

**A Vision for
Local Record Centres
in Scotland**

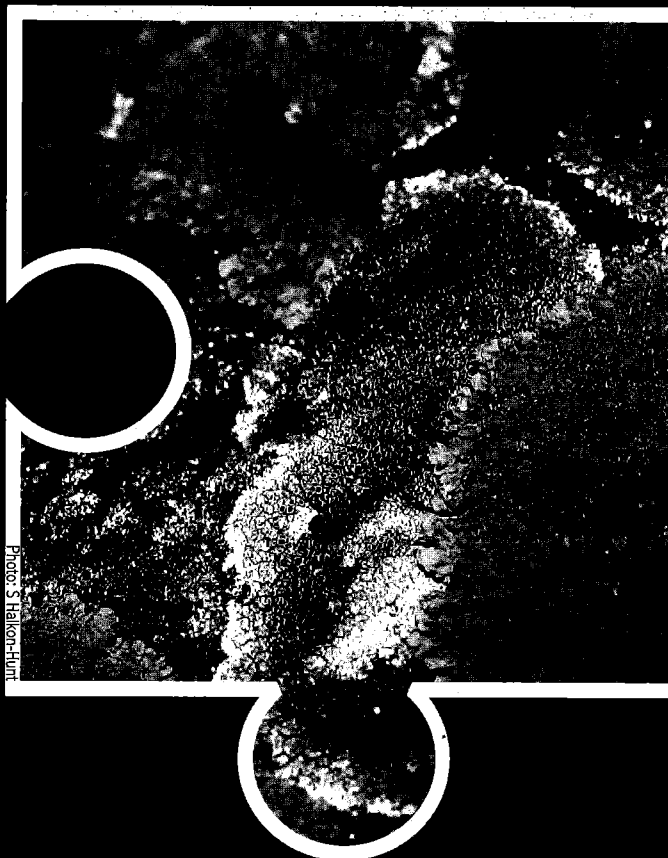


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A Vision for Local Record Centres in Scotland

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a partnership of local and national custodians of wildlife information providing access to all within a framework of standards.

These guidelines were prepared as a contribution to the development of the NBN as part of the NBN's Linking Local Record Centres (LRCs) Project. It is part of a range of guidelines prepared for LRCs and their partners.

The Wildlife Trusts are leading the Linking LRCs on behalf of the NBN. This project is funded by Countryside Council for Wales; English Nature; Scottish Natural Heritage; The Esmeé Fairbairn Charitable Trust and The Wildlife Trusts.

THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS

**The Kiln
Waterside
Newark**

**Nottinghamshire
NG24 1WT**

Tel: 01636 677711

Fax: 01636 670001

E-mail: info@wildlife-trusts.cix.co.uk

Or visit the NBN web site: www.nbn.org.uk/projects/lrc

A Vision for Local Record Centres in Scotland

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1 Summary

The National Biodiversity Network's Linking Local Records Centres project completed a consultation exercise looking at the potential geographical distribution of LRCs throughout Scotland. Based on the feedback of sixty-two respondents this paper evaluates and assesses the advantages and disadvantages of the different models proposed, from the perspective of national, regional and local users bodies.

Considerable work is needed to develop an integrated network of LRCs covering the whole of Scotland that meets the needs of users and recorders operating at a wide range of different levels.

Three recommendations are given to take this work forward:

Recommendation 1

The development of a network of LRCs in Scotland should progress based around the following geographic distribution:

1. Shetland Isles and Orkney
2. Highlands
3. Western Isles
4. Tayside (Angus, Perth and Kinross and Dundee City)
5. North east Scotland (Aberdeenshire, City of Aberdeen and Moray)
6. Fife
7. Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire
8. Scottish Borders
9. Dumfries and Galloway
10. Lanarkshire (North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire)
11. Ayrshire (North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire)
12. West central Scotland (Inverclyde, City of Glasgow, Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire)
13. Argyll and Bute
14. Lothians (East Lothian, Mid Lothian, West Lothian, Edinburgh City)

Recommendation 2

In developing and managing LRCs throughout Scotland cooperation between LRCs is essential. All LRC partnerships and users should build effective working relationships with other LRCs, especially their immediate neighbours.

