

Parliamentary Briefing: A Green Recovery for Scotland – summary for MSPs

22 June 2020



This briefing sets out 11 measures recommended by Scottish Environment LINK that can be implemented by the Scottish Government as part of a green recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Since March 2020, the attention of governments has rightly focused on responding to the public health crisis and caring for the most vulnerable, but as we move to considering life beyond lockdown it is clear that there will be severe consequences for the economy and people's livelihoods, both globally and nationally. Statements from the Scottish Government Ministers have signalled the intention that the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should be 'green'¹ but it is critical this rhetoric turns into reality. Before the pandemic swept Scotland, we were already facing nature and climate emergencies and a green recovery must stimulate national and local economies that work for people while delivering benefits for nature and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Other countries are already beginning to lead the way in this. In New Zealand, a country with a population similar to Scotland's, the government is planning for a \$1.1bn investment to create 11,000 new environmental-based jobs focused on restoring nature, from regional environmental improvement projects to new funding to enhance biodiversity levels on public and private land.²

Scottish Environment LINK members have ideas for a green recovery that sustains livelihoods and protects nature. Below are 11 ideas for how Scotland can, in the months ahead, start a transition to a net-zero economy which protects and restores nature, increases our wellbeing, while building a sustainable economy. This is a summary of LINK's longer briefing available [here](#).

1. New policies must satisfy five key tests

The Scottish Government will have many crucial decisions to take in the coming months about what a post-pandemic green recovery will look like, starting with the recommendations of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery.³ It is expected that a package of policies will eventually emerge from this process.

Scottish Environment LINK urges that such policies are developed in accordance with a set of 5 key tests to ensure that they truly deliver on the ambition that the recovery will be a green recovery:

1. Every individual policy/action adopted must be based on sound evidence, must not increase carbon emissions, must not damage nature and must not harm social wellbeing.

Taken together as a package, each individual policy/action must contribute to at least one of:

2. Reduce pollution;
3. Improve adaptation to climate change and reach net zero by 2045;
4. Secure sustainable consumption of natural resources;
5. Improve biodiversity and ecosystem services.

¹ Scottish Government 2019. *Climate Change Plan update*. <https://www.gov.scot/news/climate-change-plan-update/> AND Scottish Government, 2020. *Economy Secretary's statement 21 April 2020*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-economy-secretarys-statement-economic-impact-covid-19-tuesday-21-april-2020/>

² New Zealand Government, Department of Conservation, 2020. Press release. <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2020-media-releases/investment-to-create-11000-environment-jobs-in-our-regions/>

³ Scottish Government 2020. *Advisory Group on Economic Recovery*. <https://www.gov.scot/groups/advisory-group-on-economic-recovery/>

The contributions must be quantifiable and reportable.

2. Launch a large-scale investment programme to rebuild the economy and meet climate and nature targets

The best way to stimulate the economy and ensure improved wellbeing is a large-scale programme of investment to protect and restore nature and at the same time achieve climate change targets⁴ - often described as a Green Deal. **The Scottish Government should identify the key domestic projects and programmes and ensure a mix of public and private investment flows.** The programme should be designed to create skilled jobs across rural and urban areas, including coastal areas, through landscape restoration projects, green technologies and renewables sectors, and the circular economy. This should also include building Scottish supply chains for major new investments.

3. Invest in a Nature Network for Scotland

One of the most effective responses is a Nature Network; a strategic, long-term approach to manage, restore and enhance Scotland's terrestrial and marine habitats and landscapes. Its approach builds a nature friendly landscape and seascape, where nature can move and thrive and provides life affirming wildlife and nature encounters to all people. A Nature Network is not just a physical network like a path or hedgerow. It links the ecological processes that operate throughout the landscape, across managed landscapes and Protected Areas.⁵ A Nature Network would be a key element of Scotland's infrastructure and can be delivered through the forthcoming National Planning Framework 4.

The Scottish Government can kickstart a Nature Network with investment in catchment scale habitat restoration and linkage projects. This would deliver not just ecological benefits but also economic and social benefits through job creation, upskilling and community involvement. Scotland's eNGOs comprise a ready network of skilled practitioners and volunteers to coordinate delivery that would provide continued financial security to eNGOs who are currently looking at severe impact on ability to continue operating over the next 12 months.

