

Scottish
Environment
LINK

Scottish Environment LINK

2026 Scottish Parliament Manifesto



Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 48 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

www.scotlink.org



Scotland's natural environment is globally significant.

Our country is a special place: home to iconic wildlife and internationally important habitats, like Scotland's rainforest and the vast peat bogs of the Flow Country. This natural heritage is precious and unique, with globally threatened plants and wildlife.

But nature in Scotland is in trouble.

Scotland has suffered from a high level of historic nature loss, and we face even greater threats today with 1 in 9 species at risk of extinction.

Climate change poses unprecedented threats to our natural environment. But restoring nature can help us in the fight against spiralling emissions and will help us adapt to warming that is already happening.

Nature can recover – but we need to act now.

We have a choice over our future. We can let the decline of nature continue – or we can leave behind a healthy planet for future generations.

Nature is incredibly resilient. If we act now, we can create a Scotland abundant with nature, with thriving native woodlands and species-rich grasslands, healthy seas and freshwater habitats, and flourishing wildlife populations.

The next Scottish Parliament must have a focus on nature and ensure we deliver progress towards our legal environmental targets – with political commitment, action at scale, and sufficient funding all key.



“The more you can get out into nature the more you enjoy it. The more you see, the more you value it and realise it’s something very precious to protect.”

Clare, member of Dunbar rowing club

People in Scotland want action to help nature

Three quarters

of people in Scotland say they worry about the natural environment.

8 out of 10

people in Scotland have noticed the impact of climate change, nature loss, or pollution in their local area.

7 out of 10

people living in rural Scotland believe the Scottish Government should do more to make farming and fishing environmentally sustainable.

(Source: Diffley Partnership, 2024)

Scottish Environment LINK is a network of organisations with a collective membership of around **500,000 people**.

**“Feeding the birds helps feed our souls.
You give to the land, and it gives back to you.”**

Natalie, volunteer at Dawson Park Community Garden, Dundee

“I think often, and particularly when we think about the climate crisis, it’s often framed as: the young people will solve it, the young people will take action on it. But it’s those in power now within the Scottish Government that have the ability to change things.”

Megan, volunteer at Community of Arran Seabed Trust

**Resilient ecosystems
will help create a
resilient society**



Resilient and healthy ecosystems.

Our natural environment depends on the complex set of interactions between plant, fungi and animal species living together in balance. We must work to recover nature at landscape scale and deliver **connectivity** between areas of high biodiversity through the creation of effective **nature networks**.

Restoring our iconic habitats.

Healthy habitats on land and at sea are crucial for supporting wildlife populations, as well as a range of other benefits, from flood prevention to preventing climate change by storing carbon. We need ambitious action to restore our habitats, such as **Scotland's Rainforest** and **Caledonian Pinewoods**, **peatlands**, **species-rich grasslands**, and **seagrass meadows**.

Protecting our native species.

Many of Scotland's most loved species – and other lesser known but vital parts of our ecosystems – face decline and even extinction. We must act to **tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss**, including unsustainable use of our lands and seas, pollution, and invasive non-native species. We must also act to deal with specific threats, such as the impact of avian flu on our seabird populations and tree disease.

Our first line of defence against climate change.

Effectively tackling the climate crisis depends on restoring nature. Our woodlands, peatlands, and our seas play a vital role in sequestering carbon. And restoring nature is vital to adapting to the warming already happening, too. Resilient ecosystems will help create a resilient society: lowering flood risk, protecting food production, and even lowering street temperatures by increasing urban tree cover.

Nature for people.

The natural environment is essential for our collective and individual health and wellbeing. Everybody in Scotland should be able to experience and interact with nature in our everyday lives. **Nature recovery within towns and cities** offers significant benefits, and green and blue infrastructure should be central to planning policy in both town and country. We must **protect and enhance our access rights** to foster a greater sense of stewardship and connection with nature. The principles of a Just Transition should underpin government policy.

Our manifesto for Scotland's environment.

