Brian indicated that he expected an announcement to be made soon of a Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre (reported by Stuart Fancy of the Scottish Funding Council). The SAIC hub will be in Stirling University. The first research priorities (led by industry) have been identified (e.g. Wrasse production). Strategy drivers are to increase Scottish salmon production by 50% and to double shellfish production by 2020. All the relevant Universities and Scottish research institutes are involved. Discussions have begun with MASTS (<http://www.masts.ac.uk/>), the Scottish Marine Science consortium. Stirling is increasing its field facilities, with marine research sites in the southwest of Scotland (e.g. Machrihanish).

Phil announced that the BGS/Heriot-Watt centre for earth and marine science and technology (Sir Charles Lyell Centre) will shortly officially open.

4 Events in 2014

Stuart reported that discussions had taken place with the Society of Biology (SOB) and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) concerning the shared financial commitment to the annual Peter Wilson lecture. Stuart indicated that the likely bill for the 2014 lecture would be about £1000

(the lecturer had paid his own expenses), and he would explore with the RSE and SOB the funding of the lecturer for 2015. All three bodies consider it very important to maintain the quality and annual nature of this lecture. The SOB had suggested a name for the speaker for 2015. Members of the Executive committee suggested some alternative names, should an alternative be necessary. Action SKM

ESCom launch

The Secretary reported that a large community of representatives of Scottish Universities and research institutes had come to the launch and the following two days of meetings. The aim of ESCom (<http://escomscotland.wordpress.com/partners/>) is 'to support collaboration between science, policy and practice to better manage Scotland's natural resources'. It aims to 'become a community of practice for ecosystem services, research, decision-making and natural resource management in Scotland'. ESCom emerged as a bottom-up collaboration between researchers who were seeking to align Scottish ecosystem services research, maximise value, identify synergies and avoid duplication. SCRR members formed the core organising group. Martin suggested that we should consider having an SCRR Newsletter issue devoted to Ecosystem Services. This would assist Consortium members to distribute word about SCRR to the staff of their universities and institutes. Action AAM

During discussion it was clear that a good process of linking between researchers in Scotland is being encouraged; the 'light touch' role of SCRR in encouraging this type of development would seem to be bearing fruit. Some large research funds underpin the research of ESCom members. Martin suggested that perhaps our next Forum (in 2015) should be in conjunction with ESCom. The secretary reported that he had offered to the ESCom meeting the assistance of SCRR in the arrangement of meetings. Action SKM

Edinburgh Plant Science

Ian also reported the formation of a group called Edinburgh Plant Science, another 'bottom-up' development of (600+) like-minded research scientists in the Edinburgh area who are having a 'launch' at the RBGE on Wednesday 25 June. During discussion it was felt that this was another example of the development of 'doing-groups' of Scottish scientists that are being created in part as a consequence of SCRR Directors meeting one another. SCRR's role is to facilitate and increase awareness of what is going on, and so it is quite important that we attend the launches of such groups to encourage them and to feed back to the SCRR. Ian suggested that there could be an SCRR Newsletter on Plant Sciences. Brian indicated that Aquaculture made use of a cascade of newsletters to raise awareness. It was suggested that SCRR should place a piece about itself into the newsletters put out by Consortium members. SNH make quarterly mention of some aspect of SCRR work. Action SKM

Stuart indicated his appreciation of the physical presence of the SCRR Newsletter. Chris suggested that SCRR should seek to be the network of networks and so pick up information on the variety of networks out there. He also suggested that an issue of the SCRR Newsletter could be focused on that (network) topic in some way.

Action AAM

Citizen Science Workshop

Ian reported on the CS workshop organised by SNH and co-sponsored with SEPA and SCRR. The workshop went well, with about 80-90 participants. It was the second of a series of Citizen Science workshops put on by SNH as part of its Sharing Good Practice series. The sharing of experience with large NGOs like the British Trust for Ornithology (third UK Bird Atlas recently published: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas>) assisted the much smaller groups restricted by funding and staff expertise. It had been hoped that more academics would attend, and there is perhaps room for repeating the workshop to help explain the benefits and methods of citizen science to an academic audience.