Recommendation 3

All bodies should adopt a long-term strategic view of their needs for biodiversity information and how they envisage LRCs meeting these needs. This should allow for flexibility and adaptation as needs change and to ensure cost-effective operation

2 Developing a model for Local Record Centres distribution in Scotland

2.1 Background

The Linking Local Record Centres (LRCs) project has been working to develop tools and guidance on how LRCs can operate as fully integrated nodes within the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

As part of this work the Linking LRCs project has consulted with key national and local partners to develop an understanding of how LRCs should be geographically distributed. This report presents the results of this consultation and proposes a way forward. It represents a substantial contribution to developing an agreed view on how an integrated network of LRCs should be organised.

Separate guidance has also been produced by the Linking LRCs project that describes how individual LRCs may be established and how they can operate.

2.2 The consultation process

In autumn 2000 a consultation exercise was conducted to elicit the views of a wide range of collectors, managers and users of biological data on how LRCs should be distributed across Scotland, ie on the geographical areas that individual LRCs should cover.

A consultation paper was sent to almost three hundred individuals working across different sectors and areas in Scotland.

The paper set out five different scenarios for the possible distribution of LRCs, each of which may present certain advantages and disadvantages to potential LRC partners. Consultees were asked to identify the scenario they favour, to provide an evaluation of its potential advantages and disadvantages to them, and to rank the other options. Additional comments were invited including any alterations to the options presented.

2.3 The results

A total of sixty-two responses were received. Section 2 of this paper presents the results for each of the five scenarios. A breakdown of the responses based on respondents' preferred scenario is presented in Annex 1.

For the purposes of determining whether there were consistent differences in responses from people working at different geographical levels respondents were asked to state the level at which they work or, in the case of those with a non-professional interest, their geographical area of interest.

For the purposes of analysis three levels were identified:

- Local – up to but not exceeding a single local authority area
- Regional – more than one local authority area but not the whole of Scotland
- National – the whole of Scotland (or wider)

Section 3 presents a breakdown of responses based on the geographical level of interest of the respondent. breakdown based on the geographical level of the respondent is presented in Annex 2.

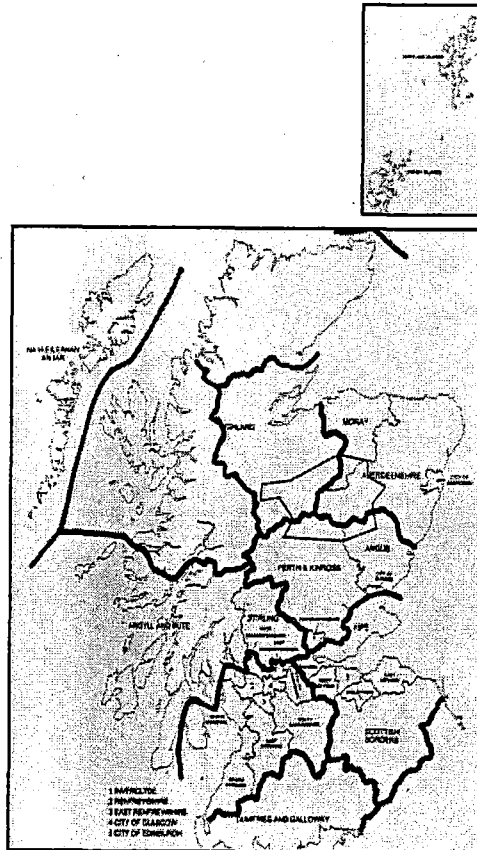
- too large and remote
- impersonal, causing loss of support amongst recorders
- unlikely to be used by local authority staff
- co-ordination likely to be unachievable

Suggested alteration

Division of each area into two provides best fit with Forestry Commission administrative area boundaries.

3.3 Scenario 3

This scenario for eleven LRCs to cover Scotland is based on the administrative structure of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which further divides its area-based structure into local offices and also groups areas at Joint Area Board level.



