

5 Principles for Adapting to a Changing Climate

We need to prepare today and act now for a changing climate. The inevitable changes are a result of past greenhouse gas emissions and we will increasingly experience the impacts of it over the coming years. Climate change means we will have to adapt how we run our economy and our lives. It also changes how we look after our environment. From coping with flooding to supplying homes with water, from growing crops to conserving wildlife - everything needs to be viewed in the light of a changing climate.

In 2013 the Scottish Government will publish a statutory **Adaptation Programme**. This is a requirement of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and will set out Government's plans for how Scotland adapts to a changing climate. LINK believes that this Programme is essential for Scotland's environment and people. It is vital that the Programme addresses the risks and threats posed by climate change and the resources needed to fully deliver it. LINK will judge the Government's Adaptation Programme and its sector plans by the 5 principles and the guidelines set out in this document.

LINK recommends that **five principles** are followed during the development of **Scotland's Adaptation Programme**:

1. **Develop knowledge** – of climate impacts and the impacts of our adaptation actions – and then make decisions based on it.
2. **Plan strategically** - with a flexible, long-term view and in a joined-up integrated way.
3. **Build resilience** – in the infrastructure, systems and environment we currently have.
4. **Accommodate and enable change** – so people and wildlife can transition and thrive in new ways and in new places in response to climate changes and impacts.
5. **Adapt sustainably** – to avoid maladaptation and detrimental impacts on other elements of the environment.

Helping the natural environment to adapt

Scotland's important wildlife and habitats are vulnerable to climate change. Many are in a damaged condition and exist in a fragmented landscape, threatening their continued survival and depriving them of the ability to shift to climates that are more suitable.

To help the **natural environment** adapt LINK has developed **5 guidelines**:

- a. **Improve our understanding of changing marine and terrestrial environments** - through monitoring, and research designed to assess the impacts of climate change, the responses of wildlife and habitats, and the effectiveness of our adaptation measures.
- b. **Reduce pressures not linked to the climate** – that the environment is already struggling to cope with, such as pollution, habitat fragmentation and over-exploitation.
- c. **Build robust wildlife populations** – which will be resilient in the face of an uncertain but changing climate, and have the ability to move through the countryside.
- d. **Identify and manage important wildlife and habitat areas** – to fill in gaps in the existing habitat network and provide new areas fit for wildlife in the future, such as Marine Protected Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- e. **Deliver conservation action at a landscape scale** – to provide wider areas of the urban, rural and marine environment that are more resilient to change and permeable to wildlife providing diverse environmental, social and economic benefits. Action at this scale must provide a network of ecologically coherent key habitats which sustain ecological processes and increase connectivity of habitats, surrounded by an environment managed with nature in mind.

Adaptation across sectors

Scotland's people and economy are also vulnerable and will need to adapt. We will adapt – it is inevitable – but the way we do so will be improved if we base it on evidence, adapt in a sustainable way, e.g. in partnership with nature, and coordinate plans. LINK believes that to make this happen all those involved in planning and preparing Scotland for a different climate will achieve this goal by abiding by the 5 principles above and the guidelines below.

To ensure that **all sectors** of Scotland's economy and society adapt to climate change in a sustainable and coordinated way, the following **5 guidelines** are essential:

- a. **Integrate action** – Make sure that adaptation plans and actions are joined-up and coherent. Links between the plans and activities of different sectors and partners must be understood and developed, especially in the early stages of planning processes. Adaptation plans must also be integrated into other planning objectives – especially those aimed at tackling climate change.
- b. **Work in partnership with nature** - Employ an ecosystem approach to planning and management of Scotland's land and seas which protects and actively enhances the natural resources and natural processes that we will increasingly rely on in an uncertain future. If we do this, ecosystems will cost-effectively provide the services we need, such as clean water, food and flood control.
- c. **Engage with people** – Planning our adaptive action must not be the done in isolation or be the sole preserve of the few. Stakeholders, civil society, community groups and partner businesses and organisations must be fully involved when developing adaptation plans, especially at the local level.
- d. **Develop a flexible adaptive approach** – Climate change is inevitable but the extent of future impacts is uncertain. Rigid plans and inflexible actions may not be fit for purpose. To deal with uncertainty we need planning, processes and action on the ground which can be altered as and when knowledge is improved.
- e. **Prioritise no-regrets options** – Many adaptation solutions will be beneficial whether or not the effects of climate change are realised. For example, protecting and restoring peatland habitats can provide us with clean water for drinking, no matter what the extent of climate change. It also protects vast stores of carbon contained in the peat soils thereby helping to limit further climate change and the amount we need to adapt in the future. Building a better Scotland can start now, even without accurate predictions of the future.

Scotland must plan and act now to adapt to the changes we are experiencing already, which result from past greenhouse gas emissions. We must work to ensure we have a healthy and robust environment for us and future generations to benefit from and enjoy.

This briefing is supported by the following members of LINK and LINK's Climate Adaptation Task Force:

- RSPB Scotland
- Plantlife Scotland
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- Woodland Trust Scotland
- Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
- Froglife
- Soil Association Scotland
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
- WWF Scotland
- Mountaineering Council of Scotland
- John Muir Trust
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
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