

SUBMITTING EVIDENCE TO A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE

DATA PROTECTION FORM

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Organisation: (if required)	Scottish Environment LINK
Topic of submission:	External Affairs

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CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT LINK

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's external affairs inquiry which will look at how Scotland is and should be engaging with the European Union (EU) and the rest of the world.

As a network of environmental charities, we will be responding to the questions which we understand as most relevant to ensuring that Scotland is able to adopt the transformative changes required to tackle the unfolding and interlinked climate and nature crises.

It is now widely recognised that global action is needed to safeguard our environment for our own wellbeing but also to ensure that future generations can benefit from the riches our natural environment has provided previous generations. Scotland's nature is globally important and therefore international cooperation is vital. For example, 1/3 of Europe's breeding seabirds are found in Scotland while the Flow Country has 5% of the world's resource of blanket bog, critical for carbon sequestration.

Engaging with the European Union

What principles should inform the focus of the Scottish Government's external affairs policy with regard to the European Union?

Scottish Environment LINK members believe that EU environmental principles should remain part of the basis for our engagement with the EU particularly in terms of environmental standards.

More generally, with respect to environmental matters, we believe that the principle of non-regression should form the starting point of cooperation. This should be tied in with a commitment to continual environmental improvement. Cooperation with the EU and EU members states should be based on high environmental standards and promoting greater environmental ambition.

We note that both the EU environmental principles and the principle of non-regression are referenced in the Withdrawal Agreement but more importantly Scottish Government has already committed:

- To introducing a duty with respect to the EU's environmental principles: in its consultation on environmental principles and governance indicated that the Government is considering proposing a duty on these principles. As Environment Cabinet Secretary has stated these principles are 'key tools that can help us to meet

international ambitions such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals'¹. LINK members believe that this duty should apply to Ministers and public bodies in order for the principles to retain the same practical effect that they have today as a result of EU membership².

- To the principle of 'no regression in standards or protections' as Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations Michael Russell stated in the Chamber³.

We also note the need to ensure that environmental protections are adequately enforced and implemented on the ground. This will require Scotland to develop new environmental governance systems, particularly under an EU exit scenario.

To deliver these commitments on environmental principles and address the governance gap, should the UK leave the EU, the Scottish Government must introduce an Environment Bill as soon as possible to ensure these measures are enacted. Without such legislation, to convert positive commitments and intentions into actual practice, Scotland's credibility as a 'world-leader' on environmental matter will be undermined.

Are there examples of best practice for ways in which nations / regions from non-EU Member States engage with and influence the EU?

N/A

What should be the focus of the business plans for the Scottish Government Innovation and Investment Hub offices in Berlin, Brussels, Dublin, London and Paris be?

We hope that the hub offices are able to promote Scotland's environmental credentials and create opportunities for exchanging best practice in terms of the environment and wider sustainability. This will be critical to ensuring operators and stakeholders in Scotland continue to improve but also that they are able to share learnings where Scotland has made progress.

How can the Scottish Government Innovation and Investment Hub offices best support the Scottish Government's external affairs policy?

LINK members hope that hub offices can support the Government's external affairs policies in a way that is transparent but also ensures stakeholder engagement.

How can the Scottish Government's Innovation and Investment Hub offices be evaluated effectively?

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-paper/2019/02/consultation-environmental-principles-governance-scotland-4/documents/consultation-environmental-principles-governance-scotland/consultation-environmental-principles-governance-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/consultation-environmental-principles-governance-scotland.pdf>

² <http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/link-response-to-the-scottish-government-environmental-principles-and-governance-consultation/>

³ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12115&i=109547>

N/A

How should the Innovation and Investment Hub offices most effectively engage with other Scottish organisations such as Scottish Development International and Visit Scotland?

Engagement should be transparent and allow for stakeholder input.

Engagement with the rest of the world

What principles should inform the Scottish Government's international engagement? For example, should economic priorities be the key priority or cultural / 'soft power' priorities?

The recent IPBES report called for transformative change on a global scale. Specifically, it called on policy-makers to transition to a different economic model which does not solely focus on economic growth. Scotland has made progress on this through its National Performance Framework, however, what is now needed is for real action that aligns public spending with those principles.

In early April, the First Minister committed to looking at what actions are needed to bring forward this transformative change.

LINK members believe that Scotland's engagement with the rest of the world should be based on building a positive and proactive agenda around sustainability. Scotland has led climate ambitions, most recently by seeking to legislate for a net zero emissions target by 2045. This ambition can be taken even further forward by Scotland leading international best practice when it comes to ensuring the health of our nature. Ahead of a global summit in 2020, Scotland will host a session seeking to progress international commitments for safeguarding biodiversity, our planet's life support system. In Scotland, we can lead by example and be seen as a constructive partner in tackling these fundamental global challenges.

The Scottish Government's international engagement should be based on our commitment to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and relevant actions that stem from it.

For Scotland to be seen as a credible partner our actions must match our ambition. This also means that Scotland must ensure compliance with international agreements such as the UNECE Aarhus Convention. The First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership highlighted that if we wish to legislate for a right to a clean and healthy environment, we need to do so by following international standards and commitments, including the Aarhus Convention. At the moment the Convention's own compliance committee has found that Scotland as well as the rest of the UK are not in compliance with the provisions of the Convention which seeks to provide citizens with access to justice and information on environmental decision-making⁴. This needs to be remedied.

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https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/compliance/MoP6decisions/Compliance_by_United_Kingdom_VI-8k.pdf

How should the Scottish Government prioritise its international engagement – for example, should the locations prioritised be based on a geography or policy focus?

N/A

What should be the key aims of the Scottish Government's international offices in Beijing, Ottawa, Toronto and Washington DC?

N/A

Currently, the Scottish Government has international engagement strategies with Canada, China, India, Pakistan and the USA. Do these strategies and their geographic focus remain appropriate post-Brexit?

N/A