



Circular Economy Priorities for Scotland, 14 January 2020

A SE LINK event hosted by Angus MacDonald MSP

Summary Report

The Scottish Environment LINK project [*A Circular Economy for a Fairer Footprint*](#) is campaigning for a strong Circular Economy Bill for Scotland. Our event, *Circular Economy Priorities for Scotland*, hosted by Angus MacDonald MSP, brought together a diverse audience, including MSPs from all the main Scottish political parties, to discuss what our circular economy priorities should be and how we might achieve them.

We first heard from Professor John Barret (University of Leeds) on *Scotland's carbon footprint and policy options*. John provided invaluable insight into the links between greenhouse gas emissions and our consumption of materials.

We were reminded that, despite generally doing quite well in reducing our territorial greenhouse gas emissions (those that occur in Scotland), our consumption based emissions (all those associated with the goods and services we use and consume) have been falling much more slowly. This is largely due to the fact that we are a net importer of manufactured goods. Much of the emissions embedded in the goods we use and consume occur outside Scotland and so they have not been the prime focus of our climate change policy.

However, even considering territorial emissions alone, it is increasingly being recognised that we need to include a focus on the products and materials we use in daily life. Climate change policy has largely focused on the transition to renewable energy and energy efficiency. John reported on research that shows that the demand for materials and products across the UK is driving up emissions from industry faster than we can decarbonise the energy supply. Research found that additional material productivity measures (to maximise the use we make of materials) could reduce the UK's anticipated emissions deficit by up to 73%.

From research that looked more closely at material productivity, John highlighted these key findings:

- Recycling of resources is important but it is not enough to reduce the impact of current levels of consumption;
- Efficiency improvements will not outpace increases in consumption over the long-term;
- A comprehensive energy demand strategy is required that concentrates on absolute reductions in materials and energy;
- Short-term reductions are more important than long-term unproven technologies.

It was great to hear directly from John, who has been involved so closely in this critical area of research, supporting the case for our main asks of the upcoming Circular Economy Bill in Scotland.

We next heard from Richard Dixon, Director of Friends of the Earth Scotland, who first reminded us of the ecological impact and environmental injustice of our way of life. The Global Living Planet Index, based on the abundance of species' populations across the globe, fell by 60% between 1970 and 2014. At the same time, the World Ecological Footprint (the amount of land and sea we need to support the activities and lifestyle of all people on Earth) which surpassed the World's biocapacity in



1970, continues to rise. In Scotland, our Ecological Footprint is such that nearly 3 Planet Earths would be needed if everyone in the world were to live like us.

A more circular economy with the key aim of reducing our consumption is one way to rein in our impact. Richard noted that the upcoming Circular Economy Bill is a critically important opportunity to set us on a path to a more circular and sustainable economy. He described how Scottish climate legislation has been successful because it both set targets to reduce emissions alongside a climate plan outlining the actions that need to be taken to achieve the targets. This 'target plus plan' approach has led to cross-government working and a framework that can guide the changes that are needed in different sectors.

The Netherlands are taking this type of approach to circular economy with material footprint targets – a 50% reduction by 2030 and to be 'totally circular' by 2050, and a number of sector-specific plans. Richard noted that, although the Scottish Government has put forward some worthwhile proposals for the Circular Economy Bill, a footprint reduction target and obligation to produce plans on how the target is to be met, would provide an overarching direction for the bill. Without this, despite a number of good initiatives, there is every danger that the adverse impacts of our high consumption, and the waste and pollution it produces, will continue.

We were delighted to welcome as a third speaker Penelope Vincent-Sweet who works for France Nature Environment. Penelope shared with us recent developments in France and where we might learn from our auld allies.

Penelope spoke about their feeling that some things which have been presented in the name of the circular economy are not in keeping with the sustainable and restorative system that is needed. France Nature Environment have developed 6 principles to discern the best circular economy systems: durable, streamlined with no superfluous waste; local; clean and non-toxic; using sustainable feedstocks; and perpetual, keeping value for as long as possible.

France will shortly have a new circular economy law which contains a number of interesting measures. For example, single-use crockery and cutlery will be banned from sit in eateries; public buildings will be required to have water fountains; plastic wrapping of fruit and vegetables will be banned; there will be requirements for information about repairability and spare parts for products; there will be changes to enhance Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Schemes; and there will specific targets on refillable packaging, reduction in plastic bottles and to phase out all plastic packaging by 2040.

France has significant experience in EPR with seventeen schemes for different product groups. Some of the schemes are to have new requirements for producers to look at the whole life cycle impact of their products and for part of the Producer Fee (the fee that producers are obliged to pay which supports the 'end of life' services to go towards repair and reuse.

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This feels like real progress and is of interest to inform the design of new schemes in the UK and Scotland. However, Penelope cautioned that, although EPR is working quite well in France, there is a



need to find a balance between producer responsibility and regulations. This was a useful reminder to those of us who advocate for much wider use of EPR schemes – we should regulate out the unacceptable.

The slides of the presentations can be found [here](#).