



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Strategy 2024 – 2030



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment

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The state we are in

We are all operating in a world of rapid change and this change is as evident in Scotland as everywhere else. The [State of Nature Scotland](#) report (2023) finds one in nine species at threat from extinction. Centuries of habitat loss, over-exploitation, intensification of farming, development, invasive species and persecution of wildlife means Scotland ranks 28th from bottom out of more than 240 countries/territories in terms of biodiversity. 2 million hectares of our peatland, 25% of Scotland's land surface, are in poor condition and emitting 6.6 million tonnes annually of CO₂. Soil loss is estimated at 920,000 tonnes a year and the cost of soil erosion to businesses is £50m annually. The situation is also reflected in our marine environment: the [2023 seabird census](#) reflects 70% of species in decline. [Scotland's Marine Assessment \(2020\)](#) highlights bottom-contacting fishing as the most widespread pressure on seabed ecosystems, and Marine Scotland Science (as was) modelling concluded that less than 1% of historic trawled area is currently protected inshore within the current MPA network.

Internationally, the [World Economic Forum](#) identifies biodiversity loss as one of the fastest deteriorating global risks. Over the last 10 years risks relating to nature, climate and natural resources have become increasingly dominant in their annual assessments, now occupying five out of the top ten global economic risks.

The Scottish Government is consistently clear that the nature and climate crises are intimately linked. Our increasingly chaotic climate is a key driver of biodiversity loss. Equally the poor state of our land is contributing to climate change through significant greenhouse gas emissions, and intensification of our land management over recent decades has been a key driver of biodiversity loss. Ocean temperatures are driving unprecedented species change and increased storminess is impacting on coastal and sublittoral habitats.

Globally, about 70% of the climate change emissions arise from burning fossil fuels and the other 30% is from land use and land use change. In Scotland, the split is closer to 50/50. The impacts of this are now unavoidable. Whilst the future is uncertain, scientific models predict that the climate will be more chaotic for the rest of the century regardless of what Scotland or the rest of world does to reduce emissions. Global temperature has increased by 1°C over the last 100 years. It is proving more problematic than expected, even in temperate latitudes such as Scotland where the occurrence of floods, fires, drought, pests, pathogens and disease are increasing in frequency and severity. It is certain that global temperature will continue to rise by a further 0.3°C and very probably by at least 1°C by the 2050s. The next degree of warming is coming three times faster than the last one.

This increasingly chaotic climate and continuing biodiversity loss mean that the assumptions that have underpinned productive uses of our land and seas over the last 100 years are now false because they are based on a largely predictable and stable climate and fully functioning ecosystems. The way we manage our land and our seas needs to change; continuing to manage land and sea for mostly single crops and benefits, will be increasingly risky.

Managing our land and sea for resilience to change means increasing diversity in species, habitats, crops, spatial management for example. Investing in our land and sea to build diversity and resilience is going to be key from now on. This in turn, gives us a chance that by 2030, Scotland's land and sea will be not only more nature rich but also more reliably productive and better able to cope with increased extreme events such as flooding, drought, and increased and new pests.

This strategic plan identifies what LINK will do in response to today's climate and nature emergencies and in support of the transformative changes required in Scotland and beyond. LINK cannot do this alone however: it is vital that we work with other stakeholders and partners in wider coalitions to maximise the expertise, and resources we can all bring to tackling these global, world changing issues.

This plan maps the role we will play as a network of environmental NGOs working across Scotland to build a sustainable Scotland, with nature benefitting people, communities and the planet.

Where do we want to be in 2030?

Having enabled and invested in transformation at local and national levels, Scotland's environment is protected, restored and enhanced and everyone in Scotland has access to a clean and healthy environment that is able to provide for people and species.

LINK's role:

LINK facilitates change: we build collaboration, support and enable partnership working to add value for the environment through leadership and engagement. As the voice for Scotland's environment, the LINK network exists to support our members in making change happen on the ground for a healthier environment, healthier societies and a healthier planet. We do this by:

Amplify	We amplify member messages on Scotland's environment
Build	We build and support multi stakeholder partnerships
Campaign	We work together to achieve positive change
Challenge	We use evidence to challenge decisions affecting the environment
Coordinate	We coordinate national solutions to global issues
Create	We create public support and political space
Enable	We bring members together to create capacity
Inspire	We inspire people with transformational stories about a better future
Provide	We provide evidence based, trusted knowledge
Speak	We speak on behalf of nature and the environment

LINK will achieve much more by working in partnership with other stakeholders, as well as members, both within and outwith the environment sector. We are extending our hands out to other networks and stakeholders who share similar and parallel objectives with us.

