

# The Scottish Environment LINK Referendum Challenge

We have entered a period where the constitution of Scotland and the United Kingdom is probably the major topic of political debate here in Scotland. As environmental non-government organisations, we are a part of civic Scotland, and wish to make our contribution to this debate.

In our view, the constitutional question should not be seen in isolation, however, from the substantive economic, social and environmental issues that are central to Scotland's future. We face many pressing and urgent issues of substance, such as combating climate change and the loss of biodiversity, and people (including many of our members) want to know how the constitutional solutions on offer will make a real difference in tackling these and similar major issues. We will continue to pursue environmental improvement whatever our constitutional arrangements are, but we hope that the campaigns can provide arguments as to why their position offers the greatest hope of achieving sustainability.

We recognise that the constitutional issue is of great importance, that it has come to a decision point, and that there is going to be a referendum within the next few years. We cannot and do not seek to hide from this, or to change it – but we want a large part of the debate to concentrate on the substantive outcomes of either continuity or the options for change.

Our contribution is to have drawn up this statement of the ideas Scotland's environmental non-government organisations think are essential for our future. We want to investigate which constitutional option will best deliver these aspirations. We are publishing our vision here – and seeking a detailed explanation from the advocates of each competing constitutional option as to why their option would deliver best against our statement of aspirations.



# WE WANT TO LIVE IN A SCOTLAND...

## **...where we measure the success of our society intelligently**

We want to live in a Scotland where economic, social and environmental success is equally valued – and where they all are measured in terms of their long-term sustainability and our living within environmental limits. We want to escape from the position where economic 'growth' is given primacy. We want our prosperity to be related to the common wealth of the planet we live on.

## **...where education reconciles economic, social and environmental issues**

We want all levels of education and lifelong learning in Scotland to underline the importance of our society, economy and environment, locally and globally, as part of the curriculum and in practice.

## **...where we are successfully tackling climate change, and using a precautionary approach to all development**

We want to live in a world where average temperatures have been kept below dangerous levels and where Scotland has played a leading role in the delivery of this aim. We want to have learned from climate change, damage to the ozone layer, and other environmental near disasters, that we must take a precautionary approach to all economic, social and environmental development, and weigh the consequences of developments with great care.

## **...where our natural and built environment benefits people's health**

We want our natural and built environments to promote good health amongst the people of Scotland. We want threats to health prevented and a strong appreciation of the huge and diverse benefits to physical and mental health that come from an unpolluted, accessible, high-quality natural environment and a built environment that promotes activity and well-being.

### **...where the uses we make of our land, seas and air are integrated and sustainable**

We want to live in a Scotland where – at the same time – people enjoy and explore the world around them; carefully utilise the riches and benefits of the land, sea and air; and protect and enhance the ecosystem we share with all other forms of life.

### **...where we protect and enhance our ecosystems and all the species in them**

We want a proper appreciation of the importance of all the species that share our land, sea and air. We want to see an end to species extinctions and the degradation of ecosystems at home and abroad and, instead, a concentration on the manifold benefits of protecting and enhancing the fullest possible biodiversity.

### **...where decisions are taken as close to people as possible**

We want to see real subsidiarity, where decisions are taken at the nearest appropriate and practical level, and where communities of place and interest can assess the long-term economic, social and environmental consequences for their lives and the lives of future generations before decisions are made.

### **...where we value and nurture our landscape and cultural heritage**

We want to live in a country where landscape, both immediate and distant, is seen as a vital asset for every citizen, and a nurturing feature for all of society. We want Scotland's rich cultural heritage to be protected and nurtured within such a landscape.

### **...where openness and public participation are central features of our governance**

We want the methods and processes of government at all levels in Scotland to be open and properly transparent and, as a matter of course, to include genuine representatives of our communities of place and interest in all political decision-making.

### **...where we learn from, and play our part in, the rest of the world**

We want a Scotland that is outward looking, internationalist, co-operative and ready to learn from other nations, societies, and states – and ready to share our ideas, successes, and the lessons from our mistakes, with the rest of the world. We want Scotland to implement international obligations properly, and our attitudes and behaviours to be set in full awareness of the global ecological impact of our lives and activities.



# Our Challenge

We challenge the campaigns for each of the constitutional options to tell us how and why their preferred option will best meet each of these aspirations. We will publish the replies we receive on our website so that our members and other interested citizens can read them before they make their decision on Referendum Day. We don't know exactly when this day will be, nor the options on offer, who will be able to vote, or who will be the 'referee' for the referendum – but we ask that these technical issues be settled in the near future so that we can concentrate the debate on the serious, substantive issues outlined here, and by other sectors of the Scottish community.

## Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interests, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. **LINK** provides a forum for these organisations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary environmental sector, and acting as a strong voice for this community in communications with decision-makers in Government and its agencies, Parliament, the civic sector, the media and with the public.

Acting at local, national and international levels, **LINK** aims to ensure that the environmental community participates in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

**LINK** works mainly through its Taskforces – groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the issues and developing advocacy strategies to promote sustainable development, respecting environmental limits.

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## Our Referendum Challenge is supported by the following **LINK** member organisations:



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