

Scotland's Rural College

Draft Impact Plan

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Draft Impact Plan

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Natural Capital - Galvanising Change (D5.3)

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Introduction

Research in environment, natural resources and agriculture funded by the Scottish Government aims to “contribute to the health, wealth and wellbeing of the nation” and includes a number of mechanisms to promote “impact” (see Box 1 for definitions). It is estimated that previous research cycles contributed £151.8 million GVA to the Scottish economy a year and supported nearly 1,500 jobs (Scottish Government, 2021). Evidence shows that proactive impact planning, early in the research cycle can increase the likelihood of impacts arising from research (Reed, 2018), and a range of tools are available.

This report proposes a draft impact plan for D5.3 (Natural Capital – Galvanising Change), based on discussion between the research team and key stakeholders within Scottish Government, and considers options for wider stakeholder engagement to further plan and co-produce impacts from the research. It is important to emphasise that impact plans must adapt to changing contexts and priorities. There are many factors beyond the control of any research project that may enhance or reduce the likelihood of impacts being achieved. As such, impact goals and activities should be seen as flexible and hoped-for rather than as firm commitments, with expectations among stakeholders managed accordingly.

Impact planning

Logic models are among the most widely used impact planning tools for research, given their ease of use and the simplicity with which they can be updated as contexts and priorities change during the research process.

Logic models are a family of impact planning methods that identify causal processes in cause-and-effect chains to show the contribution research makes to impact in the context of wider supporting or mediating factors and contexts. They include methods such as logical framework analysis or ‘logframes’ and ‘theory of change’ approaches. They identify a planned impact, and help teams identify steps to reach and evaluate progress towards those goals (Reed et al., 2018).

These tools may be used by research teams in isolation, but are most effective when used as co-production tools with stakeholders, to ensure impact goals meet the needs and priorities of those who are most likely to benefit from the research. By engaging stakeholders in impact planning, it is also possible to more effectively identify activities that are likely to deliver benefits to different groups, and identify risks and risk mitigation strategies to ensure impacts are delivered without creating negative unintended consequences. It may also be possible to identify others with similar impact goals and use the process to identify partnerships and collaborations, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency with which impacts are delivered.

D5.3 uses the Fast Track Impact Planning Template proposed by Reed et al. (2018), as this has been widely used to successfully plan and achieve impacts across the research sector, and is well suited to the needs of this project.

Box 1: Definitions – stakeholders, publics, participation and impact

A **stakeholder** is any person, organization or group that is affected by or who can affect a decision, action or issue (Freeman, 1984). In D5.3, we are primarily interested in those who have a stake in natural capital and ecosystem markets in Scotland.

The **public** may have an interest in this research, however we only consider members of the public in D5.3 where they take on roles as stakeholders, for example through their use of the natural environment as recreationalists or water utility customers. Although everyone may be considered a member of the public in certain contexts, it is important to recognise that there are differences between individuals, which can be used to group them e.g. backgrounds, affiliations, gender etc. Rather than thinking of the “general public” as a single entity, D5.3 considers the interests, influence and benefits or negative impacts experience by different ‘publics’ who may engage with the research.

Participation is a process where stakeholders and publics (e.g. individuals, groups and organisations) choose to take an active role in making decisions that affect them (Reed, 2008). An easy way to understand this is in terms of knowledge flows (Rowe and Frewer, 2005):

- Communication or dissemination is process where knowledge is imparted *from* researchers *to* stakeholders
- Consultation happens when knowledge flows *from* stakeholders *to* researchers
- Participation happens when there is a *two-way* flow of knowledge *between* stakeholders and researchers

Research **impact** can be defined as “perceptible and demonstrable benefits to individuals, groups, organisations and society (including human and non-human entities in the present and future) that could not have been possible without new knowledge arising from research” (Reed et al., 2021).