Our priorities are defined by our [Working Groups](#), who engage across 15 priority policy areas and who are supported by the staff team, board of trustees and 2 overarching groups on funding and communications. Priorities are defined on an annual basis by the groups and are assessed in terms of delivery success and need twice annually. All priorities contribute to LINK's vision and objectives, which are shaped themselves by the challenges and context within which we operate.

From 2024, our focus is on embedding effective delivery of environmental policy in Scotland to effect real and sustained change. This focus requires restoring and protecting nature as well as tackling climate emissions. It requires significantly more resources than before and it requires cross policy collaboration across government in Scotland and the UK. The nature of the emergencies is such that climate and biodiversity must be integral to every government department given the clear, significant impacts that nature loss and climate change are already having across Scottish society as a whole. Embedding effective action now and implementing impactful policy now not only provides better quality of life for today's communities, but it also provides the foundations of a better future for younger generations. LINK will continue to work hard to build capacity for sustained action not just within our memberships and supporters, but also in partners and stakeholders by enabling and supporting many more people, from right across society to have their voice for nature heard. Doing all we can now, provides hope and inspiration for a better future.

LINK's 2050 vision and mission

Scotland's environment is Connected | Restored | Resilient |

Our society has nature at its heart, benefiting people, communities and the planet.

LINK's mission

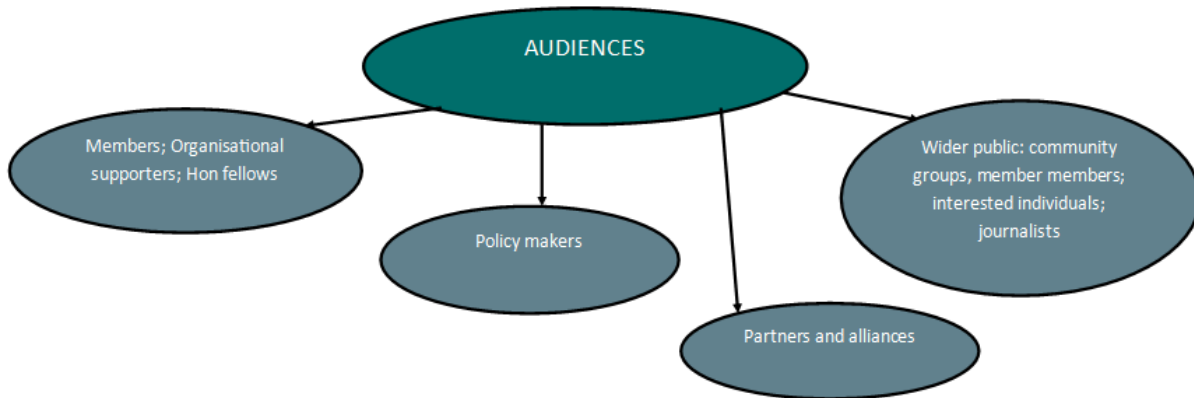
LINK supports our members to work together on agreed priorities, in order to effect environmental policy change in Scotland. We build partnerships that create irresistible momentum towards change.

LINK's place in today's world

LINK exists to secure environmental sustainability within and beyond Scotland, where all aspects of the country's environment are valued to enhance the quality of life for all. LINK provides a trusted conduit between environmental NGOs and policy makers in Scotland. We provide insight based on scientific evidence, expert opinion and strategic assessment.