4. Invest in Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change

The global climate and nature emergencies are deeply and inextricably linked together. 'Nature-based solutions' help to meet climate emission targets while building resilient ecosystems. LINK believes they must be a vital part of climate action and must operate alongside rapid fossil fuel phase-out; they must protect and restore multiple ecosystems on land and sea; they must work with communities and build people's capacity to adapt to climate change; and they must sustain and enhance biodiversity.

Scotland has an unprecedented opportunity to lead the way in delivering nature-based solutions to the climate emergency. This includes peatland restoration, strategic woodland creation and restoration of saltmarshes, kelp forests and seagrass beds in the marine environment.

Projects such as these have the potential to deliver new jobs and skills, particularly in more remote and rural communities. Investment in woodland creation and restoration, for example, can deliver

⁴ University of Oxford, 2020. *Building back better: Green COVID-19 recovery packages will boost economic growth and stop climate change.* <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-05-05-building-back-better-green-covid-19-recovery-packages-will-boost-economic-growth-and>

⁵ LINK, 2020. *Nature Networks briefing.* <https://www.scotlink.org/publication/nature-networks/>

green jobs through work in forestry operations, wildlife management and tourism. Restoring and expanding ancient and protected woodlands also presents job opportunities in areas such as collaborative approaches to reduce grazing pressure and control invasive species.

5. Prepare a new Economic Strategy which delivers a just, circular and decarbonised economy

Before the current economic downturn took hold, the climate and nature emergencies already required that the objectives and priorities of Scotland's economic policy be changed to align with climate targets and ambitions to restore nature. LINK members believe that Scotland's Economic Strategy is not directing sufficient investment into the just transition to a zero-carbon economy that benefits nature. Programmes to support low-carbon or circular economy initiatives have to date been a minor part of total government support for investment in the productive economy. Without a requirement to contribute to decarbonisation set at the highest level, most other programmes by default either work in the opposite direction or at best make no contribution to resolving the climate and nature emergencies. The wellbeing of all of Scotland's communities must also figure more prominently in Scotland's plan for its economy.

The pace and scale of change needed require a radically different and more ambitious approach - **a new Economic Strategy must deliver a just transition to a decarbonised economy with much lower resource footprints, which will substantially reduce inequalities and protect nature**, putting environmental and social objectives at the core of economic policy. It should also incorporate a Just Transition Strategy which guides a programme of investment on a sector by sector basis, delivered either by the public sector or by private enterprises under its guidance and regulation.

6. Require companies receiving public funds to contribute to a just transition

Many countries around the world are making environmental improvement a precondition of government support. For example, the French government has imposed requirements on flight operators to reduce emissions as a condition of support⁶ and the Scottish Parliament set a precedent when it passed legislation banning public subsidies being given to companies registered in tax havens.⁷ In Scotland, all government spending should promote decarbonisation and restoration of nature alongside its specific objectives. All public bodies should be given guidance about how to do that, for example through sustainable procurement. In particular, **government support for businesses, especially those in high emitting sectors like energy, must be conditional on those industries contributing to a Just Transition away from fossil fuels.**

7. Build a Circular Economy

At the core of our impact on the environment is the sheer quantity of raw materials extracted to feed our demand for new products and the pollution produced from processing them. We need to reorientate our economy to one that is more circular, makes much better use of the materials already

⁶ Business Green, 2020. *Air France coronavirus bailout package to demand steep emissions cuts.*
<https://www.businessgreen.com/news/4014617/air-france-coronavirus-bailout-package-demand-steep-emissions-cuts>

⁷ The Guardian, 2020. *Scotland bans Covid-19 support to firms based in tax havens.*
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/21/scotland-bans-covid-19-support-firms-tax-havens>

in use, and regenerates natural systems. A recent Scottish poll shows 87% agreed that we should use raw materials more wisely and reduce waste.⁸

Efforts to address the overconsumption of virgin materials need to be driven by data about our material (and other) footprints.⁹ Without this overview, any efforts risk being piecemeal and much of our economy will continue on its damaging trajectory. **A Circular Economy Bill is needed to set the framework to drive our economy to one that is more circular with legally binding targets and a coordinated, national plan.**¹⁰

8. Increase funding for green space and active travel routes

The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined to many people the importance of being able to access green spaces from home but also the lack of access for many communities.¹¹

