

2017 Scottish Environment LINK Manifesto for the UK General Elections

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.

Following the announcement of a UK general election on 8 June, Scottish Environment LINK members call on all parties to put sustainability and the protection of our natural environment at the heart of their manifestos. With EU legislation guaranteeing the majority of environmental protections we enjoy today, the future protection of our natural environment and realizing our sustainable ambitions are currently at risk.

We are therefore asking parties to demonstrate their commitment to a flourishing natural environment and sustainable development by committing to the following in their manifestos:

1) Incorporate existing standards of EU environmental protection and core EU principles of environmental protection into domestic law

No change in political or constitutional structures alters the need for well-designed and well-enforced legislation to protect and maintain our precious natural environment, currently facing tremendous challenges in terms of environmental degradation. As a first step, a clear commitment that all EU legislation that protects our natural environment, including preambles that shed light on legislative intent, needs to be enshrined in national law. The transposition of EU laws into domestic law should not be an opportunity for deregulation. It is equally important to address the void created in terms of implementation and enforcement by the absence of recourse to the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. Supporting the creation of environmental courts or an ombudsman post could be ways to address this.

EU law has been developed on the basis of key principles such as the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle as well as integrated environmental impact assessments. These principles should continue to form the basis of national environmental law in the future.

2) Build on existing EU environmental protections and ensure that all policies contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals across the UK, also in line with the Shared Principles for Sustainable Development as agreed by the governments of the UK and its devolved administrations, should guide policy-making across all sectors. Environmental objectives and sustainability should be embedded in sectoral legislation such as agriculture and fisheries as well as wider economic policies.

More specifically, outside of the Common Agricultural Policy regime, regulation across the UK needs to: reward farmers, foresters and other land managers for the full range of goods and services they provide; help rural businesses become more profitable and sustainable; protect and enhance the environment and the natural resources that underpin economic activity; and, spend taxpayers' money effectively, helping to create good livelihoods and jobs and contributing to our health and wellbeing.

With respect to fisheries, it is not only important to strengthen and enforce existing environmental protections arising from EU law and policy, but also to adopt a progressive Sea Fisheries strategy with ecosystem based management at its core to contribute toward protecting and enhancing our seas.

Sustainable development should be considered also within the context of trade agreements. We need a clear commitment that there will be no trading off environmental protections in the context of trade negotiations. This would be damaging to our natural environment and it would also upset the UK's trajectory towards a more sustainable future. The UK should ensure that trade terms are in line and, where possible, reinforce environmental goals and ambitions.

3) Commit to adopting robust national processes for implementing UK international commitments

Regardless of the UK's decision to exit the EU, the UK will continue to be bound by international agreements on climate change (Paris Agreement), biodiversity (Convention on Biological Diversity, Aichi Targets, Bern Convention) and marine protection (OSPAR). For the majority of these international agreements, the EU has provided the mechanism through which obligations were met at a national level. These mechanisms now need to be replicated within the UK to ensure that the UK continues to deliver on its international commitments. What is more, this should not impact other international agreements emanating from institutions such as the Council of Europe such as the European Landscape Convention, the only international driver for landscape conservation.

Successful achievement of the UK's international commitments will require continued collaboration and coordination with EU and EEA partners as well as enhanced participation in international fora.

4) Support an inclusive and transparent process for negotiating the UK and Scotland's future relationship with the EU

Environmental policy is devolved, as is largely the case with agriculture and fisheries policies, particularly in Scotland. As negotiations with EU partners gather pace, it is important that any UK position also reflects the interests of all four nations by engaging in a substantive and forthcoming manner with the devolved governments and stakeholders operating in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Discussions with all relevant stakeholders need to be initiated in a transparent and inclusive manner to develop a consensus on the UK's position for the future relationship with EU partners. From a UK perspective, clarity on how the Great Repeal Bill process will affect devolved administrations and how the governments and parliaments in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will be involved needs to be provided. While it is understood that the outcome of this process will provide greater powers to the devolved governments, it is important to ensure that any interim UK agreement put in place while the terms of the UK's future relationship with the EU are being developed also respects the current devolution settlement.

5) Safeguard future funding for environmental research and nature conservation projects

EU funding has both enabled the roll out of important projects in Scotland and across the UK while also increasing our understanding of how our environment operates as well as providing incentives for sustainable practices. To ensure that the good progress being made in those areas continues, it will be important to safeguard this level of funding as well as relations with European research institutes.

For more information contact:

Daphne Vlastari, LINK Advocacy Officer (daphne@scotlink.org, 0131 225 4345, 07572113379)
www.scotlink.org