

Parliamentary Briefing for the Scottish Parliamentary debate on Biodiversity on 17th January 2013

INTRODUCTION

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 30 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Scotland, along with all other countries in the world, is failing to meet its target to halt the loss of biodiversity.

Biodiversity is the foundation of all life on earth and its continued loss has been called "Europe's silent crisis"¹. The ongoing decline in diversity, at species, habitat and ecosystem levels and the decrease in ecosystem stability is resulting in loss of supporting, provisioning, regulating and cultural services². While these services are increasingly recognised as having significant economic value to Scotland, over 80% of services provided by Scotland's biodiversity are showing deterioration or equivocal changes³. Continuing to lose biodiversity is not an option in a sustainable Scotland.

Scottish Environment LINK submitted a detailed response to the review. The problem for biodiversity, as we see it, is that biodiversity has no champions in the Scottish Government. As a result, other efforts to conserve and enhance biodiversity by policies outside of 'mainstream' conservation action are weak and under-resourced. This is despite the fact that, in the long run, it is easier and cheaper to achieve biodiversity conservation through, for example, improved agriculture, flood management, planning or forestry policy. To address this, the Minister must champion biodiversity to his colleagues and to **all** sections of the rural affairs and environment portfolio. He should remind them of the Government's commitments to the Aichi targets⁴ to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020 and their duties to deliver these under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The minister might be asked, during the debate, what steps he is taking, or is intending to take, to champion biodiversity to all departments and agencies of the Scottish Government?

We believe that success now depends on **all** organisations and businesses delivering for biodiversity, and recognising that increasing their positive contribution to nature and landscapes can help them to better meet their own corporate priorities and performance. We noted that one of the key recommendation made by respondents to the government's consultation on the Challenge 2020 document was *A need to better specify how the Strategy will be delivered, including defining roles and responsibilities and timescales for key steps and actions.*

Challenge 2020 needs to provide a vision, as well as guidance and leadership on what needs to be done to alter our current trajectory, to reverse rates of change and to build wider public support. Against this background and the need for urgent, coordinated and effective action, the current review of action to deliver the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland⁵ needs to be well designed and ambitious. It needs to identify key steps required for Scotland to make progress towards our biodiversity targets.

¹ <http://www.publicserviceeurope.com/article/1425/loss-of-biodiversity-europes-silent-crisis>

² Cardinale et al (2011) The functional role of producer diversity in ecosystems. *American Journal of Botany* 98, 572–592.

³ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) *The UK National Ecosystem Assessment*

⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity (2011) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020. www.cbd.int/sp2020

⁵ Scottish Executive (2004) *Scotland's biodiversity: it's in your hands*

To be world leaders in this area and to match the international reputation of our wildlife and landscapes, Scotland needs to achieve much, much more.

What do we need to do?

A vital tool is to have a list of priority actions, which all stakeholders can work to achieve by 2020. The focus of the biodiversity strategy must be to achieve positive biological outcomes. This might be, for example, an increase in butterfly orchids or the restoration of peatlands. Such action takes Scotland towards the international target to halt the loss of biodiversity. Moreover, the strategy should not replicate targets from other strategies, such as the Scottish Forestry Strategy or the National Marine Plan. It should instead add value to achieve the step change the Minister wishes to see¹.

Examples could be:

1. Reverse the decline in vascular plant diversity and wild pollinators in the wider countryside
2. Phase out peat use by public bodies completely by 2015
3. Reverse decline in extent and quality of upland heath
4. Improve 5,000 hectares of urban greenspace and hospital grounds, through managing publically owned land for biodiversity

Public engagement in conserving Scotland's nature is crucial. However, we need to be taking positive actions towards improving biodiversity health in order to increase public support. Using the strategy to focus upon saving Scotland rare species and increasing the amount of native woodlands or upland heath will inspire the public and result in positive engagement. Watching over the continued loss of Scotland's nature will not.

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