

**Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
Research 2022-2027**

Overview

<i>General Comments</i>

Detailed Response

Specific Comments

1	Are the objectives and priorities set out in the strategy sufficiently clear?
MODERATELY	
<p>The document makes no mention of the Water Sector Vision, and how research could help us sustainably achieve this vision.</p> <p>Scottish Water welcomes the research programmes that focus on water quality and water resources and we are supportive of further research to aid understanding so that any subsequent changes to policy/regulations are evidence based.</p>	
2	The research strategy outlines 5 Research Themes. Is this an appropriate way of structuring our work?
YES	
<p>The five research themes are clear, but as discussed in the text many are overlapping. To maximise the benefit across all themes it would be good to have a number of cross-cutting projects.</p> <p>Circular economy and waste is called out as a new research topic but is under the Human Impacts on the Environment theme. Given that Circular Economy principles apply across all other research themes would this be better identified as a separate theme in itself? Linkage to SEPA's "One Planet Prosperity" strategy and the Water Sector Vision could strengthen this focus.</p>	
3	Do you think the research strategy will enable us to get the best research and scientific evidence from the best providers?
YES	
<p>Scottish Water welcomes the recognition that there is value to be gained in expanding the supply base to address research needs. We support the need to</p>	

develop and retain a high quality research base in Scottish research bodies but the best relevant science should always be used to inform policy, regardless of what geography it originates.

4 Are the proposals for maximising impact appropriate?

YES

The addition of horizon scanning capacity as part of the research programme is welcome as it should draw attention to emerging issues and opportunities that can be missed in a focused 5 year programme. Sufficient flexibility needs to be built into the programme to ensure that it can respond to emergent needs.

5 Do you support the proposals on delivering our investment?

YES

The inclusion of the Responsive Research Fund is welcomed. Our environment and emerging trends and threats are changing at pace. This will help address a gap which we felt was currently present with regards to the Centres of Expertise, in that they could only utilise existing research, not undertake new research.

In terms of the proportion of funding between the different groups, an alternative approach would be to assess this in terms of the benefits that research provides.

6 How do you think the Responsive Research Fund (RRF) should be developed and operated?

Scottish Water would suggest that a diverse group of people are included in the assessment process.

7 Do you support our aims in working collaboratively with other funding providers?

YES

8 Do you support the new structure for Governance set out within the strategy?

YES

9 Do you have any further comments or suggestions?

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2020 set out the creation of a Scotland HydroNation Chair, by Scottish Water, to support the achievement of the Water Sector Vision. This key role, which is due to commence in June 2021, should be referenced in the strategy to ensure that the appropriate linkages are made between the MRPs, Centres of Expertise and the wider academic sector. This will support greater cohesiveness in research and enable greater levels of collaboration.

Comments on Specific Themes and Topics
Theme A – Plant and Animal Health
<p>General - Scottish Water welcomes the mention of protection of public health through a One Health approach to tackle zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance. This approach needs to be strengthened with evidence of the approach backed by sound science.</p>
Theme B - Sustainable Food Systems & Supply
<p>General - Some areas of the country are forecast to come under increasing pressure due to climate change impacts (flood/drought) and population shifts. A focus on water-efficient agriculture in these areas could be a useful addition.</p> <p>Topic B3 - Improving agricultural practice - Scottish Water's source drinking water often lies or flows within agricultural land. Therefore, we would wish to see reference to water quality in section B3 eg influencing farmers' behaviour to protect source drinking water.</p>
Theme C - Human Impacts on the Environment
<p>Topic C4 - Circular Economy and Waste Scottish Water supports the research into this area which is in line with our own Strategic Objective of Embracing the Circular Economy. The aims are good but we would suggest that they are too focused on material waste.</p> <p>The Circular Economy also looks at reducing inputs (making the same or more with less) and using wasted capacity, such as potential future use and resources. An important part of any research is to develop a systems approach that can be easily applied to different industries. Thereby adopting common circular economy measures that can be used countrywide across sectors, and creating an ongoing public education plan.</p> <p>The focus in this area needs to identify where cross cutting policy could drive better outcomes. An example of this is co-digestion where the value of sewage sludge in combination with other wastes is not permitted due to conflicting policy objectives.</p> <p>The connections at the end of this section appear very light, when circular economy activities could underpin so many other outcomes. Other sections make specific reference to those areas and it would have been good to see them here too, to allow others to see the links.</p>
Theme D - Natural Resources
<p>General - It should be stated that Natural Resources also have strong links to the circular economy. In the text it only mentions climate change, GHG emissions, greenspace and land use.</p>

Topic D2 - Water - Scottish Water welcomes the development of the links coming through for water quality and quantity; and recognition of the need for further understanding of flood risk.

There are a number of linked challenges that need to be reviewed together to be able to link the solutions. This strategy has the ability to do that by linking cross-sector effort on facing up to the climate emergency – both mitigation and adaptation. Delivering great blue-green places to live (at all scales) that are adaptable to future conditions will in turn help tackle the challenge of surface water flooding in our urban environments. This links to land use and use of outdoors and green space.

Under the D2 Connections heading, stronger links need to be made to the Water Sector Plan, Scottish Water’s strategic ambitions and the Scotland HydroNation Chair.

Topic D3 – Soils – Scottish Water notes that fertilisers, of any kind, do not appear to be mentioned at all in the document. However, there are several references to soil health and the importance of a safe and environmentally sustainable food/drink environment. These have indirect links to the use of bio solids on land.

Topic D4 – Biodiversity – Scottish Water welcomes the proposals for developing evidence on the benefits of nature-based solutions for societal challenges, and we would encourage the addition of flooding/food risk and reducing the amount we abstract from the environment to the list of challenges set out here. Linking the ways we plan for the impact of Climate Change will bring greater benefits to the people and the environment in Scotland; so the use of nature-based solutions to reduce the risk of flooding and create water-resilient places is critical.

Scottish Water agrees with the need to develop evidence based solutions that enhance nature and biodiversity across a range of policies, practice & scales – and suggests that blue-green infrastructure is key to this process, supporting water-resilient towns and cities, as well as supporting habitat connectivity, enhancing biodiversity, etc. Clear links to the Land use Planning policies, practices and scales is needed to ensure decision makers can drive for inclusion of requirement for all sites/development proposals to be assessed and report on how they will contribute positively to the climate emergency, enhancing nature, biodiversity, and water resilience.

Topic D5 - Natural Capital – Scottish Water supports this approach and would wish to see a link included here to help ensure that data gathered for natural capital is shared with decision makers across other policy areas, to build natural capital into investment decisions as part of a 6-Capital approach to decision making.

Theme E - Rural Futures

General - Scottish Water supports the inclusion of the intention that “communities should become better involved in decisions made about their land and other aspects of their areas” and this is something we have committed to also, within our strategic plan.

Topic E2 - Rural Communities

This topic focuses purely on depopulation and demographic change, but it should be wider than this and include themes such as creating a sustainable community, the local economy and the delivery of services to these more remote areas.

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