

Environmental groups welcome Scottish Government's support of EU Nature Directives

Environmental groups across Scotland welcome the news that the Scottish Government does not wish to renegotiate the EU Nature Directives.

On Jan 26th, in answer to a parliamentary question on the subject of the directives, asked by Stewart Maxwell MSP, the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Aileen McLeod MSP, answered: "Like the UK Government... we do not wish to seek the renegotiation of the directives."

The UK and Welsh governments made similar announcements in December 2015, leaving only Northern Ireland to pledge their support in the UK.

As part of her answer the Minister also acknowledged that, "Scotland provides the largest component of the UK's contribution to the European Union's Natura 2000 network." And that "the Scottish Government is continuing to participate in the European Commission's 'fitness check' of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the conclusions of which have yet to be determined."

Deborah Long, Head of Plantlife Scotland and Convener of Scottish Environment LINK's Land Group said:

"We are delighted that the Scottish Government has publicly stated their support for the EU Nature Directives."

"Given the Scottish government's support of the EU Nature Directives, we are now looking for effective government leadership on halting the loss of biodiversity by delivering on the ambitions of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity. We need clear commitments from our government to lead and resource effective action across Scotland to halt the loss of biodiversity including through continued full implementation of the Nature Directives. LINK's forthcoming manifesto for the 2016 election outlines what we expect to see political parties commit to as we go into the election, in order to enable Scotland to live within environmental limits."

"Scotland's environment and its landscape underpin our economy, our culture and as such the habitats and species that make it what it is need protection through law as well as conservation through partnership working. At Scottish Environment LINK we remain committed to speaking up for the environment and we are pleased to continue to work with government and our partners to ensure Scotland's environment is in the best shape for future generations to enjoy."

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Notes/links for editors:

1. The EU Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive are collectively known as the Nature Directives.
2. In 2014 the EU announced their plans to carry out a fit for purpose review of the Nature Directives, known as the REFIT ‘Fitness Check’.
3. On 30 April 2015 the European Commission launched its public consultation on the Nature Directives.
4. In May 2015, 100 voluntary organisations across the UK – known as the ‘Joint Links Group’ and including Scottish Environment LINK – cited that the European Commission’s REFIT ‘Fitness Check’ of the Nature Directives is the biggest single threat to UK and European nature and biodiversity in a generation.
5. To access the evidence submitted by the Joint Links group, please click here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/evidence_gathering/index_en.htm
6. Between April and July 2015 the European Commission ran a public consultation on the Nature Directives. Over 520,000 people across Europe spoke up to save these laws - more than three times higher than the response to any other Commission consultation.
7. On 16 December 2015 EU Environment Ministers met to discuss how we meet our target to reverse wildlife declines by 2020. At this meeting UK Environment Minister, Rory Stewart, stated that the UK do not want to renegotiate the Nature Directives, and instead want to work with others on improving their implementation.
8. The full parliamentary question referred to above can be found here: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_ChamberDesk/WA20160126.pdf
9. Conclusions for the Fitness Check are predicted to be announced later in 2016.

Scottish Environment LINK's Land Group - a coalition of environmental charities campaigning to protect and recover Scotland's wildlife – works together to build understanding of issues affecting land and freshwater in Scotland and to help deliver a sustainable future from these environmental assets in Scotland.

This statement is supported by the following organisations from LINK’s Land Group:

RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Buglife, Marine Conservation Society, Froglife, Bat Conservation Trust, ARC, Butterfly Conservation Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland and Scottish Wildlife Trust.