October 2020

Scottish Environment LINK

Summary of key points from Scottish Environment LINK's Green Recovery Group on the **Sustainable Renewable Advisory Group – Paper 3 – Agriculture, Land Use and Natural-Based Solutions Deep Dive**

1. Background to the LULUCF sector

Nature restoration is fundamental to retaining and building ecosystem services, many of which are currently degraded or degrading and on which focus must be trained in order to retain them into the future. Such services include, but are not restricted to flood management, carbon sequestration and pollinator populations. However, acknowledgement of the need for nature restoration is not constant throughout this document so we have added it in where needed.

The Scottish Government Economic Strategy specifically identifies that "*Protecting and enhancing this stock of natural capital, which includes our air, land, water, soil and biodiversity and geological resources is fundamental to a healthy and resilient economy. It also supports sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and renewables*."[1] As such we must invest in this capital to reap long term benefit especially for these sectors specifically identified, including resilience to climate change and sustainable rural economies.

Likewise, the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (AGER) advised that *"There is a need now to prioritise nature-based solutions such as peatland restoration and afforestation which support multiple objectives including climate mitigation, flood protection and biodiversity enhancement while at the same time boosting the rural, tourism and nature-based economies*".[2]

We note that **marine** is not covered in this paper, beyond the ambitions for a Blue Economy Action Plan. We have therefore made the assumption that marine issues are covered in a different deep dive paper. However, it is important to highlight that Nature-based Solutions encompass the restoration and expansion of coastal and marine habitats and it is critical that those activities are adequately considered by this group.

2. Key challenges post Covid-19

We would like to see an additional key challenge added that addresses the need to balance action to reduce carbon emissions with action to increase biodiversity. A focus on efforts to increase carbon sequestration and emissions reduction, for example through extending commercial forestry plantations, without assessing the cumulative impact on biodiversity or habitat quality and extent, would lead to **unintended consequences** for Scotland's ecosystems. There is a risk that ecosystems become less resilient to ongoing change, building up problems for the future, if biodiversity is not fully considered alongside efforts to increase carbon sequestration.

3. Potential opportunities for a green recovery

[1] https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2015/03/scotlands-economic-strategy/documents/00472389-pdf/00472389-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00472389.pdf

[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/towards-robust-resilient-wellbeing-economy-scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/

All of Scotland's habitats provide ecosystem services. Woodland, peatland and agriculture are covered in this paper. However, there are other key habitat types, besides the marine and coastal habitats mentioned above, that fall out with these descriptions and that, without action, will continue to degrade and cease to offer key ecosystem services. These include **nature rich grasslands and uplands.** These habitats currently have no funding directly associated with their maintenance or restoration and are instead subject to ongoing degradation as a result of agricultural conversion practice, current deer management and muirburn practices, resulting in grassland conversion, overgrazing and burning. All lead to reduction in biodiversity and increases in soil erosion. Action to restore these key habitats and the ecosystem services they provide should be added.

4. Need for an integrated food policy

Food sits at the heart of the climate-nature-health nexus and is key to sustainable renewal. An integrated food policy must promote agroecology and nutrition equity, and we encourage the Ministerial Group charged with developing the Statement of Policy on Food to take a 'whole system' view of food, given its impact on climate, nature and health both in Scotland and in the places we depend on for our food. This should also include a focus on organic food.

Local food – which gained such prominence during lockdown – brings particular benefits for community cohesion, access to nature, 20-minute neighbourhoods, social return on investment, and low carbon diets. LINK welcomes the announcement in Programme for Government of a national strategy for local food and calls for this to bring together climate, nature and health.

Market gardens, glasshouse production and vertical farming all have a part to play in revitalising local food economies, both in urban areas and in rural and remote rural contexts. This will involve paying attention to supply chains as well as improving access to land and investing in horticultural skills.

With regards to offshoring of agricultural emissions, LINK members agree that we need to tackle production and consumption together. We would like to see more from the Scottish Government about how they aim to do this, for example through sustainable diet guidelines or a National Food Strategy. However, production and consumption are not in sync in Scotland or the rest of the UK. For example, Scottish lamb consumption per capita is very low (2.1kg/person/yr) and only around one third of that is home grown. The remaining two-thirds is imported, mostly from Wales, England or New Zealand.

We need more joined up food policy to tackle the climate and environmental impacts of the whole food system, from production to consumption.

LINK has already put forward proposals for job creation in the local food economy as well as in the wider environmental sector. LINK has contributed to the Farming 1.5 report on farming in a net zero Scotland.

5. Job creation, skills and a green recovery

There is scope for new job creation in the **nature sector in Scotland,** contributing to efforts to build a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing the nature crisis. Many nature-based solutions to climate change would also contribute towards a shift to a wellbeing economy, by helping to address inequalities across Scotland, and helping achieve Scotland's National Performance Framework Outcomes and the Sustainable Development Goals. LINK's briefing, *A Green Recovery for*

Scotland: People, Land and Sea, outlines a range of nature recovery projects that, with investment and support for skills training, could lead the way on this. For example, delivering a Scottish Nature Network would deliver improvements in biodiversity, help to meet climate targets, provide a range of ecosystem service but also improve access to nature across Scotland, an issue that disproportionally affects disadvantaged individuals and communities.

