

Scottish Parliament Debate: S5M-10561 Earth Hour 2018, 28 March 2018 Briefing for Species Champion MSPs

- Scottish Environment LINK¹ welcomes the debate on Earth Hour and urges all Species Champion MSPs² to use this opportunity to stand up for their species and call for action to address climate change impacts on biodiversity in Scotland.
- As highlighted by WWF's Earth Hour, **nearly 1 in 6 species are at risk of extinction from climate change.**
- Almost 10 years since the adoption for the Scottish Climate Change Act, **the urgency to tackle climate change has only heightened.** Climate change has a profound impact on our environment, health and wellbeing. Ambitious targets must be set and realised in the next few decades if we are to meet Paris Agreement goals and avoid dangerous levels of climate change. There is no question that we need to transition rapidly to a low carbon and sustainable society.
- But ambitious targets for eliminating harmful greenhouse gases are not enough. **Action to halt biodiversity loss and enhance our environment is needed just as much.**
- On Monday 26 March, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)³, described as the "IPCC for biodiversity", released the results of the most comprehensive biodiversity study in more than a decade, written by more than 500 experts from over 100 countries. It concluded that **such is the rate of decline that the risks posed by biodiversity loss should be considered on the same scale as those of climate change.**
- Human destruction of nature is rapidly eroding the world's capacity to provide food, water and security to billions of people. This alarming trend endangers economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere.

Scotland's Biodiversity

We can be proud of our unique, varied and rich environment and biodiversity in Scotland, however, we must also be aware of historical and ongoing threats, impacts and challenges surrounding its quality and future. Scotland's rich and varied biodiversity includes internationally important assemblages in the marine and terrestrial environment: bryophytes and fungi, seals, dolphins, breeding seabirds and wintering waterbirds.

In a report developed in 2016 by a coalition of 53 wildlife organisations, many of which are members of Scottish Environment LINK, it was revealed that **almost one in ten Scottish species are at risk of extinction.** The *State of Nature 2016: Scotland* highlights that there is **grave concern particularly for some species**

¹ 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.

² Species Champion asks Members of the Scottish Parliament to lend political support to the protection of Scotland's threatened wildlife by becoming 'Species Champions.' Species Champions learn about the pressures on their species and its habitat, such as such as habitat loss or fragmentation, the impact of invasive non-native species, climate change and pollution. They work to provide a brighter future for these species, spread that knowledge throughout Scotland's political community and shape policy to promote and secure biodiversity.

³ Often described as the "IPCC for biodiversity" IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body comprising 129 member Governments. Established by Governments in 2012, it provides policymakers with objective scientific assessments about the state of knowledge regarding the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems and the contributions they make to people, as well as the tools and methods to protect and sustainably use these vital natural assets. For more information about IPBES and its assessments visit www.ipbes.net

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including more than half of vascular plants, such as juniper, and 39% of butterflies. There are also serious concerns for a quarter of Scotland's birds including upland species such as dotterel and curlew, and seabirds such as puffins and kittiwakes.

The *State of Nature report* confirms that our nature is facing great pressures from land-use change while climate change and human activities are having a particular impact on internationally important marine habitats and species, resulting in declines and alterations to species' distributions and community composition.

What is more, Scotland's Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) is 81.3% when values under 90% indicate that "ecosystems may have fallen below the point at which they can reliably meet society's needs" (Hayhow et al., 2016: 3). **Scotland ranks in the bottom fifth of all 218 countries analysed; 36th from the bottom.** This level of degradation reflects historical losses that took place in the course of the 20th century and further back. **Given the significant losses that we have already incurred in Scotland, it is of paramount importance that we work to safeguard and enhance our environment going forward. Indeed, still today we are working to redress errors of the past** such as:

- Commercial afforestation and drainage resulted in the loss of 44% of Scotland's blanket peat bog between the 1940s and the 1980s.
- Although grasslands cover around one-quarter of Scotland, after decades of human intervention less than 1% of this is semi-natural. Between the 1940s and 1980s, the area of broadleaved and mixed woodland fell by 23% and 37% respectively, and native Caledonian pine forests now cover less than 90,000 hectares – just over 6% of the original area.

The importance of nature in Scotland is apparent, not just in terms of natural and cultural wealth but also the economic benefits it brings: 14% of jobs are supported by the natural environment.

Impacts of Climate Change

There is strong evidence that climate change is affecting Scotland's biodiversity and impacts are expected to grow as the magnitude of climate change increases. Many species are occurring further north and there are also examples of shifts to higher altitudes. Changes in species' distributions have differed between species, probably reflecting the intrinsic characteristics of species and the effects of habitat fragmentation in slowing dispersal processes.

Some habitats are particularly sensitive to climate change and the risks are clearest for:

- montane habitats, due to increased temperatures;
- wetlands, due to changes in water availability; and
- coastal habitats, due to sea-level rise.