Summary results

Only nine respondents selected this scenario, placing support for this option as second lowest. Support for this option came predominantly from those working at regional level, with only one (out of 24) local respondents supporting this distribution model (for a breakdown of the results see Annex 1).

Main reasons cited for supporting this option

- provides appropriate level of coverage while being reasonably coincident with SEPA boundaries
- Western Isles needs separate LRC as Inverness would not be used
- follows sensible and natural geographic/biological zones and may be appropriate compromise on cost
- may help with agreeing Service Level Agreements

Main reasons cited for not supporting this option

Not sensible to split the Highlands

Suggested alterations

None

- recognises Cairngorms as a special case
- the perfect option for Highland
- LBAP monitoring is a key issue that needs to be addressed by any network

Provisos placed on support

None

Main reasons cited for not supporting this option

- too many LRCs in the central belt
- not likely to easily meet regional or national needs
- the excessive number of LRCs that would be required and the capacity of local authorities to play a lead role in all of them
- difficulties in securing funding for 25 LRCs
- risk of not engaging in certain areas

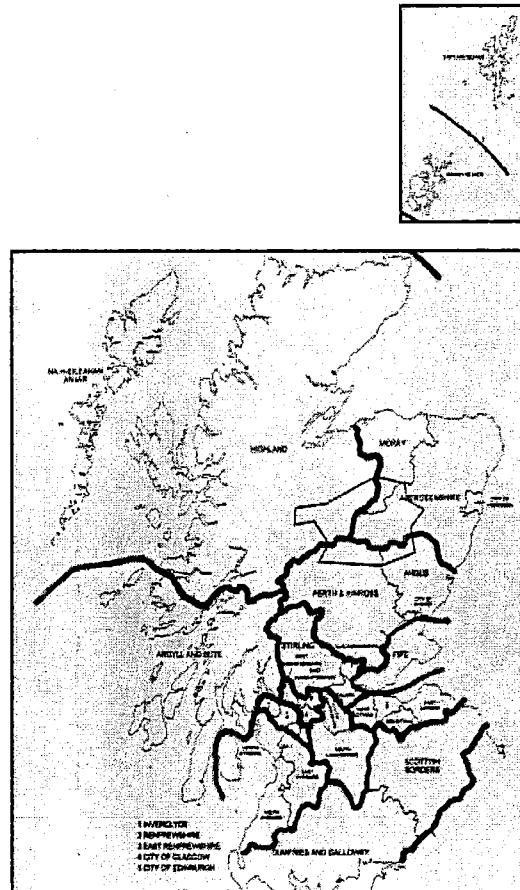
Suggested alterations

North and West Highlands may develop as satellite recording centres (as in scenario 3) but this should be under the auspices of Inverness.

3.5 Scenario 5

This is a "hybrid" proposal for 14 LRCs and is based on current activities.

Partnerships have been formed in a number of areas to promote the development of LRCs. This scenario recognises current LRC activities and the significance of the LBAP process as a significant driver for LRC development in Scotland.



Summary results

Nearly half of all respondents chose this option and, of those who didn't, nearly half selected this as their second choice.

Over half of those working at the local level favoured this option, with significant levels of support at the national level (for a breakdown of the results see Annex 1).

Main reasons cited for supporting this option

- gives the best all round coverage to most people, using sensible and easily administered boundaries
- presents a good compromise between meeting specific needs of each LBAP and benefiting from economies of scale
- builds on existing provision
- has many of the benefits of option 4 in terms of local recognition but is more rational and achievable
- balances local accountability and resources
- maintains an independent and easily accessible LRC in both Orkney and Shetland

- presents a good geographical spread
- most chance of success
- closest to an even spread of potential resources
- follows biogeographic boundaries
- takes into account the old regional local government structure

