

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Green recovery

Submission from: A Circular Economy for a Fairer Footprint – a Scottish Environment LINK project.

This is a companion to Scottish Environment LINK's other evidence submission, focusing on the circular economy and its potential to contribute to a green recovery.

Do the principles of sustainable development (as set out in the annexe), and those for a resilient recovery, as proposed by the UK Committee on Climate Change, provide a comprehensive framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland?

Only partially. The principles for Sustainable Development provide a useful framework, placing the economy within environmental limits and recognising the importance of governance and science. The principles for a resilient recovery, as set out by the UKCCC, fail to acknowledge the importance of shifting to a more circular economy in addressing climate change and resilience. A more circular economy reduces the emissions which are embedded in materials and products we use¹ and offers a more resilient trajectory², with shorter supply chains and a focus on restorative systems.

Also, in general, although we support the urgency and need to address climate change, it is important to remember that it is only one of several environmental limits which we are in danger of surpassing³ (or have already surpassed). For example, biodiversity, ocean health, air quality and nitrogen and phosphorus cycles are also of critical importance.

What are the key barriers to delivering a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

Although Scottish Government has embraced the concept of the circular economy and there have been good initiatives and some progress, it has been somewhat piecemeal. Barriers to transitioning to a more circular economy include:

- Lack of investment and leadership from Government (for example, compared to the Welsh Government on recycling).
- The need to move the focus of policy both up the waste hierarchy (away from recycling and towards reuse and reduction); and to earlier stages of the lifecycle of products (to address material use and product design, as well as managing waste).
- Lack of joined up policy – there is a need to embed circular economy thinking across Government and the public sector.

What key policies, actions and immediate priorities are needed to deliver a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

¹ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/completing-the-picture-climate-change>

² <https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/2020/06/02/a-circular-economy-will-protect-us-against-future-shocks/>
<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/news/covid-19-insights-build-back-better-with-the-circular-economy>

³ <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/323371/rr-scottish-doughnut-safe-just-space-scotland-250714-en.pdf;jsessionid=7E252929A392E315F22C377499E4917B?sequence=7>

A more circular economy offers job opportunities in general⁴. **Short-term recovery measures** should include a focus on the following:

- Repair and reuse create many more jobs than recycling, incineration or landfill⁵. Investment in Repair and Reuse Hubs, in partnership with social enterprises involved in this sector, could create jobs, reduce waste and reduce our environmental footprints.
- Public procurement needs to be circular such that there is an increased share of service hire or product sharing, repairing of existing products, purchasing second-hand / refurbished products. Public procurement is a key enabler of a shift to a circular economy; creating demand for circular services⁶ and products and supporting the enterprises that supply them. Procurement decisions need to be based on long-term environmental, social and economic costs and should be screened against environmental impacts, including footprints.
- Investment to enable Local Authorities to implement the Household Charter to improve household recycling.
- Building on the recent demand for local food, support local food initiatives which shorten supply chains and reduce the footprint of our food and farming system.
- Training and apprenticeships in areas that are specific to support and develop a more circular economy.

In the medium term there is a need for Scottish Government to:

- Publish material flow accounts, which show the flow of different materials through our economy, including our material footprint; annually to inform policy.
- Introduce the Circular Economy Bill, with headline targets on reducing our overall consumption of raw materials (as in the Netherlands) and a duty to produce 'Resource Reduction Plans' which map out how to reduce our footprints and address problematic materials.
- Introduce an Extended Producer Responsibility framework with the intention being that Producer Responsibility is the norm. In the first instance, it should include additional identified product groups, such as carpets and furniture.
- Introduce product policy and standards to drive eco-design and reduce pollution (for example filters on washing machines to catch plastic micro-fibres).
- Introduce compulsory Material Passports to facilitate increased re-use and recycling, and additional consumer information to support the 'right to repair'.
- Introduce a National Soil Plan, with targets and duties to increase soil carbon, and a commitment to nutrient budgeting (nitrogen and phosphorus).

How should the 2021/22 Budget support a green and sustainable recovery and avoid locking in carbon; and what funding is needed in the ECCLR portfolio to deliver a green and sustainable recovery?

As mentioned above, a circular economy is critical if we are to address our climate and nature emergencies. It also offers a more resilient economy, and must be fully embedded in the Covid-19 recovery measures. Funding should support the measures mentioned above and, in general, all funding should be screened such that it is supporting the trajectory to a circular economy – one that

⁴ <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Employment%20and%20the%20circular%20economy%20summary.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.rreuse.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-briefing-on-reuse-jobs-website-2.pdf>

⁶ Circular services are where the provision of a service, rather than a product, means that the provider is responsible for the use and after-use phase of the products that provide the service, and there is therefore an incentive for the products to last a long time and for 'end-of-life costs' to be minimal

is restorative and regenerative by design; based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution; keeping materials and products in use, and regenerating natural systems.

Further information:

The Circular Economy for a Fairer Footprint is a 3 year project being overseen by Scottish Environment LINK's Economics Group. 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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