LINK's audiences and our value proposition

LINK has four main audiences:



From LINK Communications mapping 2021

Working with these audiences helps LINK and our members address a key driver of change, which is the imperative to build on the moment. We are all under pressure to act now: globally, the Inter-governmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have both given the world until 2030 to reverse nature loss ([IPBES 2019](#)) and climate emissions ([IPCC 2023](#)). The pressures on our environment, of climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and overconsumption have all increased and are contributing to ongoing loss and degradation both in Scotland and across the world. The need to act now builds on:

- a. UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration
- b. Climate and Biodiversity CoP calls and commitments
- c. A Just Transition for everyone
- d. Wellbeing and having access to nature
- e. Scotland's role as a leader

We will continue to develop and add new tools to enable us to work more effectively with our partners and audiences and to build on the imperative to engender change and action now. In 2024, these include:

Current communication tools
LINK website and campaign / initiative pages, including Save Scottish Seas, Circular Scotland, Nature Champions, Nature for All
External campaign websites, where appropriate, for example Farm for Scotland's Future
LINK Thinks blog
LINK social media: twitter, facebook, Instagram, you-tube, LinkedIn
Graphics, videos and template posts for members and sometimes other supporter organisations to use via websites and social media
Publications: reports, briefings
Events: receptions and public workshops
E-actions/petitions
PR/media relations
LINK individual supporter email list
Member events, networking and e-bulletin
Organisational supporters
Quarterly LINK Board workshops
Tools under development / consideration

Events: crystal ball webinars & Gritty issue roundtables
LINK Thinks podcast

LINK's members, organisational supporters and Honorary Fellows

LINK provides:

- Access to expertise, networks and other multi stakeholder partnerships
- A shared endeavour providing solidarity and a place to find common ground
- A critical mass to influence standards and practices
- Amplification of members' voices

[LINK members](#) work together as LINK not just to share resources and expertise to bring about change but also to reach out to wider society in Scotland in time limited campaigns, including for example [Save Scottish Seas](#) and [Farm for Scotland's Future](#). The success of these campaigns, building on our first in 2018, [Fight for Scotland's Nature](#), is such that members are keen to do more to build public support to create political space for action. With staff expertise on campaigns, LINK can support member requests for campaigns on key issues on an ongoing basis. [Organisational supporters](#) are encouraged to support and use LINK campaigns and public resources. [Honorary Fellows](#) support LINK as spokespeople on areas of their expertise and provide input into forward planning and horizon scanning activities, where their experience and wisdom is invaluable.

Policy and decision makers

LINK provides:

- The home of credible and trusted knowledge and opinion on Scotland's environment
- The collective representative for >0.5 million people in Scotland
- A unified voice finding and providing consensus on complicated issues
- A citizen-led voice for the environment

LINK's working groups are where members work together on key policy areas, identifying priorities and sharing expertise and resources to produce agreed outputs. These working groups are where policy messaging is agreed and form the basis of all meetings and interaction with policy makers at all levels. Resources are shared between groups. LINK's Discretionary Project funding is available to all groups to support agreed, time limited pieces of work where a small amount of funding is required, often at short notice.

Alliances and other coalitions with shared aims

LINK brings skills and experience in creating collaborative working, gained as a member led network over the last 35 years, and builds strong working relationships with wider alliances and coalitions. The clear

benefits of collaborative working for environmental policy have been borne out by successes over the years, which is why LINK is committed to putting more resources and energy into wider alliances and coalitions during this Strategic Plan to 2030.

Scotland's society and communities

LINK provides:

- A citizen-led voice for the environment
- A way for society to let policy makers hear their opinions

LINK uses campaigns and initiatives to bring members together, with shared resources, to build a public voice for the environment. We do this when a joint public voice helps build momentum and visibility for key environmental issues. The success of LINK's campaigns and the ongoing success of the [Nature Champions](#) initiative in Holyrood, are recent examples of successful ways of working with both society outside Parliament and MSPs within.

LINK's Objectives

A sustainable Scotland

Where Scotland's nature, land and seascapes are healthy and resilient, supporting thriving communities and flourishing people.

A strong voice

For the environment, nature, land and seascapes so they support a prosperous future.

An effective network

Communicating effectively, working together and achieving more.

Transformations required:

This plan is the result of a 18-month process involving member and stakeholder input, staff and Board workshops. Through this work, we have identified 6 key transformations that are required to meet today's nature and climate challenges. These are:

1. A move from environmental policy that sounds good to environmental policy that **does** good.
2. Environmental leadership from the eNGO sector and government commitment to lead.
3. Land and sea use that is nature and climate friendly.
4. A circular economy with net zero emissions and no nature loss.

5. All major infrastructure projects, as part of the National Planning Framework, delivering for biodiversity, climate and society, through environmental audits that together map cumulative impacts
6. A justice centred approach adopted to ensure a just transition to a climate and nature friendly world.

