

A Roadmap for Adopting a National Ecological Network for Scotland

Scottish Environment LINK members support the introduction of a National Ecological Network in Scotland, in line with Scottish Government commitments in [Scotland's Biodiversity - a Route Map to 2020](#) and the [National Planning Framework 3](#).

While scientific evidence and academic literature overwhelmingly supports the introduction of a National Ecological Network to benefit not only our environment but also our wellbeing and economic prosperity, there has been little progress in the roll-out of a National Ecological Network in Scotland.

To encourage progress, LINK members have developed a vision for a National Ecological Network. This briefing outlines LINK member views on what the National Ecological Network can achieve, as well as the core principles it should be based on.

National Ecological Network Key Benefits:

The National Ecological Network (NEN) would help protect and restore Scotland's nature, so that it continues to provide the life support systems we all depend on, particularly in terms of our health, wellbeing and economic prosperity.

The NEN could do this by providing an overriding, holistic policy approach that integrates the enhancement and protection of nature into policies, proposals and funding streams, so that they can deliver multiple public benefits more effectively. This would allow the Scottish Government to deliver on the following priorities:

- **Biodiversity:** help Scotland fulfil its national, EU and international environmental obligations, particularly those related to improving the condition of protected nature sites. This approach is urgently needed to address the growing internal and external pressures impacting our network of designated sites and the ongoing wider decline in biodiversity.
- **Land use:** ensure that the environment is given appropriate weight in land use decisions and would catalyse collaborative approaches to land stewardship that create stronger and more resilient communities.
- **Water:** ensure that the environment is given appropriate weight in decisions regarding the marine and freshwater environments.
- **Climate change:** restoration and enhancement of habitats would protect and increase carbon sequestration and storage, helping to meet internationally and nationally agreed mitigation targets. Increasing investment in Green Infrastructure and connecting habitats would help to reduce flood risk and build climate resilience in both our rural and urban communities.
- **Public health:** improving public access to local greenspace and increasing people's use of Scotland's outdoors would significantly improve the physical and mental wellbeing of local residents, tackling problems such as stress, anxiety and obesity.
- **Local and national economies:** by building on and improving Scotland's reputation as a top destination for wildlife and outdoor activity, the NEN would contribute to local tourism and recreation industries. At a wider scale the network would recognise and protect the multiple benefits that healthy ecosystems bring to the wider Scottish economy.

- **Public funds:** better targeting of public funds to areas where they will have multiple benefits with a preference for nature-based solutions.

In other words, the National Ecological Network provides a way to streamline and target effort using a range of delivery mechanisms, helping us to meet our United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as supported by Scottish Government, and contribute to improvements in our national indicators.

What is the National Ecological Network?

The NEN is a strategic, practical and long-term approach to enhancing Scotland's natural environment which is directly linked to increasing the social and economic prosperity and sustainability of its rural and urban communities. The NEN will operate at a national scale but be built of action across Scotland from the local to regional scale.

Scotland's NEN would deliver more effective protection and positive management of Scotland's existing network of designated natural heritage sites, bringing them into favourable conservation status.

Existing protected areas would form the backbone of a wider landscape network, where existing areas of natural habitat are enhanced, new areas of habitat are restored and created, and land managed for other purposes is managed in a way that supports nature.

The NEN would take a strategic approach to where and how to target habitat conservation and creation and how to shape land use policy in a way that contributes most effectively to shared goals.

A National Ecological Network would help Scotland fulfil a range of national, EU and international legal obligations, enhance connectivity by allowing species to move more easily between habitats, support a landscape approach to tackling conservation issues, give communities better access to high quality, wildlife rich greenspace, provide opportunities to protect and enhance natural capital and improve the range and quality of ecosystem services whilst at the same time making Scotland a more attractive place to live, do business, invest and visit.

As well as safeguarding and enhancing the ecosystem services that Scotland depends on, the National Ecological Network would be a means of strategic planning for the natural environment more commonly associated with major infrastructure projects, thereby placing the same importance on planning for 'green' infrastructure as is done when planning for 'grey' infrastructure. This would enable all levels of government, NGOs, communities, landowners and managers to coordinate actions to protect and enhance the natural environment, be it at a local or national scale, making Scotland a world leader in tackling the loss of biodiversity and implementing high level strategic planning for nature, in line with its ambitions to lead the world in action to halt climate change. This would also complement strategic planning for built development and other land use change, enabling higher quality outcomes and place making.

How should a National Ecological Network be adopted in Scotland?

The National Ecological Network should:

1. Have **Protected Areas at its heart as the key nodes where conditions for biodiversity are optimised and from which connections can radiate**. This means improving their status and preventing further deterioration in their condition and taking steps to restore condition and increase resilience.
2. Support strong and specific measures **for areas between and beyond Protected Areas**, including locally important wildlife sites, buffer areas, stepping stones and linear connections to improve connectivity and increase resilience at the landscape scale.
3. Build coherence and complementarity among current and future **Landscape Scale Initiatives**.
4. Guide and influence land use in the wider countryside and **inform Regional Land Use Plans**, to secure sustainable land management beyond the areas outlined above.
5. Be a cross-cutting theme and objective, embedded in plans and strategies including Scotland's **National Planning Framework, Land Use Strategy, River Basin Management Plan, National Marine Plan, and Biodiversity Route Map**, all of which will be mechanisms for its delivery.
6. Be a **material consideration in development planning, development management, other licensing regimes and when allocating agri-environment and forestry spend** across the country.
7. Provide a **spatial element** that defines clear **Regional Spatial Priorities for Ecological Restoration Action, which will help target funding and habitat creation action and inform decision making and planning**.

This statement is supported by the following organisations:

| | |
|--|---|
| Amphibian and Reptile Conservation | Ramblers Scotland |
| Buglife Scotland | Royal Zoological Society of Scotland |
| British Ecological Society – Scottish Policy group | RSPB Scotland |
| Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group | Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society |
| Bumblebee Conservation Trust | Scottish Badgers |
| Butterfly Conservation Scotland | Scottish Raptor Study Group |
| Cairngorms Campaign | Scottish Wild Land Group |
| Froglife Trust Scotland | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| Marine Conservation Society | Trees for Life |
| National Trust for Scotland | Whale and Dolphin Conservation |
| North East Mountain Trust | Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust |
| Nourish Scotland | Woodland Trust Scotland |
| Plantlife Scotland | WWF Scotland |

For further information please contact:

Daphne Vlastari, LINK Advocacy Officer,
Tel: 0131 225 4345, email: daphne@scotlink.org

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations - 34 member bodies representing a spectrum of environmental and associated cultural heritage interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. LINK provides a forum and network for its members; and assists communication between members, government and civic society. Further information on LINK is available at www.scotlink.org

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish charity under Scottish Charity No SC000296 and a Scottish company limited by guarantee and without share capital under Company No SC250899.