



SCOTTISH POLICY GROUP

BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

**The British Ecological Society Scottish
Policy Group Five Year Strategy 2016-
2021**

British Ecological Society Scottish Policy Group (BES-SPG) strategy

Ecology covers a range of disciplines. *The British Ecological Society Scottish Policy Group defines ecology as the scientific study of the distribution, abundance and dynamics of organisms, their interactions with other organisms, (including humans), and their physical environment.*

Background

The BES-SPG has now been in existence for 5 years. When the BES-SPG started this was a new idea for BES, with no similar group present in any of the other devolved countries. During these first 5 years the committee have been identifying ways of working, finding out what does and does not work and how it can work with both BES members and policymakers. The BES-SPG is now widely known and our activities have expanded during this time. In April 2016 the committee thought it appropriate to review our Aims and activities to assess a) if we were fulfilling our aims; b) what, if any, activities we wanted to drop; c) what activities we could do better to fulfil our aims; d) if there were new activities we should do; and e) where we wanted to be in 5 years' time. As a result of this review we have produced a BES-SPG strategy. We have circulated it to BES-SPG members and included their comments. We would now like this to be signed off by the policy committee so they are aware of our strategy.

Aims of BES-SPG

- 1. Supporting ecologists to understand and get involved in policy making, and support policy makers in understanding ecology.** BES-SPG acts as a hub, bringing together ecologists and policymakers to enhance mutual understanding. SPG provides training for Scottish ecologists (and those undertaking ecological work in the widest sense) to become more involved in policymaking, and provides briefings to BES-SPG members about the latest policy news.
- 2. Promoting the use of ecological knowledge as part of a multidisciplinary approach to policy making.** BES-SPG highlights to Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, and the wider society the long and short term benefits of using robust ecological evidence to inform policies.
- 3. Providing robust ecological evidence.** BES-SPG acts as a focal point to provide robust ecological evidence to policy makers including Scottish Government and its agencies, MSPs, Scottish Parliament Committees, SPICE, local authorities, planning authorities and others.

Assessment of activities undertaken to date

In a scoring exercise carried out by the committee in April 2016 we assessed that the SPG was most successful at delivering Aim 1, and least successful at achieving Aim 3. We assessed all the activities we currently do and concluded that they are all helping us to meet our aims. However we did identify a number of ways in which we could improve our current activities, these are listed below.

Current activities and ways we plan to improve them

Pie and a Pint (PAAP): These events help achieve Aim 1 and to a lesser extent Aim 3. We wish to improve these events by following up on the discussions that take place at them. We plan to do this by a) producing a summary document of the discussions after each PAAP event and b) sending round invitations to follow up on the PAAP event through personal visits to explain the discussion further.

Science conference: This largely contributes to Aim 1 but could have a greater impact on aim 2 by encouraging more policy makers to attend, e.g. SNH, MSPs. We would like to improve how this contributes to Aim 2 by:

- Issuing specific personal invites from individual contacts.
- Invite more policy makers to present at the conference in order to encourage them to attend.
- SPG should specifically sponsor a particular part of this event each year (drinks reception and evening speaker) to promote SPG more effectively.

SE Link Environment week: This contributes to Aim 2. The SPG have only done this once and based on this experience we will aim to be more strategic in how we manage our presence at the event in future.

Other SE Link Activities: This contributes most to Aim 2 and partially to Aim 3 but could be improved to contribute to Aim 1 if more members were encouraged to be involved. We will aim to work harder to maximise the benefits SPG gains from LINK and to prioritise how we can contribute to LINK.

Consultations: Responding to consultations contributes to Aim 3 and partially to Aim 2. We will aim to improve the way we conduct consultations by including more members, particularly Early Career Researchers (ECR) to help with Aim 1. We currently respond to 3-5 consultations a year and aim to increase this number to 5-7 (depending on willingness of members to get involved).

Training Workshop: This specifically fulfils Aim 1 but we aim to improve this by 1) making it an annual event and 2) assessing if policy makers would find a training workshop useful.

Updates/communications: This largely contributes to Aim 1 and partially towards Aim 2. In order to increase our communication we need more members to be willing to write blogs/twitter content etc with a specifically Scottish focus.

Forward look – What we would like to achieve within the next 5 years

In addition to improving our current activities, as listed above, in the next 5 years or sooner we aim to:

- Increase the percentage of BES Scottish members that are SPG members from 18.6% to 25% to contribute to Aim 1.
- Create a more multidisciplinary SPG to contribute to Aims 1 and 2. *A wider range of disciplines being part of the SPG.*
- SPG committee to have an annual forward look meeting.
- More Scottish Government folk and agencies attending PAAP. This will contribute to all three aims. *Target of 7 attending each PAAP.*
- Better links to the Welsh policy group. *Target of one joint activity in the next 5 years.*
- Make links each year to the BES proactive policy topics. This will contribute to Aim 2. *Aim to organise a PAAP, blog or other relevant form of discussion on at least one of the BES proactive topics each year.*
- Interact more with Scottish media. *Currently we have very little (zero?) interaction.*
- Host a lunch and seminar at Victoria Quay to make Scottish Government more aware of SPG. This will contribute to Aims 1 and 2. *This would be a new activity for SPG.*
- Support and encourage SPG members to provide targeted evidence to Scottish Parliamentary Committees, e.g. the RACCE Committee. This activity would link to Aim 3. *This would be a new activity for SPG.*
- Scope the possibility of working with local policy makers. This would contribute to all three of the BES-SPG's aim. *This would be a new activity for SPG.*
- There are no cross-party groups relating to ecology. Explore the possibility, with SE Link and supportive MSPs, to set one up, as CPGs can be an effective means of communication with parliament and would contribute to Aim 3. *This would be a new activity for SPG.*
- Sufficient policy work happening in Scotland to argue the case for a part-time BES Scottish Policy Officer at the next BES strategic planning session. This would enable BES-SPG to be more active in all three of its aims.