

LINK response to UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC) Report

Scottish Environment LINK welcomes the CCC '[Net zero](#)' report and recommendations to the Scottish Government on setting a net zero greenhouse gas emissions target for 2045. LINK members also welcome the Government's swift response to bring forward amendments to the Climate Change Bill for setting a 2045 net zero target.

We welcome the CCC's emphasis of Scotland's 'greater potential for emissions removal', given its capacity for nature-based carbon sequestration through peatland restoration and afforestation. ECCLR will be aware of previous LINK evidence and support for ensuring that the Bill acknowledges the positive role that nature can play in tackling climate change¹. Actions supported by LINK directly speak to the need to step up the roll out of nature-based solutions which should also acknowledge the role of blue carbon in Scotland.

We hope that now that the Government has introduced amendments for reaching a net zero target, ECCLR will be able to focus at Stage 2 on solutions that will help us achieve this, including first and foremost action to deploy nature-based solutions. In terms of the CCC report:

1. LINK welcomes the recommendations on peatlands

The CCC report highlights that 'there is potential to more than double the area of restored peatland from 0.6 million hectares today to over 1.4 million hectares by 2050, which would reduce these emissions to around 7 MtCO_{2e}'. The CCC recommendation of including peatland emissions in the inventory must be considered, to not only account for historical emissions but also incentivise restoration to address the issue of ongoing emissions. The future of peatlands is vulnerable due to planned extraction of peat for horticultural use, and LINK members recommend provisions within the Bill should be made through a sunset clause to set time limits for decisions to be made on the status of our peatland sites.

2. LINK acknowledges the positive role of Scotland's forests and woodlands

[Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) states that 'all Scotland's forests, woodlands and associated open ground habitats provide some biodiversity value', and suitably managed native, ancient and semi-natural woodlands contribute the most to biodiversity. The Strategy also says that 'while the forest and woodland creation target will help deliver additional carbon reductions, the existing resource must also be managed sustainably to preserve Scotland's carbon sink'. In view of this prevailing national policy, LINK members hope that measures within the net zero commitment will include an enhanced role for appropriately-sited native woodland, and within increased planting targets, and the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of existing native woodland, especially through the control of inappropriate grazing.

3. LINK welcomes the need for 'transformational land use change'

The CCC is highlighting, in line with previous reports², that 'policy to encourage farming practices must go beyond the existing voluntary approach'. It adds that measures such as 'financial payments in the UK Agriculture Bill should be linked to actions to reduce and sequester emissions should take effect from 2022'. LINK has supported similar policies in the context of the development of a Scottish policy on agriculture³. Scottish Natural Heritage have highlighted that 'agricultural soils have the greatest potential to hold more carbon – an estimated 115 megatonnes of it, equivalent to 22% of total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from Scotland's energy sector'⁴. We note the Government's recently announced research to help understand how emissions can be cut from the use of nitrogen fertilisers. This work must be followed up with targets to reduce emissions and policies which enable better use of fertiliser. More work on agroforestry will also be needed, as indicated in LINK's Stage 1 evidence.

¹ Scottish Environment LINK, Stage 1 evidence submission: <http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/Scottish-Environment-LINK-ECCLR-Stage-1-Evidence-Climate-Bill-Aug2018.pdf>

² UK Committee on Climate Change (September 2018): Reducing emissions in Scotland – 2018 Progress report to Parliament, <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Reducing-emissions-in-Scotland-2018-Progress-Report-to-Parliament.pdf>

³ LINK Parliamentary Briefing (October 2018): 10 principles for future land management support in Scotland, http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/10-principles-for-future-land-management-support-in-scotland_finaldraft.pdf; LINK Position Paper (March 2017): Renewing Scotland's Rural Areas, http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/LINK-Future-of-Farming-and-Rural-Land-Management_March2017.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nature.scot/climate-change/taking-action/carbon-management/managing-nature-carbon-capture>

LINK members also support CCC observations that ‘this is now an opportunity to define a better land strategy that responds fully to the challenge of climate change’. LINK members have long recommended strengthening Scotland’s Land Use Strategy and introducing regional land use plans.