Methods

An online workshop was facilitated on 5th May 2022 to review a draft impact plan based on the D5.3 proposal, with the D5.3 management team, including researchers and key Scottish Government stakeholders. These participants then continued to input to the plan, revising text as necessary until 20th May 2022. The resulting draft impact plan will then be further revised in collaboration with a wider range of stakeholders, selected on the basis of the D5.3 Stakeholder Analysis (submitted alongside this document)..

Results

The draft D5.3 impact plan is shown in Table 1, and consists of draft goals, proposed activities to reach those goals, activity and impact indicators (with means of verification), and risks and assumptions (with mitigation strategies). Multiple activities have been proposed for some impact goals, based on the needs and interests of different stakeholders. Given the applied nature of the research in D5.3, some of the planned impact generation activities refer to work packages (WPs) within the research itself.

A number of the impact goals are dependent on external factors that are not within the control of the research team, so it will be important to manage expectations and adapt goals and activities where possible to changing contexts and priorities. For example, expanding markets and ensuring their integrity depends on a range of market and policy drivers, which the research hopes to inform and possibly shape, but cannot control.

Where possible, activity and impact monitoring will use existing data, but in some cases, additional data will need to be collected. Such data collection is planned as part of an impact evaluation of D5.3, which was integrated into the project from the outset. Demonstrating influences on policy, agency or business-decision-making is notoriously challenging, as there are multiple influences on decision-makers' concepts and ideas, and the public result of eventual changes (e.g. changes to policies) may take years, and not be obviously trace-able. However, to track aspects of impact we will regularly request feedback, using a simple structured survey (potentially linked to our biannual update), throughout the project to trace stakeholders' views on our work and changes to their ideas. We will also use post-event evaluation forms to inform design of future events but also track aspects of impact; and we will seek to discuss impact in later interviews with key stakeholders. Where visibility and reach are of greater concern – e.g., with wider publics and awareness, then metrics of online “footfall” e.g. webpage visits, will be used to shape the social media and other web presence strategies.

Conclusion and next steps

The draft impact plan described in Table 1 represents a starting point for the potential impact of D5.3, based on goals and activities originally agreed in the research proposal, modified through discussion with the research team and key policy stakeholders. The project will engage a cross-section of relevant stakeholders (referring to the D5.3 stakeholder analysis), as part of the research, and the impact plan in Table 1 will be updated annually in response to feedback from stakeholders.

Table 1: Impact planning logic model, showing how impact goals will be delivered and monitored and how risks will be mitigated.

Impact goal	Planned activities	Activity indicators (what does success look like for the planned activities?) [means of verification]	Impact indicators (what does success look like if we achieve the impact goal?) [means of verification]	Risks and assumptions	Risk mitigation
Evidence-based changes that are likely to improve the delivery of environmental and economic outcomes from natural capital policies e.g. 5th Climate Change Plan, 4th Land Use Strategy, and the Agricultural Bill	Review of international policies and practices (WP1, tasks 1.1-1.3); identification & engagement with Scottish policy processes (WP2, task 2.4); identification of blended finance options for Scottish policy (WP3, tasks 1.1-1.3)	Deliverables from WPs 1-3 [RESAS reporting process]	Integration of evidence from international review and identified policy options with relevant policies and regulations [policy documents and testimonial interviews] Staff involved in WP2 policy process are more informed, supportive and confident in choosing NC framing and/or data sets in their planning [feedback from staff in D5.3 impact survey]	For WP1 it may not be possible to get detailed knowledge of international cases where there is little public information /material is hard to find /working in another language/ and contacts are unavailable or unwilling. For WP2 It may not be possible to get access to relevant policy teams, who may not be receptive to ideas emerging from this research.	For WP1, there is budget to cover some translations if needed. For WP2 Engage relevant policy teams early in the coproduction of this impact plan and the project to ensure it meets their needs. Consider potential for 'light touch' versus 'in depth' approaches, to reflect varying opportunities for access.
	Potential Engagement with CCC, Just Transition Commission and SG team developing 5th Climate Change Plan	Successful engagement from team to shape research and impact goals that can contribute to their policy work	As above for 5th Climate Change Plan	As above	Identify relevant individuals and engage in 2022
	Engagement with SG Land Use Transformation Portfolio Board - constituent programmes of CAP	Successful engagement from team to align with	As above for 4th Land Use Strategy	As above	Identify relevant individuals and engage in 2022