Ian also reported that he had recently attended the first digital conservation conference in Aberdeen (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/events/digitalconservation/>). There will be a special issue of *Ambio* (a 'journal of the human environment', published by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences) resulting from this meeting. Martin drew attention to the Edina-led COBWEB project (Citizen Observatory Web - <http://cobwebproject.eu/>). This large project brought together expertise from 13 partners and 5 countries. It aims to create a test bed environment that will enable citizens living with UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserves to collect environmental data using mobile devices. Information of use for policy making is being generated by quality controlling the crowdsourced data and aggregated with Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) type reference data from public authorities. In the process it aims to build up expertise in these new and developing technologies and understand how crowdsourcing/citizen science techniques combined with SDI might bring benefit.

Chris drew attention to the survey work of OPAL (<http://www.opalexplornature.org/>). The European Citizen Science Association is hosted in Berlin (<http://ecsa.biodiv.naturkundemuseum-berlin.de/>).

Workshops

Stuart reported that the SCRR website, 'events' section, lists a number of workshops of interest to and being run by Consortium members. It is part of the changing pattern of SCRR's ability to present more than in the past. In addition, SCRR is in discussion with Liz Fletcher, Mick Watson, Ian Toth and Willie Donachie regarding a 'follow-up' Metagenomics Forum this year, organised by Edinburgh University, JHI and Moredun.

Action SKM, AAM

Martin suggested that both the Ecosystem Services and Plant Sciences groups might provide opportunities for SCRR to assist and 'badge' meetings of relevance to the development of those two groups. Perhaps the Forum due in 2015 might be undertaken together with the Ecosystem Services group.

Action SKM, AAM

Brian reported that Masts had a food security meeting that was so well subscribed that they are planning to have another one.

Chris suggested that 'Resource security' as a topic might embrace not just food but also water, timber, etc. and would draw in a wide range of research and stakeholder interest.

Ian requested that additional ideas and thoughts for workshops and potential SCRR events should be passed to Stuart for consideration. If there is any event being organised by Consortium members where it might be possible to double badge it with SCRR, please consider this.

Action All

5 **Membership**

Stuart reported that SCRR policy was to engage with as many rural research organisations as it can. There are small organisations that are part of a larger grouping that would like to join but also retain their identity. The Crichton Campus was one such and had recently joined. He indicated that SCRR is also engaging with the archaeologists through the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. The engagement with the universities of St Andrews, as well as Dundee and Aberdeen, remain as gaps in the membership portfolio.

Action SKM/AAM

Ian reported that there were developments at the University of Glasgow Scottish Centre for Ecology and the Natural Environment Field Research Station at Rowardennan (www.gla.ac.uk/scene). He also mentioned that there had been preliminary contacts with the Field Studies Council in Scotland, based in Millport, and that the University of Glasgow had retained good connections with the Millport facilities and FSC.

Action SKM/AAM

The Secretary agreed to send members spare copies of the SCRR Newsletter, and asked members to contact individuals in University Departments throughout Scotland who might be interested in the research linking aspects of the SCRR.

Action All

The Secretary is attempting to organise an SCRR Directors' Research Meeting in Glasgow to spread the word in the West of Scotland and illustrate what the Consortium is about.

Action AAM

Executive membership

Ian reported that Steve Yearley would be returning from Sabbatical at the end of July when he would resume chairing the Executive Committee.

6 **Finances**

The Treasurer reported that the finances of the Consortium had been enhanced by the payment of subscriptions, with approximately £35,000 in the bank. This reserve is currently slightly larger than the income/expenditure for one year. Increased efforts will be made this year to encourage Consortium members to pay on time. Action AAM

Stuart reported that the 'matrix' used to assist members to select the subscription amount they felt appropriate to pay was working well.

It was agreed that one or more pop-up banners advertising SCRR would be appropriate publicity expenditure. The design should have the map of Scotland with dots of membership location, very few words and good images. Action AAM

7 **Contacts**

The Scottish Science Advisory Council (SSAC) now produces a regular update and Stuart recommended that members should be notified by email of updates. Action SKM

He reported that there is a call (on the SSAC website) for new members and he encouraged members to consider applying. Ian indicated that SSAC had recently sent out questionnaires about research facilities in the Natural Sciences that were used and might be required.