Main reasons cited for not supporting this option

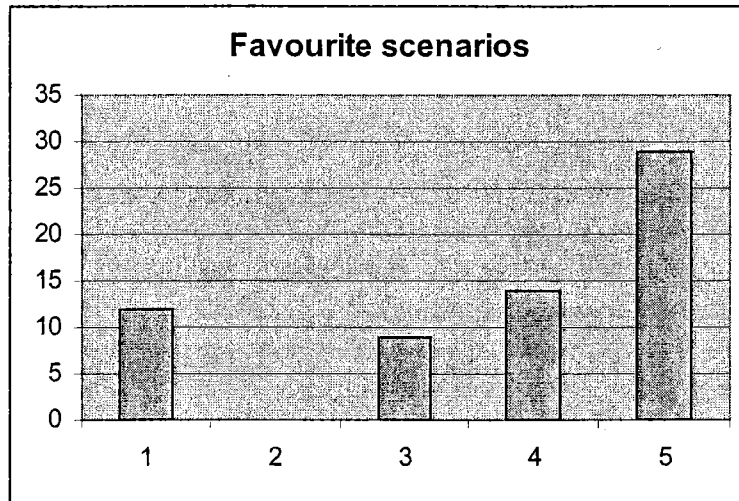
Likely to be too expensive

Suggested alterations

- split Highlands and Western Isles
- main LRC for Highland based on existing LRC in Inverness, with satellite centres for the North in Wick, and the West in Fort William
- make the Western Isles, Skye and the Small Isles a further LRC area, this could link in with the sub areas of proposed Highland LBAP set up
- amalgamate the two proposed centres in west central Scotland
- split Dumfries and Galloway from Borders

3.6 Discussion of results based on scenarios

The graph below illustrates the level of support for each of the scenarios from all respondents.



There was a clear preference for scenario five. As well as being widely supported, many of those selecting this option have had direct involvement in developing and running LRCs or in developing strategic policy on data management issues. Those selecting others as their first choice expressed no strong opinions against this option. Many respondents mentioned that this option presents a compromise between the ideal degree of local accountability and the availability of resources. In general those selecting this option appear to have taken more factors into account than simply meeting their own data needs.

Despite overwhelming support for scenario five, there were views expressed by a substantial number of respondents that this option could be improved through a number of alterations.

There was very considerable support for splitting the Western Isles from Highland and this view should be accepted as constituting an alteration to the preferred option.

3.7 Key issues

There was some support for not amalgamating Dumfries and Galloway with Borders although current work on developing an LRC in the region is likely to influence these views.

Unfortunately responses from the west central belt were low and it is not possible to evaluate the level of support for the suggested amalgamation of the areas comprising the City of Glasgow, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire. Work needs to be done to raise awareness of the need for data on biodiversity within this area.

There was a high level of understanding expressed by most respondents of the many issues that need to be considered when developing LRC provision, although it is clear that considerable work needs to be done to make the network of LRCs a reality.

It is clearly important to continue to explain and promote, at all opportunities, the role of LRCs in supporting voluntary recording effort and in working closely with local decision makers.

A number of respondents expressed the view that good communications technologies, and the use of the web, would enable satisfactory access to data that are managed at a considerable distance. It is clear that more work needs to be done to determine if this is true although it appears that the delivery of responsive LRC services requires that a close working relationship exists between LRCs and their users.

4 Results based on the level of the respondents

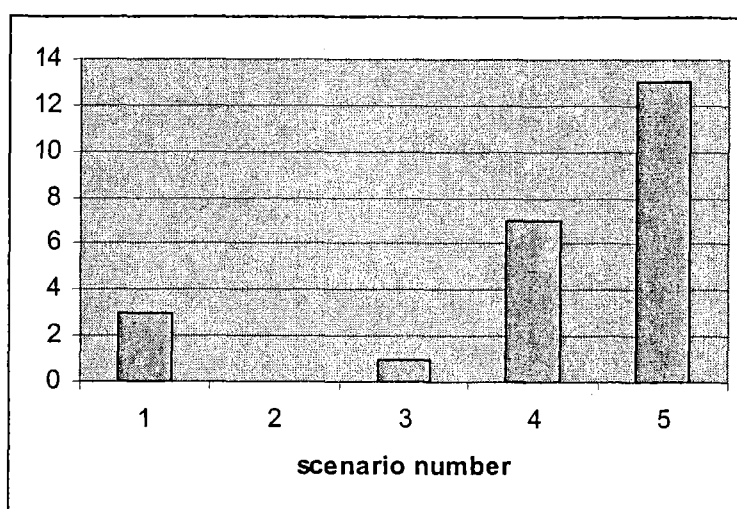
This section presents a breakdown of responses based on the geographical level of interest of the respondent

4.1 Local level respondents

Twenty-four respondents classified themselves as working at the local level.

