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| Biodiversity report 2021-2023 |
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| December 2023 |

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| Introduction **Biodiversity is the variety of all living things and the ecosystems where they live. It has enormous value and is central to our survival as a species. Our economy, jobs, health and wellbeing depend on it.**  The [**Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004**](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/contents) places a statutory duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity.  The Biodiversity duty is not only about protecting biodiversity through managing specific sites, habitats and species. It aims to:   * increase the level of understanding and connection between people and the living environment; * promote consideration of all impacts on the natural world through our actions and decisions, including through procurement and use of resources; and * encourage staff, partners and customers to engage with, understand and consider biodiversity.   As outlined in the [**Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011**](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents/enacted), every public body in Scotland is required to produce a publicly available report on compliance with the Biodiversity Duty. This must be completed triennially.  This report outlines the efforts of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS) in furthering the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out its responsibilities during the three-year period to 31 December 2023. |  | A field of flowers with a body of water in the background  Description automatically generated with medium confidence |

# WICS’ role

We are a non-departmental public body with a statutory duty to promote the interests of Scottish Water’s customers.

Our objectives are set within the context of the Scottish Ministers’ aim to transition to a net zero carbon industry by 2040 and to ensure the sustainable long-term future of the water industry. We have 3 core strategic objectives:

1. To support the sector to achieve its long-term vision and to deliver the [Scottish Ministers’ Objectives for Scottish Water](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-water-directions-2020/).
2. To challenge Scottish Water to achieve best in class levels of service for its customers and communities.
3. To be recognised internationally as leaders in the field of economic regulation, as part of our commitment to supporting the Scottish Government’s Hydro Nation initiative.

Although we do not interact directly with biodiversity, we make a significant indirect contribution through responsible economic regulation of Scottish Water. The Scottish water and sewerage sector is a £1.4 Billion industry that improves infrastructure, creates jobs and supports livelihoods across Scotland. To enable Scottish Water to ensure Scotland’s water is sustainable both today and for generations to come, we ensure Scottish Water has funding to:

* continue to deliver a flourishing and improving aquatic environment, and drinking water to be proud of;
* ensure that its assets – such as pipes and sewers – are better able to withstand future unexpected events; and
* make the transition it needs to achieve the ambitious target of net zero emissions by 2040.

We are a small organisation of 25 employees. Our ability to benefit biodiversity directly is limited, but the organisation considers the impact on biodiversity and sustainability as part of our decision-making processes.

# Actions to protect biodiversity

This report covers the three years 2021 - 2023. During 2020 our working arrangements were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with all staff working remotely from home. This remained the case until early 2022 when employees began to meet and perform some of its activities face to face (e.g. meetings).

The future working arrangements are still being considered and are discussed further, along with other efforts we have made during the period in effort to meet our responsibilities towards conserving biodiversity.

## Estate management and working arrangements

### Background

We have a sole office where all employees were based prior to the pandemic. However, we operated successfully under the home working model and decided to sub-lease the office to another public body which resided in the same building. This sub-letting arrangement is reviewed on an annual basis with the other public body.

Although video conferencing has become a large part of our employee’s day to day life, for interactions that benefit from face-to-face meetings, we have used a range of meeting and conference facilities. We have also trialled shared office space as a means for longer-term collaborations.

### Successes and challenges

Home working has reduced the volume of waste produced by the office. Employees are provided with energy efficient equipment to work from home and printing requirements have reduced considerably. For example, all papers for meetings are issued electronically. During the period, we established a new brand and accompanying website, which improved online interaction and reduced non-paper-based communications with our stakeholders.

Our employees no longer undertake daily commutes to an office, and we can recruit candidates from a wider range of locations across the UK.

Although home working has resulted in decreased absence rates, we recognise that face-to-face contact is beneficial for employee well-being. This continues to be a key focus as we work to implement measures to support employees working from home.

### Future plans

We are still working on plans for a future working environment for employees. Given the success of remote working, future working arrangements are likely to include a move away from traditional large office space and instead towards a mixture of hybrid working that allows for flexibility while providing better overall sustainability.

A key consideration for us will be how to carry forward the benefits from remote working as we transition to new working arrangements.

## Transport and travel

### Background

Travel has one of the largest impacts on our carbon output. Prior to the pandemic, we had already been taking steps to reduce our carbon footprint by providing flexible work arrangements, such as working from home.

Our travel policy encourages employees to keep business travel to a minimum, making use of video conferencing, when convenient. The policy encourages employees to use cost efficient and environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

### Successes and challenges

We are committed to supporting the Scottish Government’s Hydro Nation initiative, which is setting out to build partnerships internationally, sharing knowledge and expertise on water-related issues and undertaking joint research. The aim is to use Scotland’s reputation and expertise internationally to improve global water management.

Some of our Hydro Nation work involves international travel. Despite the challenges of time differences, we were able to deliver a project for the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand, with minimal travel requirements, during the reporting period.

To compensate for necessary travel, we off-set carbon emissions by funding an equivalent carbon dioxide saving elsewhere. We use the information in the sustainability section of our annual report to determine the level of off-setting required. Following publication of our annual report and financial statements we use a reputable carbon off-setting organisation to plant trees on our behalf.

### Future plans

Whilst our Hydro Nation work will always require some international travel, our experience of delivering projects remotely through the pandemic allows us to maximise the use of technology, only travelling when necessary to deliver key elements of our projects and business development activity.

## Technology and infrastructure

### Background

In early 2021, following the pandemic, we decommissioned all on premise IT infrastructure and transitioned entirely to a cloud-based model.

Our approach to delivering IT services aligns fully with the Scottish Government’s cloud first strategy – designed to maximise financial, environmental and security benefits in the public sector.

### Successes and challenges

The transition to cloud-based services has removed the need for on-premise IT infrastructure and hardware resulting in savings on equipment and maintenance as well as a reduction in our energy consumption.

Our current home working model has enabled us to remove multi-functional on-premises printers. This has reduced our paper usage and waste.

We introduced a range of IT services to support virtual collaboration reducing the need for employees to travel which helps to reduce our carbon footprint.

### Future plans

We will continue to deliver IT services in line with the Scottish Government’s cloud first strategy and seek to maximise the resulting environmental, financial and security benefits that new and emerging technology can bring.

## Sustainable procurement

### Background

As a public body we are conscious of our obligations to deliver value for money. We consider sustainability when procuring services and goods, ensuring we achieve value for money by making sustainable choices and encouraging sustainable products and services.

We achieve this by having clear procurement policies in place for employees, using shared services where convenient and ensuring specific environmental performance conditions are included in supplier contracts.

### Successes and challenges

The Scottish Government provides public bodies with the opportunity to call-off from a variety of framework contracts. These contracts have been procured with a firm focus on sustainability and value for money. We have used the Scottish Government Framework contracts for travel bookings, employee assistance and occupational health.

### Future plans

We will continue to procure services with sustainability and environmental impact in mind.

# Conclusions

During the pandemic, we adapted our operating model and introduced home working for staff and later trialled hybrid working. This change has delivered greater flexibility for our employees, generated financial savings, and reduced our environmental footprint.

As we develop our future working arrangements, environmental impact will be considered in our decision-making process. We plan to move to a hybrid-working model to determine the best possible approach and way forward.