However, we do not feel that the paper adequately reflects the opportunities nor the need to increase the contribution of the nature sector towards Scotland's economic recovery from Covid-19, in order to deliver both jobs but also in order to accelerate action on addressing the climate and ecological emergency.

6. Circular economy

Europe's 'Farm to Fork' policy is closely linked with the EU's Circular Economy Strategy, and we would want to see more of a 'circular economy' focus in this paper. In particular, the proposals on surplus food redistribution are an inadequate response to the massive issue of food waste. Fareshare and similar organisations redistribute a small percentage of the backend waste from retailers which in turn is a small percentage of supply chain food waste, and despite their ambitions will never be able to make a serious dent on on-farm waste. There are much more powerful measures for making a significant reduction of supply chain food waste and these are needed soon and at scale to meet our Sustainable Development Goal commitment of a 50% cut by 2030.

Soil is our most important non-renewable resource and the regeneration of soils must be at the heart of any sustainable food policy. LINK has previously put forward proposals to safeguard soils both in the National Planning Framework 4 and in our response to the Circular Economy Bill consultation.

We welcome the nitrogen balance sheet and encourage Scottish Government to take a similar approach to carbon and phosphorus.

7. Woodlands and Forestry

If the current native woodland target of 3,000 to 5,000ha per year is not significantly increased there will be a massive discrepancy in the type and diversity of woodland covering Scotland. The Just Transition Commission's advice on green recovery calls for **increased diversity in tree planting** because at scale and over the long term, native tree species are shown to be better at carbon sequestration. The independent Deer Working Group recommendations must also be implemented to address Scotland's deer issue and to have a sustainable deer management system.

The Biodiversity Strategy established a target of 3,000 - 5,000ha per annum of native woodland planting at a time when the overall planting target was 10,000ha per annum. However, this native target has not been revised in line with the incremental increases in the overall target – **this should be addressed with a target for the proportion of new planting that is native.**

The UK Forestry Standard sets minimum requirements for woodland management rather than standards for nature recovery. There is a need to strengthen the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

8. Additional LINK feedback on discussion questions

1. In some cases it will not be possible to deliver on all environmental and economic priorities/targets when it comes to the way in which we use and manage our land. What approach should be taken to decide which national priority/target is addressed?

LINK feedback: A long term approach to land management is required. The impact of land management decisions is delivered over centuries: it is crucial therefore that short term gains do not negate future long-term visions. This is where the **Land Use Strategy** should be updated so it can signpost effective action towards long term aims of net zero, fully functioning ecosystem services and thriving resilient communities.

2. The UK CCC have suggested that red meat and dairy consumption should reduce by 20% in the UK. That assumes a reduction in domestic production – however, this could simply result in no dietary change and offshoring of emissions. How can the emissions from livestock farming in Scotland be reduced without the risk of offshoring? And how do we ensure a Just Transition for agriculture which supports tens of thousands of jobs in rural communities?

   LINK feedback: Support for Scotland's farming system must be based on **delivery of public goods** including ecosystem services like flooding, carbon sequestration, thriving pollinator populations and soil restoration. Public funding should support such services, which are generally not supported by the market. LINK's paper on the future of rural support outlines how this should work. Paying for providing public goods provides new types of jobs in the rural economy.

3. The CCC have stated that the policies to net zero in land use involve hundreds of decisions by different actors: farmers, government, banks, land agents, industry and the public, which will need to act together to deliver significant emissions reduction in land. This includes significant behavioural changes. How can Government drive this change to secure progress towards net zero, along with the ultimate net zero target, while meeting a Just Transition and nature targets?.

   LINK feedback: The Government needs to clearly demonstrate **leadership at the national level** with a clear statement of vision and intent in the Climate Change Plan Update, along with policies that deliver progress towards that vision. Today's focus on emissions targets is the result of the clear vision and leadership shown by the Scottish Government on climate change. The same approach is now needed to tackle the nature crisis before it is too late. The Environment Strategy makes a good start with a clear vision: as yet it is unsupported by mechanisms to deliver on that vision. Scottish Government will be the focus of attention in 2021 when at the Biodiversity COP15 Scotland will be presenting the Edinburgh Declaration on biodiversity, and when the eyes of the world will be on Scotland during COP21 in Glasgow. It is vital that this vision is ambitious and forward looking so that it delivers for future generations and gains the support of today's young people.

   Having high level strategies in place to guide this will be key: the Land Use Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy will be crucial in laying out the next steps towards the objectives of the Environment Strategy, including meeting the net-zero target.

9. Conclusions:

We support the conclusions drawn in this discussion paper. We would underline that there are elements of Scotland's land sector that are crucial but are not covered in this paper, including for example, grasslands and upland management. This is where the Land Use Strategy should be able to identify priorities for action to inform how RLUPs deliver national priorities though regional and local priorities and actions.

Further reading:

Green Recovery briefing 1: land, sea and people (2020): https://www.scotlink.org/publication/green-recovery-1-people-land-and-sea/

Renewing Scotland's Rural Areas: revisited (2020): https://www.scotlink.org/publication/renewing-scotlands-rural-areas-revisited/

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