

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Green recovery

Submission From **Scottish Environment LINK**

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?

The principles for Sustainable Development provide a useful framework for action. However, the principles for a resilient recovery, as set out by the UKCCC, miss a crucial element of recovery, which relates to the nature crisis. Any green recovery must respond effectively and in a timely manner to the 3 current crises we face, and not just one or two of them: the COVID-19 pandemic and the high risks of future pandemics, the climate emergency and the nature crisis. International evidence from [IPCC](#) and [IPBES](#) clearly demonstrate the need for effective action that achieves results within the next 10 years. Success also locks in resilience against future pandemics, which IPBES considers increasingly likely ([IPBES COVID-19 stimulus measures](#) April 2020). We must also ensure that the green recovery takes a human rights approach: the right of everyone in Scotland to a healthy environment reminds us to keep people at the heart of policy.

An effective framework in our view therefore must deliver policies and proposals that are quantifiable and reportable and that meet [these 5 tests](#):

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.

Green recovery policies, taken together as a package, must ensure these additional four tests are met, while 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.

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

In April, LINK ran a survey of our members to establish impact on them and their ability to deliver their charitable objectives. The results of this survey are not public, although LINK would be able to share a confidential report with the Committee. The biggest concern was, and remains, the financial challenge in the next 6 - 12 months, if current crashes in funding, membership subscriptions, revenue and charitable giving are not quickly reversed. These mean that all member organisations are expecting to have to utilise their financial reserves within the next 12 months. 33% of member respondents have less than 4 months of reserves. The percentage of members unable to operate past 6 months on current reserves rises to 46% of respondents. This will have a significant and lasting impact on the ability of Scotland to deliver on our environmental and well being ambitions, where in Scotland the environmental NGOs are a significant deliverer or agent of delivery for Scottish Government.

Specifically, this impact is crucial for the scale for projects that contribute most effectively to a green recovery. The ability to initiate and support large scale conservation projects has been severely compromised by the Covid-19 pandemic. Larger eNGOS are eating into financial reserves, which will impact severely on their ability to lead, take risks and underwrite further large scale projects. Once these financial reserves start to deplete, as is predicted, the ability to take on new projects that carry financial risk will be minimised. This is happening at the same time as the rapidly closing window for Scotland to access EU LIFE funds, and the closure of relevant grant streams from NLHF, which have not yet reopened. SNH is signalling that they cannot support the level of funding required for these projects to contribute to green recovery across Scotland.

The pandemic has illustrated that today, people need nature more than ever before. This is also the time when nature needs us more than ever. There is increasing concern in the eNGO sector, and beyond, that while the climate emergency and nature crisis have not gone away, the drive towards tackling them has dissipated as a result of the pandemic. This is understandable. It is equally imperative, however, that action towards these global issues must be maintained and renewed in order to deliver locally the 'Green Recovery' we all wish. LINK member bodies have a suite of projects that, if delivered, could contribute significantly to a green recovery across Scotland. LINK is working with members and stakeholders to identify how these projects could be rolled out. More details available in this [LINK report](#).

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

The key issue is a lack of capacity to underwrite the scale of projects Scotland needs to halt the loss of biodiversity, to tackle climate change and to bring skills and jobs into areas where young people and local communities can invest in their local landscape and the business opportunities that brings (above).

For example: government support for conservation delivery could be used by the sector in green recovery projects to match big funders like NLHF and in addition, enable larger eNGOs to lead projects that take advantage of the last gasp of EU LIFE funding.

In the past, the sector has managed sometimes to negotiate match funding on a case by case basis but this is even harder now. This means that the probability of the sector being able to provide the delivery mechanisms and leverage in funds we have traditionally secured is going to diminish significantly, and perhaps for some years, which will impact on Scotland's ability to meet climate and biodiversity targets. Examples of some of the projects in development and currently at risk but which if supported would contribute to a green recovery across Scotland plus meet biodiversity and climate targets, provide employment and training opportunities, are [here](#).

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?

Our members, when asked in the April survey, had a number of areas where specific financial support would help Scotland build a green recovery. These were:

1. Financial underwriting of landscape scale projects, without which current projects ready to implement, cannot happen (detail available from LINK)

2. Match funding to unlock other sources from funding, including for example, EU LIFE programme (while it remains open), NLHF landscape scale funding, philanthropic sources and charitable trust and foundations, plus the new approaches to private investment outlined in the £1 Billion Challenge (details [here](#)).
3. Political support for landscape scale projects: the Peatland Action Fund has been extremely successful in highlighting the importance of peatlands to both climate and biodiversity and has kickstarted important peatland restoration projects. Addressing the timing issues within this fund, and extending the approach to other key habitats in Scotland including woodland restoration, jointly with Forestry and Land Scotland.

However, this is not just about funding. Scotland is home to some unique habitats that are in need of targeted restoration so they can sequester carbon and halt the loss of biodiversity. In turn, healthy ecosystems support businesses across Scotland. These landscapes require different approaches to their restoration, not all of which have funding as a key barrier:

Uplands: the key driver of decline in the uplands are the numbers of deer. Implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Government's independent Deer Working Group report would enable woodland restoration and expansion, while sequestering carbon and reducing biodiversity loss. An effective deer management system would also deliver more rural jobs and a stronger venison industry (LINK, [Managing deer for climate, communities, conservation.](#))

Farmed landscapes: ensuring the rural payment scheme in future supports land management that restores soils, habitat connectivity and habitat quality for nature are key. This success needs to be happening by 2030, which means agreement on future payments needs rapid agreement, for which any report from the Government's Food and Farming Futures Policy Group will be vital. (LINK report [here](#), currently being updated).

Coasts and seas: Scotland's coastal and marine habitats are vital for carbon sequestration, halting the loss of biodiversity and loss of livelihoods based on marine biodiversity, including fishing. Implementing the MPA legislation would help protect the remaining strongholds and tackling effective fisheries legislation would address ongoing and future problems with habitat and species management at sea (LINK briefing [Recovering Scotland's seas](#) October 2019).

Woodlands: expansion of woodland cover is rightly seen as a key action in Scotland for meeting out the climate targets. Targets for woodland expansion must combine quality and quantity targets to ensure carbon storage, support the recovery of wildlife and bring benefits to people, including employment and business opportunities. Woodland expansion and restoration through effective deer management, rhododendron ponticum control and active management of existing woodland should be a key part of the Scottish forestry grant schemes going forward (LINK [Tree and Woodland expansion principles for Scotland](#) (June 2020)).

Peatlands: continuation of the Peatland Action Fund has demonstrable impacts and should be continued. The approach must be widened out to cover other habitats.

General response

Scottish Environment LINK members have ideas for a green recovery that sustains livelihoods and protects nature. We have identified 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. Detail on these 11 points are [here](#).

1. New policies must satisfy [five key tests](#)
2. Launch a large-scale investment programme to rebuild the economy and meet climate and nature targets
3. Invest in a [Nature Network for Scotland](#)
4. Invest in [Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change](#)
5. Prepare a new Economic Strategy which delivers a just, circular and decarbonised economy
6. Require companies receiving public funds to contribute to a just transition
7. Build a Circular Economy ([LINK response to Circular economy proposals](#) December 2019)
8. Increase funding for green space and active travel routes
9. Maintain and enforce environmental standards ([LINK briefing for ECCLR](#) January 2020)
10. Create sustainable and fair food systems (relevant blog [here](#))
11. Reform agricultural support

Further information:

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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This response is supported by the following LINK member organisations:

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Scottish Wildlife Trust
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