This group showed a marked preference for scenario five with a pronounced preference for this proposal for 14 LRCs over that based on the 25 LBAPs, few local level respondents selected the two options based on SEPA, SWT and RSPB regions (for a breakdown of results see Annex 2).

The preferences of local level respondents are illustrated in the chart below.

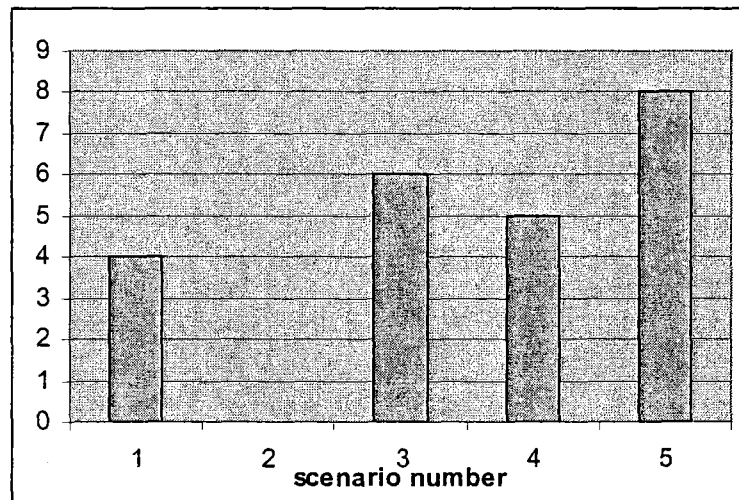


4.2 Regional level respondents

Twenty-three respondents classified themselves as working at the regional level.

Responses from this group showed almost equal numbers selecting each scenario (except for option two). The most popular choice was scenario 5 (for a breakdown see Annex 2).

The preferences of regional level respondents are illustrated in the chart below.



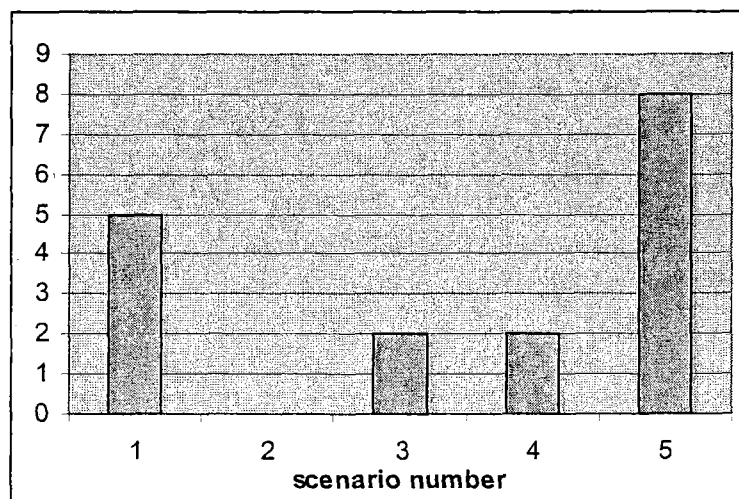
4.3 National level respondents

Seventeen respondents classified themselves as working at the national level.

This group displayed a clear split between those choosing option 1 and option 5, with few choosing the scenarios based on either SNH areas or LBAPs. Again, scenario 5 was the most popular choice.

Included in those selecting scenario 5 are a number of important data users including SNH, SEPA, SWT and RSPB (see Annex 2).

The preferences of national level respondents are illustrated in the chart below.



