

Food & Footprint

Piloting a Natural Capital Assessment Template for NatureScot

Research-backed end-to-end sustainability solutions.



NatureScot is Scotland's nature agency, working to improve the natural environment in Scotland. In October 2021, SAC Consulting responded to a tender to carry out Phase 2 of NatureScot's Natural Capital Assessment Template project as part of their 'Farming with Nature: Supporting Sustainable Food Production, Climate and Biodiversity'.



www.nature.scot

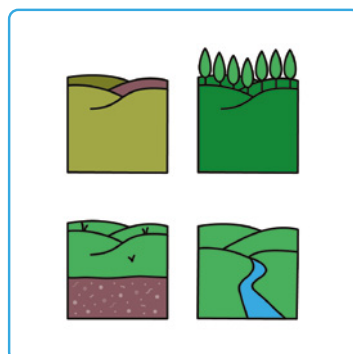
The programme is delivering a range of pilot projects, to help inform what future rural support, outside of the Common Agricultural Policy, may look like. This project aimed to develop and test a Natural Capital Assessment template specifically for land-based businesses, to give land managers an overview of the Natural Capital assets (habitats) on their land. The aspiration was to create a tool to give land managers a baseline to help them understand where to focus or how to make good decisions about the future.

In essence, the tool would offer a holistic approach to sustainable land management.

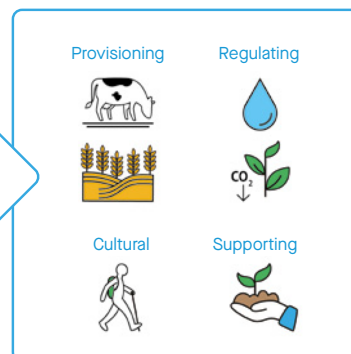
NatureScot wanted to develop an easy to use template that took a whole farm approach, allowing land managers to identify and manage their natural capital assets to enhance biodiversity and mitigate against climate change. Following development of the template in Phase 1, Phase 2 tested the template to ascertain whether farmers and land managers would find it useful and how consultants and advisors found it.

Natural Capital

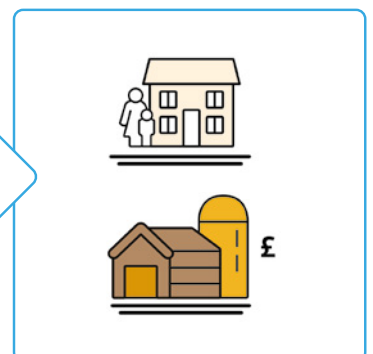
Natural Capital assets



Ecosystem services



Value/benefits to business and society



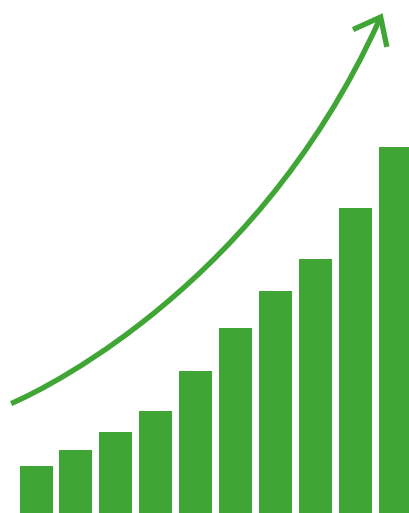
Winning the contract in partnership with Cumulus Consultants Ltd. (NatureScot's delivery partner in Phase 1), the project offered a valuable opportunity to test a whole farm Natural Capital approach. and enabled SAC Consulting to add value through its nationwide reach within Scottish farming and regional spread of expert consultants and specialists.

Phase 2 of the project included the following:

- Piloting a 'Natural Capital Assessment Template' with 50 land managers across Scotland, covering a diverse range of businesses that make up Scotland's rural sector. This included creating baseline maps for each participant and showing the location of their Natural Capital assets.
- Producing knowledge exchange material to disseminate the project, and the concept of Natural Capital, to rural land managers across Scotland.
- Designing and sharing a feedback survey to the participants of the trial and the SAC advisors involved in the testing, producing an overall feedback report for NatureScot which analysed their experience of the pilot.

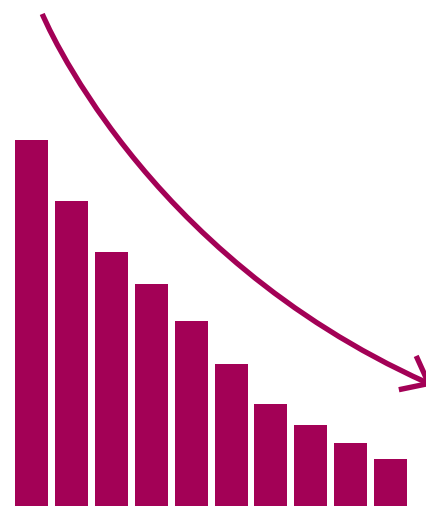
The project also collaboratively enlisted support from diverse teams of specialists across SAC Consulting with a range of extensive GIS skills, Natural Capital expertise, well-established farm advisory backgrounds and experience of working with different types of crofters, farmers, and estates across Scotland.

SAC Consulting has a track record of producing high-quality evidence-based knowledge transfer material and utilised this skillset to create a series of informative documents on different types of Natural Capital assets. We produced film content which both introduced the pilot, the topic of Natural Capital, and showcased short interviews with participants talking about their involvement in the process. When available for public viewing, these will be found on Nature Scot's website (link below).



Enhancing Natural Capital

- Improving soil structure
- Protecting water quality
- Increased wildlife
- Peatland restoration



Depleting Natural Capital

- Soil erosion
- Water pollution
- Habitat loss

Link

www.nature.scot/professional-advice/social-and-economic-benefits-nature/natural-capital/farming-nature



The key to the success of this project was in our open and collaborative approach, utilising a range of consultant specialisms, strong customer relationships, and nation-wide reach. This way of working ensured the success of the piloting of the template, with initial feedback from pilot participants stating that the advice and recommendations were highly valued. The project also offered opportunity to focus on education around the concept of Natural Capital, which is hugely beneficial for everyone working in, and around, the industry.

Kirsty Hutchison from NatureScot said,

"I think it's been a brilliant project for NatureScot and SAC Consulting to better understand the work we're both doing individually and how we can work together to create real impact. We collaborated really well together and brought different specialisms, expertise, and experience.

At NatureScot, we believe that thinking holistically about farming, nature and climate together is key to sustainable land management.

Considering the concept and application of Natural Capital can uncover ways to build resilience into agricultural businesses, allowing land managers to futureproof their business and retain, create, and manage a diverse range of habitats which in turn deliver a range of "ecosystem services" including water quality, flood prevention, carbon storage, improved air quality, alongside providing nature rich habitats to support biodiversity and mitigate against climate change. The project has demonstrated that there is real, tangible value in partnership working to create solutions for the industry. Utilising different sets of expertise and skills helps deliver better outcomes."

**Kirsty Hutchison, Agricultural Officer,
Nature Scot**

Phase 2 of the project has now concluded, and the findings will be presented to Scottish Government in a workshop where next steps for the template will also be discussed.