

SCOTTISH CONSORTIUM FOR RURAL RESEARCH

The 118th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee was held at Sniffer, Greenside House, 25 Greenside Place, Edinburgh EH1 3AA on Monday 2nd December 2013

Present:

Ian Bainbridge	Chairman
Stuart Monro	(Scientific Director)
Nick Fraser	
Martin Price	
Kathy Velandar	
Ruth Wolstenholme	
Steve Yearley	
Alastair A Macdonald	(Secretary/Treasurer)

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies were received from Colin Campbell and Willie Donachie.

2. Minutes of 117th executive meeting

Accepted as accurate.

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

Sniffer

Ruth reported that Sniffer had recently been doing a lot of work on developing tools including an adaptation 'visuals' tool that has support from Scottish Government and SNH and is intended for use by planners and communities. Sniffer has also been developing guidance for the public sector. This was referred to at a recent Sniffer/Adaptation Scotland presentation at the Sustainable Scotland Network conference ("*Five steps to managing your climate risk*" for the Public Sector [<http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/media/237550/7-Karen-Miller.pdf>]). Work is also underway in developing a risk-based approach to looking at adaptation for the Private Sector.

Through Adaptation Scotland Sniffer has also facilitated the publication of the Climate Ready Clyde Vision, and is currently managing a partnership-based process to produce a regional climate change adaptation strategy and action plan for Glasgow and the Clyde Valley. [<http://www.adaptationscotland.org.uk/4/110/0/Area-based-project--Climate-Ready-Clyde.aspx>]

Sniffer now wants to apply this place-based approach to adaptation in the Southern Uplands, i.e. looking at rural adaptation, and is currently in discussion with SNH, SEPA, local government and other potential partners in this regard. The main emphasis of Sniffer's work in terms of adaptation

is capacity building as well as the development of tools for adaptation. Several tools and case studies will be available on line in the early to mid New Year, including a community-based toolkit. Reference to these could go into the Newsletter that is due to go to press in late January.

Action RW/AAM

The James Hutton Institute

Stuart reported that on the 10th December the Scottish Government and the James Hutton Institute will formally launch at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh 'Scotland's Soils' a greater awareness of its soils data-bank. This links with a wish from the JHI that the SCRR should do something in 2014 about data in general (see below).

Cairngorms National Park Partnership

Martin reported on the gathering on the 14th November (three years after the previous meeting that had won a Beltane award for knowledge exchange) of about 35 people currently or interested in doing research in the Cairngorms (and in having research done for them). The participants were mainly from the 'supply side' rather than the 'users side' something that needs to be looked at in the future. The Park as a whole needs to have a research strategy which will be linked to a central database of knowledge about the park, so that people can find out who is doing what and about opportunities for research. It was deemed a useful event, particularly as practically every member of the SCRR with a land-based interest would have or already has a research interest in the park. During discussion the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) was mentioned in relation to the compilation of biodiversity recording in the past. The archaeologists attending the meeting highlighted their involvement in rural research and suggested that they might provide a useful insight relevant to SCRR members' research. Martin indicated that there is a small group developing the research strategy within the park. There will be a report of the meeting for the SCRR Newsletter. Action MP/AAM

Martin also mentioned that the Park has become a Long Term Socio-Economic Research site (LTSER) as a platform for collaborative research. An EU proposal being drafted for Horizon 2020 would provide targeted funds to bring the Cairngorms into this broader collaborative and interdisciplinary research approach. The park administration (CNPA) is willing to do interesting things and wants the park to be seen as a test-bed for doing useful things well. SCRR can assist by disseminating information about the research in the park, and recognising that almost every SCRR member is a partner of the Park.

Ian mentioned that although the National Parks have the same status as other Non-Departmental Public Bodies they have never featured in CAMERAS. Perhaps the Chief Scientific Adviser, Rural and Environment, Prof Louise Heathwaite and the CAMERAS partners should be made

aware of this. The CAMERAS Board met recently and is making progress towards producing a Rural and Environment Science Strategy in Scotland to add to the three other strategies already produced. The intention is for it to be completed in the next four to six months. Action MP to follow up with CNPA.

He also mentioned that there is the possibility that another Centre of Expertise will be formed dealing with Tree and Plant Health. The timing of that will depend upon detailed planning and appropriate funding.

