

# Highland Environment Forum

## Results of members survey on performance to date

### Introduction

The Highland Environment Forum is part of the Highland Community Planning Partnership and operates within identified aims. These are to:

- Foster and coordinate activity on environmental matters, both within and at the Highland level.
- Take forward relevant actions identified in the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), and be a valuable source of practical advice on the joint delivery of SOA outcomes.
- Identify and respond to emerging environmental agendas, and provide a link between local groups and national strategies, action plans and reporting procedures.
- Raise awareness and promote good practice on environmental issues across Highland.

The Highland Environment Forum has been working in its current form since September 2013. During this time there have been four full Forum meetings and seven working groups have been established. The working groups are on: the Carbon Clever declaration, biodiversity, invasive non-native species, the potential for a Highland land use strategy, tackling wildlife crime, wildfire reduction and volunteering collaboration.

A survey of 82 members was carried out in during August 2015 in order to help to assess how effectively the Forum has been working to date, to seek ideas for improvement of service and subjects for future discussion and action.

The survey was completed by 22 members of the forum, whose views are shown below. The results of the survey will inform future planning.

### Results

#### **1) The value of the Highland Environment Forum in progressing environmental understanding and action**

100% of respondents said that the forum is useful in progressing environmental understanding and action.

the forum scored highly on providing good links between people, and in understanding the links between local and national actions, and nearly 74% of respondents said that now have a better understanding of the Single Outcome Agreement. The responses suggest that there is room to further increase the link with the Single Outcome Agreement - including taking forward more of the specific outcomes and providing practical advice on joint delivery. There is also the potential for the Forum to be more proactive on identifying emerging environmental agendas. (Figure 1)

If 'yes' tick those that apply below:	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Link better with others involved in similar work	94.7%
Understand the range of environmental activity taking place within Highland	84.2%
Make links between local groups and national strategies, action plans and reporting procedures	73.7%
Have an improved understanding of the Community Planning Partnership and Highland Single Outcome Agreement	73.7%
Be aware of good practice on environmental issues across Highland.	68.4%
Take forward specific actions identified in the SOA	63.2%
Access valued practical advice on the joint delivery of Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) outcomes	52.6%
Identify and respond to emerging environmental agendas	52.6%
	19 answered question
	3 skipped question

Fig 1: The Highland Environment Forum's effectiveness at processing understanding and action

## 2) The effectiveness of the working groups

15 people gave their views on the working groups, all of whom thought that they are effective.

The comments on how the groups are effective were that they:

- Focus attention on the SOAs (1)
- Enable networking & sharing good practice - both within the groups and outward dissemination (9)
- Focus effort to complete a task (7)
- Only group discussing the subject (land use strategy) (1)
- Encourage joint delivery of agreed outcomes
- Bring together a broad coalition of experts (3)
- Are always looking to improve (5)

(Number of respondents in brackets)

Two suggestions were made to improve the working groups, stating that they would benefit from:

- Higher-level buy-in from some of the statutory organisations involved (1)
- More consistent backing from HEF Partners on key strategic projects (1)

(Number of respondents in brackets)

## 3) Meeting structure and timing

All respondents agreed that the combination of full Forum discussion meetings and focussed working groups works effectively, with one comment that 'partially' would have been a useful third option.

There was unanimous agreement that the Forum should remain an open group, with anyone who has an interest in working to the aims of the Forum able to attend meetings and become a member of the Forum.

With comments that:

- It is a key strength of the Forum
- It allows public and third sector groups/organisations to share views and experiences
- It allows greater understanding of the subject

- The mix provides a positive tone that focuses on progression and solution finding.

It was noted that the work groups need to be made up of people with a direct link to the subject matter in hand.

**Meeting frequency** - Two of the 16 respondents thought that it would be useful to change the meeting frequency. The questionnaire did not ask for more detail.

**Agenda format for the full Forum meetings** - 5 of the 18 respondent thought that improvements could be made

Suggestions included:

- return to a full day meeting, more conference style (1)
- publish agenda well in advance (1)
- allow breaks so that people can attend for part of the meeting
- have more case studies - particularly community lead (1)
- Have tighter reporting back on work groups (1)
- Have reporting back sessions on work groups (1)

*(Number of respondents in brackets)*

***Information on meeting outcomes and working group progress?***

12 of the 17 respondents said that they would like more information

Suggestions included:

- more use of web and social media (4) Suggestions included Facebook, twitter, weekly digest, email links.
- a progress plan or delivery plan with annual reporting (4)
- some short updates on what the working groups have been doing in between the whole-Forum meetings. (2)
- Working group updates at full Forum meetings (1)

*(Number of respondents in brackets)*

**Travel expenses** for groups with smaller budgets and based further away. Fifteen people responded - and 9 stated that this would be a good idea.

**Video conferencing** Fifteen people responded - and 10 stated that this would be a good idea.

**Additional suggestions for improving meetings**

- Meet in different locations (1)
- More network opportunities to share good practice (1)
- Members get more involved in chairing meetings and setting agendas (1)
- Members more involved in developing SOA (1)
- More members offering to get involved in working groups (1)
- update on theme prior to meeting (1)
- more circular seating pattern (1)
- good refreshments (1)

*(Number of respondents in brackets)*

## 4) The Future

### Subjects for the Highland Environment Forum to discuss in the future

Suggestions were:

- Land reform (1)
- Rewilding (3)
- Invasive non-native species (2)
- Wildlife Crime (1)
- Marine Environment (1)
- Impacts versus benefits of renewable energy (2)
- Transport and green tourism (1)
- Community growing/local food production (1)
- Wildfire reduction (1)
- Deer & moor management (1)
- Grazing and peatland restoration (1)
- Fisheries - wild and aquaculture (2)
- Biospheres and geoparks (1)
- Establishing a north of Scotland biodiversity data hub (1)
- Approaches to raise wildlife awareness (1)
- Climate change and its impacts (1)
- Links between health, community resilience and nature (4)
- The circular economy and the environment (1)
- Act proactively on current issues - e.g. the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (1)
- Salmon aquaculture (1)

*(Number of respondents in brackets)*

### Additional thoughts from respondents

- Proper resourcing of Forum to be agreed by partners
- Strengthen links with other CPP work groups
- Get a higher public profile
- Consider the historic environment within its remit