DRAFT Minutes of the Board meeting held on Friday 7 August 2026, 10:00 – 14:00 held in Lomond, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD

DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE 2 OCTOBER 2026 BOARD MEETING

Board:
Richard Dixon (RD), Chair
Marie Fallon (MF)
Paul McAleavey (PM)
Morag Sheppard (MS)
Laura Anderson (LA)
Annalisa Savaresi (AS)*

Apologies:
Chris Spray (CS)

*via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:
ESS Team (Items 2-8 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
Sam Gardner (SG), Head of New Scrutiny Duties Development
Kate Hawkins (KH), Programme Manager
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. SG was introduced as the newly appointed Head of New Scrutiny Duties Development. Apologies were received from CS. MS reported that as of 3 August 2026 she is no longer the acting Chair of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland as a new Chair has been appointed.

3.	**Minutes and Matters arising** The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 7 August 2026, were approved by the Board, subject to minor amendments. The Board noted the running list of matters arising and actions. MR provided an update on the ongoing steps in relation to ESS' preparatory work on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and RP provided an update on shared IT service arrangements and ESS' annual assurance process. The Chair noted that an invitation had been extended to ESS staff members to attend future Board meetings as observers.
4.	**Chief Executive's update** MR provided an update on ESS' activities since the last Board meeting, highlighting: • feedback from Scottish Government event regarding Public Service Reform (PSR) • an update from an Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP) UK environmental governance workshop • updates on the progress of ESS' new duties recruitment MR also noted that ESS has been invited to give evidence to the Climate Action Committee in September 2026. KH provided an update on ESS' new programme management framework, noting the progress following initial workshops and newly created reporting tools. **Action: MR to present trial organisational reporting dashboard at the October 2026 Board meeting.** The Board noted the updates, and in discussion: • discussed opportunities for future Board engagement and collaborative working with the Climate Change Committee

	• considered the processes for internal legal support during periods of staff absence • suggested ways to strengthen programme management and further align delivery with the Business Plan **Action: ESS to explore opportunities to strengthen engagement between Climate Change Committee representatives and the Board.**
5.	**Governance** MF provided an update on the work of the Audit and Risk Committee ("the Committee"). A revised Code of Audit Practice has been issued by Audit Scotland and the Committee’s co-opted Committee member, Neil Oakley, has been reappointed for a further four-year term. KL provided a verbal update on behalf of CS, the Sustainability Champion Working Group champion, highlighting: • outcomes from engagement with peer public bodies on sustainability practices • updates and actions arising from the most recent Sustainability Champions Group meeting • progress and next steps relating to ESS' long-term journey towards achieving net zero targets MF provided a verbal update from the Equality Champion Working Group, highlighting: • updates on the next steps arising from the recent culture workshop • discussion of staff learning and development, with actions agreed to support further training opportunities • updates and actions arising from the most recent Equality Champions Group meeting

	MS provided a verbal update from the Cyber Champion Working Group, highlighting: • outcomes from the latest Cyber Champions Group meeting, including actions to support ongoing organisational awareness and resilience • updates on planned internal staff training activities • discussion of outcomes from engagement with peer public bodies on cyber practices The Board noted the updates. MF presented the Committee's Annual Report to the Board, detailing that in its opinion requirements and assurances have been met for the financial year 2025/26. The Board noted the paper, ESS' approach to the shared IT service arrangements assurance and discussed the importance of *a focus on* the continued use and development of AI. **Action: RP to present a paper on AI at a future Board meeting to support a dedicated framing discussion.** SG gave a verbal update on his new role as Head of New Scrutiny Duties Development, highlighting emerging strategic risks and potential upcoming challenges. The Board noted the update. RP presented an update on 2025/26 year-end expenditure and the projected 2026/27 budget. In discussion, the Board: • noted developments relating to pension contribution arrangements • considered longer-term financial planning • considered the judicial review contingency budget and agreed that it should remain ringfenced to support ESS functions and independence RP outlined the case for additional resourcing and the proposal for one new additional post, and the separate conversion of a fixed-term post to a permanent contract, within the Investigations Standards and Compliance (ISC) team. The

	Board considered the proposal, discussed service requirements and resource implications, and approved these two recommendations.
6.	**Investigations and representations** JMcG presented the new casework dashboard, developed with support from KH. The Board thanked the team for its work and welcomed the improved visibility of casework activity and progress. The Board also noted areas for further consideration. JMcG presented an update on the work of the ISC team, highlighting: • progress on work relating to the Special Protection Area (SPA) case • progress on ESS' work on Tree Preservation Orders • the potential for broader thematic pieces arising from individual representations received • next steps on ESS' work on environmental governance • updates on the contaminated land investigation The Board noted the updates and discussed: • plans to improve reporting and efficiency • ongoing work to strengthen legal capability and maintain access to specialist advice
7.	**Strategy and Analysis** NL provided an update on the work of the Strategy and Analysis team, highlighting: • the publication of the Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and Sea Floor Integrity reports and subsequent stakeholder engagement • engagement with the Scottish Government regarding delivery against the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) report recommendations • engagement with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Water regarding implementation of the CSO report recommendations

	• collaboration with ISC on the water quality work • early-stage work to scope the new resources priority The Board noted the updates and in further discussion: • considered opportunities to enhance the visibility of work and progress through dashboard reporting • noted that recent wildfires further emphasised the importance of climate adaptation as well as mitigation • highlighted the importance of continued engagement and learning from peer public bodies across the UK on common environmental topics under consideration (e.g. resources) **Action: NL to organise a presentation to the Board regarding learning from observing the Programme Advisory Group developing proposals for the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act targets.**
8.	**Any other business** RD presented the proposed Board meeting dates for 2027 and advised members to notify KL of any scheduling conflicts.

Dr Richard Dixon
Chair, Environmental Standards Scotland
[DATE]