4.4 Discussion

There is a clear preference for scenario 5 amongst both locally and nationally based respondents. In fact support for scenario 5 amongst national respondents at 47% exceeds the 35% of regional respondents choosing this scenario, although this was also the most popular choice of regional respondents.

5 The Way Forward

5.1 Preferred option

Response to the consultation generally favoured a proposal for 14 LRCs, based on current activities (scenario 5). Although there are a number of suggested modifications to this model it was generally seen as a suitable model for LRCs that gave comprehensive coverage of the country, providing local links, retaining boundaries and areas that individuals are familiar with and user can operate within.

Concern has been expressed as to whether a network of as many LRCs will be viable. There are savings to be made from operating at a larger scale, however weighed against these must be the loss of links with local recorders and the increased difficulty for staff in having a full knowledge of the area covered.

Recommendation 1

The development of a network of LRCs in Scotland should progress based around the following geographic distribution:

1. Shetland Isles and Orkney
2. Highlands
3. Western Isles
4. Tayside (Angus, Perth and Kinross and Dundee City)
5. North east Scotland (Aberdeenshire, City of Aberdeen and Moray)
6. Fife
7. Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire
8. Scottish Borders
9. Dumfries and Galloway
10. Lanarkshire (North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire)
11. Ayrshire (North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire)
12. West central Scotland (Inverclyde, City of Glasgow, Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire)
13. Argyll and Bute
14. Lothians (East Lothian, Mid Lothian, West Lothian, Edinburgh City)

5.2 Refining the model for an LRC

The model for any LRCs must take into account the needs of local users and recorders. It should not be imposed from a national perspective. However many of the users have a regional or national perspective to their work and the overall objective is to create a network of non-overlapping LRCs that can cooperate to give a bigger picture. Many users will not share the same boundaries as the LRC and an LRC will need to be prepared to work in partnership with neighbouring LRCs to meet the needs of its users, perhaps even brokering joint relationship or service level agreements. LRCs must not therefore be developed in isolation.

The model for LRCs within the NBN is not prescriptive and should be used flexibly. An individual LRC may have a presence in more than more location, allowing for a local presence, particularly when the LRC covers a large area or the population is widely dispersed. Equally LRCs may wish to share facilities and expertise with neighbouring LRCs. All these issues need taking into account in the development and management of LRCs.

Recommendation 2

In developing and managing LRCs throughout Scotland cooperation between LRCs is essential. All LRC partnerships and users should build effective working relationships with other LRCs, especially their immediate neighbours.

5.3 Developing and sustaining the network

There is considerable work needed to ensure that a full network of LRCs develops across Scotland. This needs commitment at both local and national level. Locally the emphasis must be on building local partnerships of users, nationally strategic frameworks are needed for the development of LRCs within organisations that cover the whole country.

Local politics and personalities tend to dominate the discussion over the development of LRCs and, although these issues must be recognised and addressed, the long term vision for LRCs in Scotland needs to be able to move beyond these short term issues. There is an important role for national bodies to play in promoting the long term vision and perhaps mediating between local partners. For example COSLA could promote better partnership working between local authorities to enable more effective sharing of resources, BRISC could encourage sharing of resources and expertise between LRCs, and SWT and SNH could develop clear strategies of how they will operate nationally and locally with LRCs.

Importantly all these bodies (local and national) need to recognise that the vision for LRCs in Scotland will continually evolve and adapt to suit changing current needs. Collectively the bodies involved can have an overall strategy to cooperate to manage this change and ensure an ongoing and effective service from the LRCs.