The imperative to embed the return of nature to our towns and cities while increasing active travel and outdoor recreation should not be missed. **Local authorities must be given greater funding to invest in infrastructure for active travel or leisure purposes and create high quality and accessible greenspaces, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods.** The reshaping of our towns and cities in this way will have long-term benefits to public health and to local economies. A study by Sustrans found that in the UK 12.7 jobs are supported or sustained for every £1 million of investment in sustainable transport infrastructure.¹²

9. Maintain and enforce environmental standards

As the economic response to the pandemic is rolled out, it is vital that strong environmental regulations remain in place. The Scottish Government continues its commitment to “maintain alignment with EU law in devolved areas after EU exit” and also to “maintain the role of environmental principles and effective and proportionate environmental governance after EU exit.”¹³ As part of a robust response **Scottish Ministers must legislate to embed environmental principles into Scots law and establish an independent, well-resourced environmental watchdog to enforce environmental standards.**

10. Create sustainable and fair food systems

As the pandemic began to unfold in the UK, securing essential food was many people’s first response. It has raised questions about the resilience of our food supply chains and people’s access to food. Even before the crisis, the 2018 Scottish Health Survey showed that 9% of adults experienced food

⁸ <https://www.scotlink.org/why-a-circular-economy-needs-to-be-part-of-the-economic-recovery/>

⁹ For more information on reducing our material footprint, see LINK briefing: <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CE-Bill-call-for-Aug-19-logos.pdf>

¹⁰ LINK, 2019. *Developing Scotland’s Circular Economy: proposals for legislation.* <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/LINK-CE-consultation-response-Dec-2019-1.pdf>

¹¹ Environment Journal, 2020. *Coronavirus lockdown highlights need for green spaces in housing developments.*

<https://environmentjournal.online/articles/coronavirus-lockdown-highlights-need-for-green-spaces-in-housing-developments/>

¹² Sustrans, 2017. *Active Travel and Economic Performance.* <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/4472/4472.pdf>

¹³ Programme for Government, 2019. p.32. [The Government’s Programme for Scotland 2019-20](https://www.scotland.gov.uk/Information/Statistics/14922/1)

insecurity in the preceding 12 months.¹⁴ The flexibility and sustainability of our food systems must be given consideration as part of a green recovery.

Currently, however, food policy is fragmented, with different government departments creating separate and sometimes contradictory strategies according to diverse policy goals. This prohibits clear leadership which businesses and communities can respond to. **Introducing a Good Food Nation Bill, as consulted upon by the Scottish Government in 2019,¹⁵ can put us on the path to sustainable food production and consumption.** It creates a multi-pronged and coordinated, whole systems approach to halving the environmental impact of food which recognises the interconnections between production and sustainable nutrition.

11. Reform agricultural support

Globally, food production and consumption are key drivers of habitat loss and wildlife declines.¹⁶ In Scotland, agricultural food production influences three quarters of the land area and has a significant influence on the environment, in some cases positive and in others negative. Farming practices can work with nature and, where it does, it builds resilience in local communities, protects nature, produces local products and business opportunities. Conversely, production and harvesting practices can also have direct negative impacts on biodiversity, for example through removal of native woodland or hedgerows, disruption of habitats through drainage or poor soil management. Such negative impacts can also be indirect, by impacting broader ecosystems which affect habitat function and species richness.¹⁷

A truly sustainable farming regime is one that produces good quality, nutritional food in a way that also conserves, regenerates and restores the natural resources on which production is based and delivers a whole range of public benefits, from carbon sequestration to attractive and accessible landscapes. **Agricultural support must be reformed to prioritise activities that enhance biodiversity and reduce emissions while growing good quality, nutritional food.**

This briefing is a summary of the LINK [Green Recovery Group's Building the Future We Want briefing](#). Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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¹⁴ Scottish Government, 2018. *Poverty and Income Inequality Statistics, Chp 5 Diet*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2018-summary-key-findings/pages/7/>

¹⁵ A Bill was being drafted but the Scottish Government has signalled its intention to now not bring this forward due to the current public health crisis. Many stakeholders consider this Bill remains essential if progress is to be made in relation to Scottish food policy. <https://www.scotlink.org/files/documents/LINK-Good-Food-Nation-Consultation-response-April-2019.pdf>

¹⁶ Maxwell, S.L., Fuller, R.A., Brooks, T.M. & Watson, J.E.M. (2016). Biodiversity: The ravages of guns, nets and bulldozers. *Nature* 536: 143-145

¹⁷ WWF, 2018. *Living Planet Report*. https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/