

# **Tackling the nature emergency**

## **Prioritising Actions for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan – Methodology**

**September 2023**

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### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) outlines an ambitious vision to halt biodiversity decline by 2030 and restore Scotland's biodiversity by 2045. In order to achieve this, equally ambitious delivery plans are required with actions set out that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based (SMART). Delivery plans are to be set at a five year frequency to allow delivery of the strategy to be adaptive and flexible.

1.2 The process, from taking the visions and outcomes from the strategy to produce actions through to drafting the delivery plans is set out in the schematic in Figure 1. It has been a collaborative effort between core Scottish Government, Scottish Government Agencies and external experts. This methodology statement details the process that was followed to define and refine the set of actions for the first five year delivery plan.

### **2. Logic modelling**

2.1 Over the summer of 2022 the Biodiversity Programme Advisory Group (PAG) (a group of experts external Scottish Government) were brought together to develop the actions needed within the first delivery plan to meet the visions and outcomes of the SBS.

2.2 A logic modelling approach was used to facilitate the development of actions. Starting with the vision of the strategy the group worked backwards to define the Outcomes, Outputs and Actions required to achieve the main outcome of the strategy.

2.3 The exercise was undertaken for the eight land and seascapes outlined in the SBS: Uplands and Peatlands, Agriculture, Woodlands and Forestry, Wetland and Freshwater, Coastal, Marine, Urban and Soils and Geodiversity. In addition, cross-cutting actions were developed that were applicable to multiple land or seascapes and contexts. PAG members were split into sub-groups based on expertise to refine the list of actions. Actions that were most likely to meet the first vision within the strategy of halting biodiversity loss by 2030 were prioritised. In total, over 200 actions were devised across all of the land and seascapes and cross-cutting themes.