4 Events in 2013

Stuart reported that the Metagenomics Forum had been a success. There had been a good turnout and the feedback had been very positive. People had been brought together who would not normally have met. It spread the word that SCRR was an organisation that played a research-facilitating role and many of the younger people who attended valued this concept. A report will go onto the website and into the next Newsletter. The report from Willie's colleague in Moredun will be chased up and it may also be possible to use a report produced by Jeanette Hall in the SNH. Action WD/IB

Kathy reported that the Nature-based Tourism Seminar to be held on the 16th December at Dynamic Earth had attracted about 40 participants so far, with the aim being to have 50 attending. In the evening Our Dynamic Earth will show a film (Wild Places) that seeks to encourage children to get out into the great outdoors. It will be in the Show Dome and is open to the general public. The results of the day will be reported on the SCRR web pages and in the Newsletter. Action KV/AA

Stuart reported a discussion whether we needed a discussion topic for the Board Meeting on the 13th January. The Referendum White Paper contained some answers to the questions sent in as an SCRR response to a request for anonymised questions from SSAC (Minutes of 50th Main Board Meeting, 5th May 2013). What are the still unanswered questions? There was the suggestion that some of this discussion could take place via email for those not able to attend the Board Meeting. Stuart would be the person collating the questions and issues, on behalf of SCRR, as before. He suggested that the paper he had sent in last time might be a useful starting point. Ruth suggested that perhaps it might be helpful to get some preliminary feedback before the Board Meeting in order to provide a focus to the discussion at that Meeting. Key questions would be helpful. It was proposed that 30 minutes of the Board Meeting should be set aside for this discussion. The relevant paragraphs from the White Paper will be circulated before the Board Meeting. Action AAM

The suggested text on the agenda for the Board Meeting would be: 'We propose to discuss the Referendum White Paper and its implications for Rural Science in Scotland. Three proposed initial questions concern: Research Council Funding arrangements (questions 246-250)?

Research funding from the Charities e.g. Wellcome Trust?

What will happen to EU funding?

Action AAM

Stuart indicated that he had heard that there was also a 'Research Paper' being drawn up dealing specifically with research, and he will follow this up.

Action SKM

The Annual lecture is arranged for 10 February 2014 and will be given by Dr Alan Belward. His title is: Running out of land – a new global challenge. The Institute of Biology have indicated that they will reduce their financial commitment to the lecture. The costs in the past have been shared equally between the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Institute of Biology and the SCRR. Stuart will explore the basis of the recent increase in the cost of the lecture.

Action SKM

After a brief discussion suggestions of a topic and good speaker for the 2015 Annual Lecture were called for. As 2015 will be the 'Year of Scotland's Food and Drink' this might suggest the choice of speaker.

There are two ideas for workshop topics for 2014. After discussion it was suggested that the Citizen Science topic might feed to the following suggestion of Handling Data. Many of the SCRR members are busy with various aspects of Citizen Science. A workshop on this topic would perhaps be a good way to share good practice. It could be linked to a public event to illustrate to the public what can be done. This meeting could be held in Dynamic Earth, the board of which is keen to encourage this kind of public engagement and collaboration between Dynamic Earth and SCRR. Ian indicated that SNH would be happy to participate also, as they hold annual "Sharing Good Practice" events with respect to Citizen Science. Ian will speak to SNH staff about this.

Action IB

What is meant by Citizen Science includes 'iSpot', and a variety of other ways in which the general public are engaged in gathering data. Within the biodiversity set there are at least three groupings: 'Specialist Societies' (e.g. <http://www.thebls.org.uk/>), local record centres, (e.g. <http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/>) and thirdly the public platforms (e.g. <http://www.ispotnature.org/>). The experience Sniffer has is that citizen-gathered information can be used directly by the local community, rather than submitting to an external platform, thereby empowering these communities to act, for example in relation to climate resilience. SEPA are also engaged in a slightly different way with members of the public gathering samples for them. Steve indicated that one of his colleagues (Dr Rodrigues) had obtained a Beltane grant to fund some work in this area looking at the citizens' perspective, he also drew attention to CEH's work in this field of Citizen Science (<http://www.ceh.ac.uk/products/publications/understanding-citizen-science.html>). He also drew attention to the Royal Society's promotion of the citizen's right to aspects of the governance of science. (<http://datablog.is.ed.ac.uk/2013/10/28/science-as-an-open-enterprise->

prof-geoffrey-boulton/). Martin drew attention to the Cobweb project (<http://edina.ac.uk/cgi-bin/news.cgi?filename=2012-12-25-cobweb.txt>). The British Trust for Ornithology is running the 'What's Up?' project (<http://www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/our-work/whats-up>) for mountaineers and hill-walkers to collect bird sightings in the hills. Non-native invasive species have been monitored in a similar fashion, with the Colorado beetle being a prime example of the potential effectiveness of implementing Citizen Science. Discussion of issues around statistical analyses of the data collected is also relevant to such a workshop. The timing of the workshop was discussed with the possibility that it be held at Dynamic Earth in the first quarter of 2014. Action SKM

Organisation of the workshop.