Brian drew attention to the Masts website (<http://www.masts.ac.uk/>) for contact links to that group.

John drew attention to the Animal Task Force (ATF; <http://animaltaskforce.eu/>) that aims to promote a sustainable and competitive livestock sector in Europe. It has a single representative member of the research provider community from thirteen Member States and four Technology Platforms as members and expects shortly to have further industry representative bodies amongst its membership. The EBRC (Easter Bush Research Consortium comprising SRUC, Roslin Institute, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and the Moredun Research Institute) represents farm livestock research providers in the UK. In 2013 the ATF produced a 'White Paper' on 'Suggested priorities for support under Horizon 2020 to enhance innovation and sustainability in the livestock production sector of Europe's food supply chains'. Several topics in the 'White Paper' appeared in the first call in December 2013– and the ATF has recently been asked by DG RTD to make further detailed suggestions to inform the next call. He asked whether members of SCRR are involved in analogous organisations? If not, were there ways of encouraging others to consider how they might be. It is a very powerful way to influence thinking in Brussels.

Perhaps SCRR, as a network, might be able to perform a comparable function in some way.

Martin indicated that Euromontana (<http://www.euromontana.org/en/>), the European association for co-operation and development of mountain

territories was another example. Martin also drew attention to Scotland Europa (<http://www.scotlandeuropa.com>), a membership-based organisation that promotes Scotland's interests across the institutions of the European Union and to the representatives of Europe's regions and Member States. It helps Scottish organisations foster successful European relationships, providing guidance on European policies and funding. In addition Scotland House provides excellent conference centre facilities, offering an ideal location for hosting events with both Scottish and European focus.

Brian said that there were parallels in the aquatic side and mentioned aquaexcel and vibrio. It was decided that an article drawing attention to these opportunities could be placed in the next issue (80) of the SCRR Newsletter.

Action JO/MP/BA/AAM

8 **Publicity and Communications**

The Secretary reported that he was adding to the 'News' and 'Events' sections of the SCRR website information of interest to the Consortium membership. He reported that Stuart and he were trying to attend as many as possible of these events in order to increase SCRR awareness and provide feedback. The Secretary asked the Consortium membership to inform him of events so that he could put notice of them onto the website; he also asked for a picture to go with the advert as that adds to its attractiveness. The minutes of the meetings are being loaded onto the 'publications' part of the website.

The next issue of the SCRR Newsletter will be distributed at the Highland Show on the 19th June. The print run will be increased to 1000 for this edition. He asked for notification of names and addresses of people and organisations that should be receiving the Newsletter. The distribution list was being expanded to include copies for all current and potential Consortium member organisations, as well as all MPs and MSPs. Feedback had been positive. He reiterated that it was important that all Consortium members send in material as the quality of the Newsletter is founded on the material supplied. He was not seeking to expand the number of pages at the moment. Stuart reiterated that he was glad to have maintained the paper copy as it was found to be available to the general public in many different places. Electronic copies are available on the web, and notices of these are sent out to those who ask.

John wondered in what way we might access those in research labs who do not yet know about the SCRR. Would publication of the URL of the SCRR Newsletter by Consortium members increase electronic readership? Should articles about SCRR be being placed into the newsletters of the Consortium's membership? Stuart thought that preparing short articles on the work/remit of SCRR was a good idea.

Action SKM

It was suggested that there could be a way of notifying everyone on an email mailing list when the next issue of the Newsletter was available electronically. The Secretary requested advice on how to set this up in such a way that the information did not just get caught by Spam filters. Ruth indicated that Sniffer would be able to advise.

Action RW

It is important first to ask of Consortium member organisations, who in their organisations would want to be on an email notification list to receive notice of the each SCRR Newsletter as it is published.

A similar note could be put into the Newsletter itself.

A counter could be put on the 'Publications' part of the SCRR website to monitor how effective this attempt to expand Newsletter readership might be. Action AAM

9 **Residual matters from the minutes of the 119th meeting.**

Kathy indicated that the final analyses of the results of the 'Nature Tourism' meeting will be available later this week and will be passed to the Secretary for publication. Action KV

10 **Any other business.**

None.

11 **Date and place of next meeting.**

Board meeting: - 30th June 2014, ECCI, University of Edinburgh EH1 1LZ