Recommendation 3

All bodies should adopt a long-term strategic view of their needs for biodiversity information and how they envisage LRCs meeting these needs. This should allow for flexibility and adaptation as needs change and to ensure cost-effective operation

Annex 1 – Support for each scenario

1. Support for scenario 1

Local level

Stirling Council
Private landowner (also an environmental consultant)
Orkney Islands Council
Highland Council

Regional level

Perth Museum and Art Gallery
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Regional response)
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Regional response)

National level

National Trust for Scotland
SWAP (Wildlife Sites Team)
Scottish Field Studies Association
Marine Conservation Society
Forestry Commission

2. Support for scenario 2

There was no support for scenario 2

3. Support for scenario 3

Local level

Orkney Field Club

Regional level

Forestry Commission (SW Scotland)
Forestry Commission (Lothian and Borders)
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (West Region)
Botanical Society of the British Isles recorder
Scottish Agriculture College, Area Adviser
Private recorder

National level

National Trust for Scotland
Scottish Association for Marine Science

4. Support for scenario 4

Local level

Fife Council, Planning Dept.
Inverness Museum Records Centre
Glasgow City Council
Islay Natural History Trust
Private recorder
Private recorder
Renfrewshire Council (jointly with scenario 5)
East Renfrewshire Council (jointly with scenario 5)

Regional level

Ayrshire Biological Record
Scottish Wildlife Trust (Dumfries and Galloway)
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Butterfly Conservation
Highland Biological Recording Group

National level

BRISC
Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department

5. Support for scenario 5

Local level

South Ayrshire Council
Falkirk Council
East Renfrewshire Council (jointly with scenario 4)
Stirling Council
Renfrewshire Council (jointly with scenario 4)
West Lothian Council
East Lothian Council
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Orkney Biological Records Centre
Shetland Biological Records Centre / Shetland Amenity Trust
Fife Nature (Local Record Centre)
Skye Environment Centre
FWAG (Orkney)

Regional level

FWAG (Lomond and Clyde)
Scottish Natural Heritage (Strathclyde and Ayrshire)
Scottish Natural Heritage (Area officer response)
Scottish Wildlife Trust (North Region)
Scottish Wildlife Trust (East Region)
North East Scotland Biological Records Centre
Aberdeen University
Scottish Borders Biological Records Centre

National level

Scottish Wildlife Trust
Royal Museums of Scotland
Scottish Wildlife Trust (Wildlife Sites Team)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Woodland Trust Scotland
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Local Biodiversity Action Plan Project Officer
Scottish Natural Heritage (corporate response)

Annex 2 – Preferred options of different respondents

1. Preferred options of local level respondents

Scenario 1

Landowner
Stirling Council
Highland Council

Scenario 3

Orkney Field Club

Scenario 4

Glasgow City Council
Islay Natural History Trust
Recorder
Recorder
Inverness Museum Records Centre
Fife Council
East Renfrewshire Council

Scenario 5

South Ayrshire Council
Skye Environment Centre
Falkirk Council
East Renfrewshire Council
Fife Nature
Stirling Council
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Orkney Biological Records Centre
FWAG
Shetland Biological Records Centre / Shetland Amenity Trust
Renfrewshire Council
West Lothian Council
East Lothian Council

2. Preferred options of regional level respondents

No preference expressed

Cairngorms Partnership

Scenario 1

Orkney Islands Council

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scenario 3

Forestry Commission SW Scotland

Forestry Commission (Lothian and Borders)

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (West Region)

Botanical Society

Scottish Agriculture College

Recorder

Scenario 4

Scottish Wildlife Trust (Dumfries and Galloway)

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Butterfly Conservation (Highland Branch)

Ayrshire Biological Record

Highland Biological Recording Group

Scenario 5

Scottish Natural Heritage (Strathclyde and Ayrshire, Pers)

FWAG (Lomond and Clyde)

NESBReC

Aberdeen University

Scottish Borders Biological Records Centre

Scottish Wildlife Trust (North Region)

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Wildlife Trust (East Region)

3. Preferred options of national level respondents

Scenario 1

National Trust for Scotland
SWAP (Wildlife Sites Team)
Scottish Field Studies Association
Marine Conservation Society
Forestry Commission

Scenario 3

National Trust for Scotland
Scottish Association for Marine Science

Scenario 4

BRISC
Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (Agriculture Division)

Scenario 5

Scottish Wildlife Trust
Royal Museums of Scotland
SWAP (Wildlife Sites Team)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Woodland Trust Scotland
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
LBAP Scottish Project Officer
Scottish Natural Heritage