Action SKM/IB/MP/AAM

The workshop led by JHI and BGS on Handling Data was the second suggestion. This would also be of interest to a number of the members of SCRR. Discussions to be held between Colin, Diarmid and Stuart will seek to have the topic include the interests of a number of other members of the SCRR. There was discussion of additional interested partners in such a meeting such as SEWeb (<http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/>) and the Geographic Information Science & Analysis Team in the Scottish Government (headed by Shona Nicol) (<http://www.agi.org.uk/storage/events/130227-Scotland/ShonaNicolRemoteSensing.pdf>). The Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (<http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/>) chaired by Craig Macadam aims to bring data collectors and data users together to develop best practice. It was indicated that the voluntary sector is good at putting data into the system, the public sector is not as good and the private sector are the worst of all residing behind 'commercial confidentiality', even when using other people's data. There is a need to make sure all parties contribute in a useful way, and that the data are pooled, and allow access to the 'pool'. Census data should also be remembered, as it is very relevant. How big the event should be was also briefly discussed at the topic is a very large one. Compliance with the Inspire Directive was also an issue to be considered (<http://data.gov.uk/location/inspire>). It should be a full-day event, and the topic will have to be constrained in some way. It would be very helpful if the discussion of 'ownership of data' could be moved forward, and the notions of Data-sharing and Data-availability made clearer. It was suggested that the meeting be held in Dundee to better enable SCRR members to attend. Martin also drew attention to the amount of data in databases and portals managed by different organisations, and suggested that posters and demonstrations of this wealth of information could also be part of the meeting, perhaps during a long lunch-hour. He also drew attention to Edina (<http://edina.ac.uk/>) that is also a big player in this side of things. It is important to make clear that we are organising this meeting in order to assist making the connections. SNH is attempting to create a habitat map for Scotland from the plethora of maps and other sources of individual species and other specific data that exist in isolation

from one another. The European Union is trying to address this topic with EUNIS (<http://www.eea.europa.eu/>), which deals with both land and marine habitats. Chris Higgins, who works for EDINA, is looking at Open access software. Martin suggested that he EEA might provide a relevant speaker to the meeting (<http://www.eeassoc.org/>) and he was willing to assist with this. Action CC/DC/SKM

With respect to the new structure of the Directors' research lunches Stuart said that cross-institution research and highlighting these SCRR collaborations should be the main feature. The next opportunity to explore this will be at the Directors' research lunch at Moredun on the 24th March and Willie will promote this there. Action WD

Stuart encouraged SCRR Directors to take this new pattern on board. He also suggested that the Directors should bring someone from their institute with them to assist the spread of knowledge of the work of SCRR and the potential for inter-institute collaboration. It had been noted towards the end of the advertising for the Metagenomics Forum that 80% of the SCRR Directors were not opening the emails sent by Eventbrite and so their staff were presumably unaware that the SCRR were organising a Forum for them. Action SKM & AAM

5 **Membership**

There has been an expression of interest from Biology and Geosciences at St Andrews University, but this had not yet been confirmed as a wish to renew SCRR membership. Glasgow University has also expressed interest. SAMS have been signed up as a new member. The archaeology representation at the Cairngorms meeting suggested that the merged Historic Scotland/Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments might also become part of the SCRR, and should be explored. The University of Aberdeen has been approached, as has the University of Dundee. Action SKM

Ian reported that the Field Studies Council (<http://www.field-studies-council.org/>) have taken over Millport. It will be running it as a Field Centre from the start of January 2014 (<http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/millport.aspx>). Approaches could be made to the new, still-to-be-appointed Scottish Director who will be managing Millport and Kindrogan as well as raising the profile of FSC in Scotland. Action SKM

6 **Finances**

Financially the Consortium is in good shape and that is in part due to support from Genomics Forum for the Perth Meeting to cover any shortfall, and similarly for the Metagenomics meeting. Costs have also been kept in check. The reserve is roughly equivalent to the income for one year. The Treasurer indicated that he would be keen, at the next Board meeting, for the Consortium members to be asked to pay the extra £5 or so to bring everyone into line with the new (matrix) membership

fee structure. The treasurer also reported that the set of Accounts been approved by Prof Ian Aitken, the first Independent Examiner. A second Independent Examiner was now sought as Mike Talbot had indicated that he did not wish to do this any more. It was suggested that Margaret Rennex might undertake this role. Action AAM

7 **Contacts**

Stuart reported that Nigel Brown at Scottish Science Advisory Council is chairing a group looking at various things including GM food. Ian suggested that it might be useful to have a part of the SCRR website where new appointments might be registered. After some discussion of examples the feasibility of this will be explored further. Action AAM

8 **Publicity and Communications**

The Secretary reported that the SCRR website was being updated where he had the skills and time to make those changes. Damien continues to do the more complicated updates. The aim continues to be that it should present the information and news relevant to SCRR in as fresh and attractive a way as possible.

The SCRR Newsletter had just been published and delivered. A request for material to put into the first Newsletter of 2014 will go out this month, with submission before the middle of January. The aim is to have the Newsletter published in time for the Annual Lecture on the 10th February. The contributions from the members of the consortium are of high quality and are much appreciated. They make the Newsletter what it is. It was noted that 2015 will be the 'Year of Scotland's Food and Drink' which will provide a suitable theme for that year. Action AAM

9 **Residual matters from the minutes of the 117th meeting.**

None.

10 **Any other business.**

Martin mentioned that Prof Ian Bryden has been appointed as Vice Principal for Research at UHI. He may wish to attend SCRR meetings. Ian suggested that he come with Martin to join us at one or two of our meetings.

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

Board meeting: - 13th January 2014, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Easter Bush, Midlothian EH25 9RG