ENVIRONMENTAL Standards Scotland
Ìrean Àrainneachdail na h-Alba

Minutes of the Board meeting held on Friday 6 February 2026, 10:30 – 14:30 held in Lomond, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD

Board:

Richard Dixon (RD), Chair
Marie Fallon (MF)
Paul McAleavey (PM)
Annalisa Savaresi (AS)
Chris Spray (CS)
Morag Sheppard (MS)

Attendees:

ESS Team (Items 2-7 as noted):
Mark Roberts (MR), CEO
Neil Langhorn (NL), Head of Strategy and Analysis
Jamie McGrandles (JMcG), Head of Investigations, Standards and Compliance
Rebecca Peppiette (RP), Head of Corporate Services and Communications
Calum Ross (CR), In-house Solicitor
Alan Hunt (AH), Head of Policy Analysis and Horizon Scanning **(Item 4)**
Sandy Bendall (SB), Principal Investigations Officer **(Item 5)**
Ingrid Wallace (IW), Senior Investigations Officer **(Item 5)**
Calum Ross (CR), In-house solicitor
Alisdair Stapley (ASt), Governance Lead
Kirsty Laing (KL), Business Support Officer (minutes)

1.	**Private session** The Board attended a private session.
2.	**Welcome** The Chair welcomed the Board and attendees to the meeting. CS noted his interests relating to biodiversity due to his former position as Chair of the UK Special Protection Areas (SPA) and the Ramsar Scientific Working Group. MS declared an interest relating to her position as Board Member of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland.

	PM declared a new interest relating to his honorary professorship at the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Glasgow. The minutes of the previous meeting 5 December 2025 were approved by the Board. The Board noted the running list of matters arising and actions and agreed minor amendments.
3.	**Chief Executive's update** MR provided an update on ESS' activities since the last Board meeting, highlighting: • the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill had been approved by Parliament following stage three. MR noted ESS' functions within the Bill and outlined the next steps to Royal Assent and commencement • a revised draft of ESS' Strategy 2026-2031 had been laid in the Scottish Parliament in February 2026 for approval • ESS' participation in the recent civil service staff survey, and a summary of the results • the Scottish Government's published draft 2026/27 budget and spending review The Board considered the updates, further noting ESS' upcoming five-year anniversary of commencement of operation in October 2026.
4.	**Strategy and Analysis** [At this point, AH joined the meeting] NL provided an update on the work of the Strategy and Analysis team, highlighting: • ongoing work on Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), Scottish Government agreeing to a revision of the code of practice, and expected timelines to completion of work on existing control mechanisms • outcomes of the recent team prioritisation workshop and the development of a forward work programme

	- progress with the seafloor integrity project and a proposed presentation to the Board on the emerging findings - the recent voluntary adoption of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics The Board noted the updates and thanked staff for all the hard work involved with the revised draft Strategy 2026-2031. **Action**: NL to arrange a presentation on the seafloor integrity project **Action:** NL to bring papers on seafloor integrity and INNS work to the May 2026 Board meeting NL presented the findings and conclusions of the commissioned report on Scotland's regulatory alignment with the EU and other international environmental standards. In discussion, the Board: - noted the key findings, including approaches to identifying best practice and bench marking standards going forward - discussed communication and publication timelines for the report - considered timings of future ESS-led or commissioned assessments of alignment The Board noted the report. [At this point, AH left the meeting]
5.	**Investigations and representations** JMcG presented an update on the work of the Investigations Standards and Compliance team, highlighting: - the actions taken by NatureScot in connection with the consultee duties case - the Scottish Government's response to our findings in the Strategic Environmental Assessment case

	• progress with the on-going project regarding public authority's duties to maintain public registers of environmental information • developments with the Aarhus Convention compliance case • the number of representations received since the previous Board meeting The Board noted the updates and discussed the work and potential outcomes of the cases presented. [At this point, SB and IW joined the meeting] JMcG introduced the Bycatch paper, outlining the process and findings of the investigation, providing options to the Board on how to proceed. The Board noted the paper, acknowledging the complexity of the case and high standard of work presented. The Board thanked those involved and agreed on steps to advance the case. [At this point, SB and IW left the meeting]
6.	**Governance** MF updated the Board on the Audit and Risk Committee's ('the Committee') activities since the previous meeting, noting the discussion on risk, and considerations for the budget 2026/27 and new duties. MF provided a verbal update from the equality champion working group, highlighting: • a recent ESS staff day and culture workshop • ESS' adoption of the Voluntary application of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics and related staff training session • recent discussions with other public bodies audit and risk committee chairs to meet and compare practice MS provided a verbal update from the cyber champion working group, highlighting: • iTECS has secured Cyber Essentials

	• cyber champion meetings scheduled for the next calendar year CS provided a verbal update from the sustainability champion working group, highlighting: • a recent review of the sustainability action plan and setting 2026 targets • sustainability champion meetings scheduled for the next calendar year an upcoming meeting to discuss ESS carbon offsetting RP presented an update on 2025/26 year-end expenditure for information and the projected 2026/27 budget, highlighting: • Public Service Reform activities for the financial year 2026/27 • the proposed plan for ESS' new duties, outlining the recruitment timelines and new proposed staff structure The Board approved the core 2026/27 budget and the outline of new duties 2026/27 budget. The Board thanked RP and the ESS staff involved for their work on the budget. **Action:** to bring updates back to the Audit and Risk Committee and Board as plans for the delivery of new duties progress in 2026/27.
7.	**Any other business**

Dr Richard Dixon

Chair, Environmental Standards Scotland

8 May 2026