An executive summary of this plan can be found here: [ADD NEW LINK](#)

Who is LINK?

Membership and staff

LINK has a membership of more than 40 [member organisations](#), who represent collectively more than 0.5 million people. Members work together through LINK towards our strategic objectives in working Groups, each led by a convenor and vice convenor drawn from member bodies. [Staff](#) provide linkages between groups, maintain consistency and flag opportunities. Staff also maintain reporting and administrative functions on behalf of the network.

Board and Honorary Fellows

LINK is supported by a [Board of Trustees](#) drawn from the membership, and Honorary Fellows, who advise LINK and LINK Groups on their own areas of work and expertise. The Honorary Fellow role enables LINK to retain contact with exceptional leaders who have contributed to LINK's development in the past and are in a position to support LINK and to promote LINK's vision. They are asked to offer their expertise and input to LINK's work, to help develop the network's external relationships and facilitate LINK's wider connections across civic society and the policy arena.

How does LINK work?

LINK provides a forum for its member bodies, enabling informed debate and cooperation within the voluntary environmental sector. Central to this are information-sharing, discussion and concerted action.

LINK assists communication between its member bodies, governments and other parts of civic society. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that environmental sustainability is recognised and delivered across public policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK is a dynamic network, helping members to achieve collective goals. We do this by sharing knowledge and information; encouraging discussion on key concerns; building consensus and taking action together.

Working through LINK allows member bodies to build collectively on their individual strengths and act smartly together. Mechanisms for collaboration include:

- Horizon scanning to inform changing environmental priorities.
- Ensuring the network is well informed about current political, economic and social contexts.
- Prioritising collective work and resources to have greater impact or influence.
- Developing actions around priorities through groups of members working together.
- Providing delegates to relevant national and international stakeholder forums who can represent the case for environmental sustainability.
- Holding events to raise awareness, encourage debate, make the case for change and influence direction on key issues.
- Designing and delivering campaigns and communications that act as a voice for the environment in Scotland

LINK's risk appetite

LINK is a member led network and our appetite for risk is set by our members. After 35 years, while LINK has had many successes, there are many challenges ahead: nature is still not in a good state and is still not part of everyday life for many people.

Today, the need for organisations to work together and with government and Parliamentarians to act effectively on the knowledge we have and the will society is showing is even more urgent than ever before. Together, we must inspire action and create political will to live within our environmental boundaries to build a prosperous and resilient society.

The biggest risk therefore is that LINK does not achieve its objective of a sustainable Scotland. This is the biggest risk not just for the organisation but for the planet. LINK's appetite to risk therefore has of necessity increased with the increasing pressures on the environment which are still not addressed.

Our strategy places the environment at the heart of policy making. It builds on over 35 years of bringing conservationists, access specialists and legal experts together. Building effective policy in this way conserves and restores nature, promotes and enables people to access nature and builds a successful society, based on a circular and truly sustainable economy. LINK's commitment is to pool our resources and to work together to achieve significant change in policy and on the ground by prioritising what we do, working together, focusing on our long term objectives, bringing people with us and enabling others to act.

Making an impact for a Sustainable Scotland

If LINK is to reach its key strategic objective of a sustainable Scotland, we need to use our two other strategic objectives around being a strong voice and an efficient and effective network. We have identified key activities within both of these that, if maximised, will lead towards a sustainable Scotland.

Objectives	
A strong voice for Scotland’s environment	An efficient and effective network
A resilient environment with thriving nature A voice strengthened through joint messages The environment is at the centre of policy making Increased campaign impact through LINK and LINK members Stronger and wider coalitions	More common ground within the network Common ground resourced through aligned priorities and more efficient resource use Greater focus on key issues Stronger and sustainable network achieved through membership and supporters Active, funded partnership projects
Campaigns and projects on key agreed issues Contributing to strong coalitions in Scotland, UK, EU.	Clear & measurable targets set at group level Impacts measured through evaluation plans Different member perspectives and approaches coordinated to produce diverse and holistic messaging Events, reports and outputs are used to create and maximise space for collaboration Reports to funders, board & audiences reflect impact and positive outcomes Reporting templates and policy procedures produce efficient, coordinated and effective outputs KPIs are grouped & relevant to each group Prioritisation is used to focus action where most needed and most effective

LINK’s programmes of work:

Our 3 programmes of work have been identified by members as key areas in which by working together, substantial and effective change is possible. LINK’s 15 working groups all contribute to these programmes of work:

Areas of work		
Our Seas	Our Land	Our Society
Groups		
Marine and Aquaculture	Deer Food and farming Freshwater Landscape	Governance Sustainable Economics Planning Carbon Credible

	Land reform, land use, hill tracks Wildlife Woodlands	Nature finance Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Environmental Funder Forum
Group Outcomes		
Sustainable fish stocks Ecologically productive habitats Flourishing coastal communities Wild seascapes	Ecologically coherent landscapes Inspiring landscapes and nature Productive sustainable land use Healthy ecosystems	The Right to a healthy environment Effective environmental legislation A circular well being economy Environmentally aware planning Leading by example in carbon Ecologically literate nature finance Access to nature for all Sufficient environmental funding

Knowledge management: knowledge, data & information

LINK, as a network, is a huge and significant repository of expertise and knowledge on the environment, species, habitats, land and sea use, people and their access, use of and dependency on nature, and environmental governance and policy. The expertise within the network relates to on the ground implementation of conservation and recovery for example, restoration and community building and data gathering, as well as policy making, and implementation. This expertise and knowledge is freely shared amongst network members through LINK's Working Groups, all convened by an expert member. In addition, LINK has access to the expertise offered by LINK's Honorary Fellows, who contribute to the strategic direction of LINK and to Groups.

LINK retains very little data beyond the publications and information on LINK's website. All data we retain are managed in accordance with GDPR requirements. Publications and resources are available to all, except for member only information including internal updates and templates. Members have access to a member only section of the website, a monthly bulletin as well as weekly Parliamentary Monitoring bulletins.

Resource management: our resources

Human resources

Staff: LINK has a core team of 10, in 2024, 7.7 FTE. In addition, LINK has 5 project staff, in 2024, 3.7 FTE.

Project staff deliver time limited projects, in line with member priorities and funded as discrete projects.

Board: LINK has 10 trustees, drawn from the membership, and the option to co-opt a further 2 trustees.

There are 3 Honorary Positions: chair, vice chair and Treasurer. Trustees serve a term of 3 years and retire in rotation, serving a maximum of 3 terms. Co-opted trustees are brought in on advice of the board and with support of the membership. In 2024, there are 2 Board subgroups for funding and employment.

Fellows: LINK appoints Honorary fellows whose expertise adds capacity to LINK in meeting our objectives. Fellows are invited to contribute to LINK and to contribute as much as they wish. They fulfil specific tailored roles as required. Fellows are appointed by the membership on advice from the Board.

Members: members are key to LINK's work and work together in Groups. Member reps lead LINK groups as Convenors and vice Convenors. Each Group draws up a Forward Plan in Autumn for delivery over the following year. Progress is reported at a Networking meeting in Summer. Reporting against Group objectives enables LINK to track progress against the network's objectives and to report back to funders and supporters.

Financial resources

LINK receives core funding from charitable trusts including Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and William Grant Foundation, NatureScot and the Scottish Government. Time limited projects in 2024 are supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund, William Grant Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation and LINK members.

LINK maintains a Discretionary Project Fund (DPF), available to LINK Groups to support specific work, from which match funding can be gained or for discrete pieces of work for which funding is not available. These funds are subject to a competitive process within LINK and awards are agreed by LINK's Board. The amount in DPF varies with levels of core funding and as a result, the amount per year is not necessarily maintained.

The way forward:

LINK's theory of change maps our way forward. This has evolved from our 2020 Theory of Change and is newly designed to meet the challenges in 2024. Our theory of change maps the tools and activities that LINK uses to make the desired impacts and reach our strategic objectives and ultimately our vision. Figure 1 illustrates how we plan to reach our vision and Annex 1 reflects the logical approach we are adopting.

LINK has annual operational plans to deliver our strategic plan. Reviewed every 4 years, these operational plans match LINK's priority themes against our strategic objectives, identify priority core activities to achieve those objectives and identify developmental activities required to build on successes to date.

Both the strategic and operational plans provide the context for LINK's annual work programmes, developed by the network on an annual basis. Progress is reported every 6 months.

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Scottish Environment LINK

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Appendix 1: LINK's Theory of Change 2024