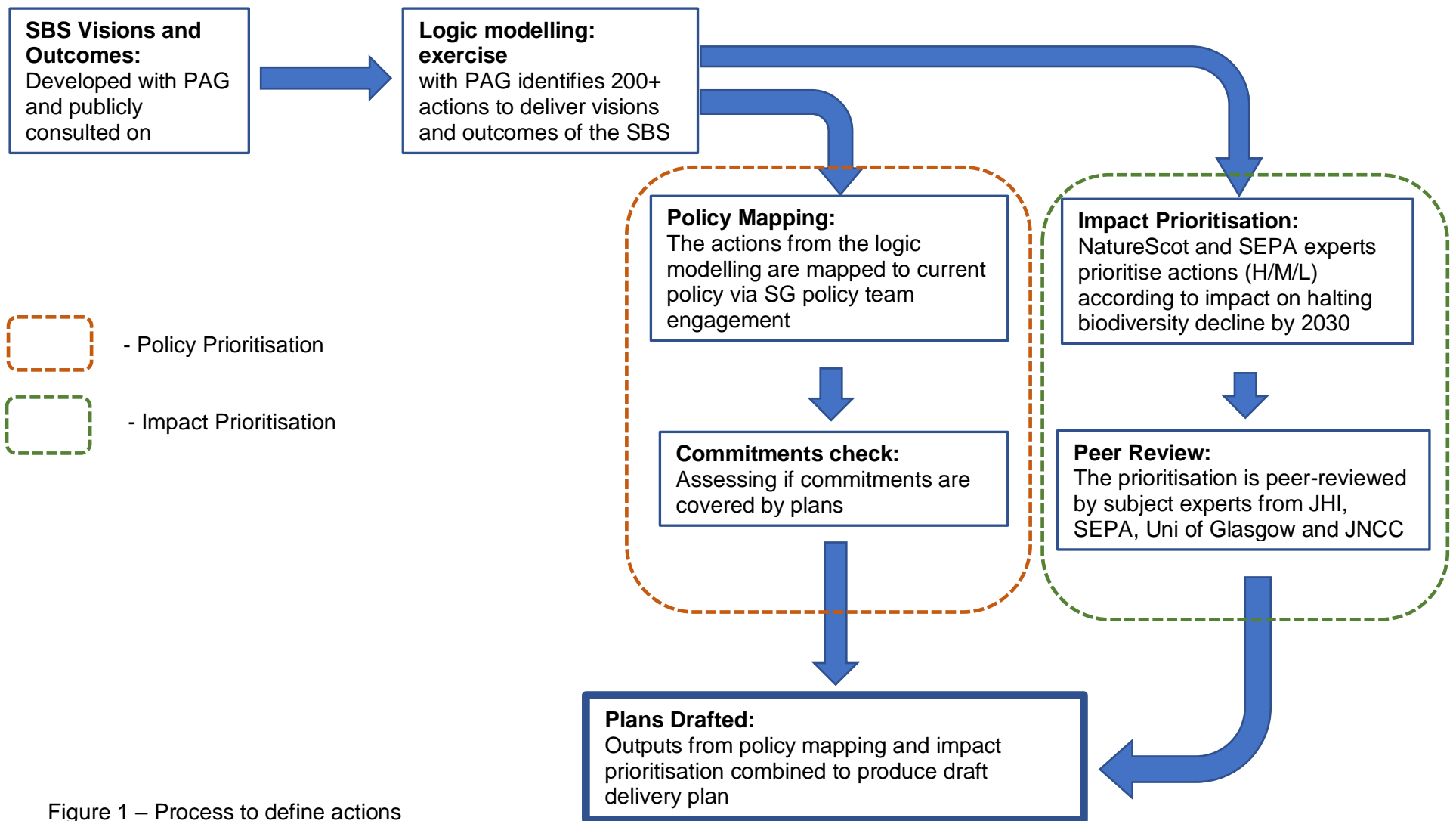


Figure 1 – Process to define actions for the first 5 year SBS delivery plan

### 3. Prioritising actions

3.1 For the first five year delivery plan to be as effective and efficient as possible actions are needed that are achievable (considering SMART) and highly impactful in halting the decline in biodiversity by 2030. It was recognised that the 200+ actions identified during logic modelling therefore needed prioritising and refining into those to go into the first 5 year delivery plan. To do this, a sub-group of the SBS core team consisting of staff from NatureScot (NS), the Scottish Government's Rural & Environmental Sciences and Analytical Services (RESAS) Division and Scottish Government Biodiversity policy were tasked with prioritising actions for the first 5 year delivery plan.

3.2 The steer from the SBS core team was to develop a prioritisation approach that was simple, transparent and quick. At the same time the approach had to be robust and transparent to provide confidence to stakeholders that action prioritisation is based on evidence and sound reasoning.

3.3 The development of the methodology centred on two key factors for assessing priority: the impact the action is likely to have on halting biodiversity decline and the feasibility of delivering the action in the first 5 year delivery plan. Actions that meet both of these criteria are likely to provide the most progress in meeting the visions and outcomes of the SBS.

### 4. Impact Prioritisation

4.1 Experts from NS were asked to review and prioritise the actions according to their likely impact on halting biodiversity decline by 2030. Actions were scored either High, Medium or Low, and NS experts were asked to provide a commentary on their reasoning behind the action prioritisation.

4.2 To add an extra layer of robustness and transparency a peer review process was undertaken to review NS experts prioritisation. For the majority of the land and seascapes the RESAS call down service with the James Hutton Institute (JHI) was used. In total eight subject experts from the JHI were available to review all of the terrestrial landscape actions. In addition, external peer reviewers were obtained from the University of Glasgow and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) for the coastal actions, SEPA for the pollution actions in the Cross-cutting logic model and JNCC for the Marine actions. Peer reviewers were asked to review the NS expert's prioritisation scoring and comment on their level of agreement.

4.3 Any discrepancies or disagreements between the NS expert scores and the peer reviewers were highlighted and reviewed by the delivery plan project group before a final prioritisation class was assigned.

## 5. Policy prioritisation

5.1 The RESAS environmental analysis team undertook an initial policy mapping exercise to link each of the actions identified from the logic modelling to current policy that may deliver for that action.

5.2 This initial mapping exercise was followed up with extensive policy engagement where relevant policy contacts within each land or seascape were asked to identify key policies within their areas that contribute to delivering the identified action. Within this, contacts were asked to attribute the level of policy support to either:

- Policy support in place to deliver this action
- Partial policy support in place or under development to deliver this action
- Limited policy support to deliver against this action

5.3 The main output from this exercise were spreadsheets for each land or seascape and cross-cutting theme that detail the level of policy support for each action. These were used to assess the achievability of actions within the first 5 year delivery plan. It also highlights where there are current policy gaps in being able to deliver against outlined actions in future delivery plans.

5.4 An additional step that was undertaken was to review the actions in deference to commitments that SG has already made. This review was completed by NatureScot and involved highlighting actions that are fully or partially committed to in high level Scottish Government plans such as the programme for government and the Bute House Agreement.

## 6. Delivery plan

6.1 The outputs from the impact prioritisation and policy mapping were cross referenced with one another. Through this process a number of edits were suggested for the actions to either make actions more ambitious, remove an errors and consolidate actions where required. Actions that were deemed to be high impact from the impact prioritisation but had little or no policy support were flagged for escalation to the SBS core team.

6.2 In the delivery plan, actions were reorganised according to the priority action themes and where possible grouped under one of the priority actions outlined in the SBS.