	Replacement, Peatland Restoration, Woodland Creation, RLUPs, Bioenergy and Responsible Private Investment in Natural Capital	and support policy goals for land use transformation - CCPU, Biodiversity, National Strategy for Economic Transformation			
	Engagement with natural capital teams and groups in Scottish Government (e.g. Natural Capital Co-ordination Group and Private Investment in Natural Capital Working Group), and other departments and teams e.g. economic transformation.	As above	As above	As above - and danger that findings will not be ready in time for this policy	Get clearer idea of likely timelines to assess whether to retain this as an impact goal
New policy and governance frameworks that better enable private sector investment in high-integrity ecosystem markets to deliver environmental and economic outcomes for Scotland	Review of international policies and practices (WP1, tasks 1.1-1.3); identification of blended finance options for Scottish policy (WP3, tasks 1.1-1.3)	Deliverables from WPs 1-3 [RESAS reporting process]	Development of a new Scottish Government natural capital policy framework that integrates evidence from our international review and identified policy options [strategic documents and testimonial interviews as part of D5.3 impact evaluation]	There is a need to develop policy frameworks that align across the UK, which may require compromise and there is a danger that these frameworks are led by Defra, limiting options for Scottish Government in the design of its policy framework	Engage early with Defra's Green Finance team to co-produce the work towards new policy and governance frameworks via this project with them
Nature-based solutions proponents more aware of how to use natural capital concepts to	Identification of NC-related options to help implement and scale nature-based solutions in practice (WP4, activities 4.1-4.3)	Deliverables from WP4 [RESAS reporting process]	More NbS project managers aware of natural capital, relevant datasets, and have ideas for using in their project planning/approaches to enrol new actors across sectors in NbS [market surveys by UK	Increased market activity leads to trade-offs for non-target ecosystem services or local communities; low integrity markets	Explore potential to introduce policy mechanisms proposed by roundtable on land acquisition for carbon to mitigate risks posed from acquisitions driven

leverage interest and investment from multiple sectors.			Ecosystem Markets Policy Coordination Group or commissioned by Scottish Government]	undermine investor confidence.	by ecosystem markets; prioritise the development of policy frameworks that can ensure the integrity of emerging markets in collaboration with Defra's Green Finance team and the Financing Nature Recovery initiative.
New nature-based solutions projects across multiple habitats, land uses and ecosystem services, drawing on high-integrity ecosystem markets and targeted public support	Wider communication and impact activities (WP5)	Deliverables from WP5 [RESAS reporting process]	Public funding increasingly prioritised towards locations/services for which there is market failure via funds delineation and other mechanisms [market surveys showing increasing proportion of projects delivered via private finance alongside RESAS analysis of public funding destinations]. Increased ecosystem market activity across multiple domains [survey data from JNCC's Ecosystem Markets Policy Coordination Group]	Limited supply of projects due to lack of confidence from landowners; high transaction costs due to fragmented nature of landownership.	Provide clear messaging to landowners about eligibility for public funding if they enter private schemes; trial new carbon market models that can reduce risks for both landowners and investors e.g. carbon floor price guarantees; trial the establishment of demand aggregators (based on LENs) via RLUPs
	For example, development of an integrated land carbon registry and trading platform with mechanisms designed to scale markets in collaboration with Kana	Indicators linked to additional activities e.g. launch of an operational integrated registry and trading platform for all carbon and ecosystem market in Scotland [live platform]	Substantial increase in number and volume of transactions via new trading platform [Kana data]	Reliance on third party private provider who may increase prices or not be responsive to change needs	Pre-agreement for free access to the platform by Scottish Government, codes, developers and landowners (costs borne by investors); encourage competition in the registry/trading platform marketplace via natural capital policy

					frameworks, to ensure there are alternative options.
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