In recent decades, warmer springs have caused life-cycle events of many species to occur earlier in the season. Sometimes this results in a mismatch between the feeding needs of young and abundance of traditional food sources.

In order to help our biodiversity, we need to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit future climate change, and protect our species and habitats so they can weather the impacts of climate change which is now unavoidable. There is now clear evidence that land management decisions can influence the impacts of climate change on species and ecosystems.

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Action Needed

Scottish Environment LINK would like to urge all Species Champion MSPs to attend and contribute to the debate on Earth Hour on 28 March and support actions that will help restore Scotland's biodiversity:

- ***Call on Scottish Government to intensify efforts to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and set plans for post-2020 aspirations***

International and domestic goals for halting biodiversity loss are set for 2020. It is understood that Scotland will not be able to meet these commitments in full. In terms of the international Aichi Targets for biodiversity, Scotland is unlikely to meet Aichi Target 5 on habitat loss, Target 9 on control of invasive species, or Target 12 on preventing extinction of species. It is therefore imperative that we significantly increase our efforts ahead of 2020 and look already at the measures that will be needed to ensure that biodiversity loss is tackled post-2020. Commitments are needed by Scottish Government on the future of biodiversity policy post-2020.

- ***Call on Scottish Government to put sustainable development at the heart and purpose of the National Performance Framework (NPF)***

As highlighted by the IPBES, "further economic growth can facilitate sustainable development only if it is decoupled from the degradation of biodiversity and nature's capacity to contribute to people. Such decoupling, however, has not yet happened, and would require far-reaching change in policies and tax reforms at the global and national levels"⁴. The authors emphasise the importance of "measuring national welfare beyond GDP". Scotland could achieve that by embedding sustainable development as the core purpose of the NPF, also in line with its support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

- ***Call for ambitious climate targets in the forthcoming Climate Bill***

LINK members believe the Climate Change Bill must set a net zero target immediately. There is no need to wait for a later date. In 2009, the 2020 and 2050 targets were set on the basis of what climate science showed was necessary to meet a 2°C goal, with no defined pathway to deliver them. At that time the 42% reduction was considered the most ambitious legal target in the world, yet we are on track to comfortably meet it. The Scottish Government should take the same bold approach now.

- ***Call on Scottish Government to implement the Scottish Land Use Strategy***

The Land Use Strategy was produced as part of the 2009 Climate Act. Since then, the Strategy has not been properly implemented and the benefits arising from better and more coherent land use policy-making not delivered. The Land Use Strategy needs to be enhanced in the context of the forthcoming Climate Bill.

- ***Call on Scottish Government to support bolder action to achieve carbon-neutral farming by 2050***

Supported in an [open letter](#) by 50 organisations, NGOs, farmers, rural groups and academics⁵, setting a roadmap for a just transition towards carbon neutral farming will help minimise Scotland's emissions from land use, which are currently account for 22.5% of total greenhouse gas emissions.

⁴ <https://www.ipbes.net/news/media-release-biodiversity-nature%E2%80%99s-contributions-continue-%C2%A0dangerous-decline-scientists-warn>

⁵ See the LINK press release here: <http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/scottish-government-must-drive-just-transition-towards-carbon-neutral-farming-urge-50-ngos-farmers-rural-groups-and-academics/> and article in The Herald here: http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16114555.Farms_at_centre_of_new_bid_to_halt_climate_change/

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- ***Call on the Scottish Government to secure funding for biodiversity, also in view of the losses from dedicated EU funding streams***

Since its inception, the EU LIFE programme has funded over 25 projects in Scotland, bringing in well over £25 million for conservation delivery - 21% of the UK total. Among the species and habitats that have benefitted the most are Atlantic salmon; the freshwater pearl mussel; the corncrake; the Flow Country peatlands; Caledonian pinewoods; upland invertebrates; the red squirrel; machair grasslands; seabirds on Canna and the Shiant; the Celtic rainforest; the porpoise; and the hen harrier. This funding is now at risk at a time when funding for biodiversity and conservation is already facing multiple pressures. We cannot afford to undercut funding for biodiversity at a time when pressures are magnifying.

- ***Call on Scottish Government to introduce a National Ecological Network in line with commitments made in Scotland's Biodiversity Route map***

A National Ecological network would provide a strategic, practical and long-term way to invest in natural assets such as peatlands and woodlands which sequester and store carbon and would also significantly help with regard to adaptation, having a key role in building biodiversity resilience.

- ***Call on Scottish Government to complete the Marine Protected Area network and ensure all sites are well-managed.***

Scotland's existing Marine Protected Area (MPA) network covers around 20% of Scotland's seas. The Scottish Government has also recently committed to additional resources to extend the network, which is welcome and required. However, fewer than a third of sites in Scotland's current MPA network have effective management in place to ensure they meet their conservation objectives and contribute to the wider recovery of the health of our seas.


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