



Inquiry into Public Administration – Effective Scottish Government decision-making

Introduction to Scottish Environment LINK

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interest, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. LINK provides a forum for these organizations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary sector, and acting as a strong voice for the environment. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that the environmental community participates in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK works mainly through groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the issues and developing advocacy to promote sustainable development, respecting environmental limits. This response was written by LINK's Sustainable Economy Group.

What are the key principles and best practice necessary to support effective government decision-making?

One of the criticisms levelled at the Scottish Government, also acknowledged by the Government, is that laudable environmental and social ambitions are not reflected in change on the ground; see LINK's report [Rhetoric to Reality](#). Scotland needs effective decision making that carries those ambitions through to the delivery level.

Based on the science behind [planetary boundaries](#), [Scotland's Environment Strategy](#) and in particular [Scotland's climate change targets](#) and [upcoming biodiversity targets](#); an environmental lens needs to be applied to all decision making processes. That lens needs to extend to environmental impacts beyond Scotland which are often the result of our footprints – the pollution and nature degradation from the extraction and processing of materials that go into many of the products we use and consume. We would like to draw the Committee's attention to a simple overarching framework to guide all decision making.

Scottish Environment LINK developed '[The 5 Tests](#)' in 2020 to guide the Covid recovery packages; which can be adapted to all decision making. In essence:

- 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
 - and must contribute directly to one of the following:
- Reduction in pollution
- Reaching net-zero by 2045
- Improving adaptation to climate change



- Securing sustainable consumption of natural resources, reducing Scotland's footprints
- Improving biodiversity and ecosystem services.

By applying these tests to all decisions, the whole of Government will be working towards our climate and nature targets.

An additional tool is the [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) which is a current requirement of public bodies when preparing plans (there are some exemptions). More rigorous use of SEAs would also better align decision making with the environmental imperatives we face.

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