Protect and restore Scotland's habitats and species

Following the passage of the Natural Environment Act, implement an ambitious set of targets supported by a programme of nature restoration capable of reversing the decline of our environment. Reach the international target of 30x30 and protect 30% of land, freshwater, and sea for nature by the end of this decade. Utilise the power of government to restore biodiversity through the work of public agencies, agriculture and forestry funding, the use of public land, and the planning system.

Increase investment in nature restoration

Significantly increase the overall level of public investment in nature, including through the continuation of the Nature Restoration Fund. All public budgets should be scrutinised to enhance impacts on nature restoration and decarbonisation, whilst ensuring that existing funding is used more effectively by ending subsidies for harmful activities. Facilitate responsible private investment and use tax raising powers innovatively and fairly to invest in nature. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and its delivery plans should be fully costed, with funding gaps identified and addressed.

New ambition for our native woodlands

Ring-fence at least 50% of forestry grants to support native woodland restoration and expansion through measures like sustainable herbivore management to support the return of nature-rich woodlands across the nation. Create at least 9,000 hectares of new native woodland annually until 2045.

Protect ancient woodlands to allow them to be at the heart of nature's recovery in the landscape, contributing to the target of achieving 30x30 on land. Reduce deer densities nationwide to levels consistent with natural regeneration and colonisation. Expand deer management incentives and support the development of venison supply chains.

A national mission to restore Scotland's peatlands

Take advice from the Climate Change Committee on an appropriate target for peatland restoration and commit to significantly increasing the pace of delivery. Establish a programme of action to remove and prevent further invasion of non-native conifers onto peatlands. Prevent commercial afforestation on peat soils more than 30cm in depth. End commercial extraction and trade in peat for horticulture.

Restore and clean up our rivers, lochs, freshwater bodies and coastal seas

Significantly improve the monitoring of sewage overflows into the aquatic environment. Restore free-flowing rivers and use functioning floodplains to reduce the impact of flooding. Take a source to sea approach to water pollution by preventing debris, litter and other pollutants of concern entering the marine environment from our rivers and coastal overflows. Improve monitoring of novel chemical pollutants.

Protect Scotland's seas with community-focused marine planning

Deliver for the environment, for coastal communities, and for sustainable marine industries by transitioning to a new ecosystem-based spatial management regime with mechanisms for local governance. Review Scotland's fishing capacity to be fully informed by ecosystem health as well as fish stocks. Ensure the fishing fleet is fully documented and able to address wider environmental impact through Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras.

Help farmers and crofters deliver for nature

Increase the level of support provided to agri-environment schemes as the first step in increasing the proportion of agricultural funding which directly supports nature- and climate-friendly farming, ensuring agriculture remains resilient in the face of climate change impacts. Create a fairer system by increasing support for smaller farmers and crofters and reducing payments made with few conditions to the largest landowners.

Transition to a system where three quarters of public funding directly supports environmental outcomes. Use the power of public procurement to support local and sustainable producers.

A Nature Network for Scotland

Establish a national nature network to deliver ecological connectivity across the landscape, helping identify priorities for areas and opportunities for the creation of links, corridors and stepping stones between our best sites for nature. Support local authorities to deliver towards a national network through appropriate resourcing and guidance.

Nature Positive Development

Ensure that development on land and at sea leaves nature in a better state and supports nature recovery. Improve detail on how developers should deliver biodiversity enhancement. Provide the Planning systems with sufficient resourcing and expertise to facilitate delivery. Legislation and policy needs to continue to protect our most special places for people and nature, including species, and ensure proposals are properly scrutinised.

Empower Regional Land Use Partnerships to drive change

Deliver Regional Land Use Partnerships across Scotland as a vehicle to link national targets with local delivery. Provide sufficient resources for the partnerships to drive landscape-scale change and collaboration. Empower the partnerships to inform decisions on public funding by identifying opportunities and priorities at a local and regional level.

Tackle invasive non-native species

Commit to an ambitious programme of action to tackle invasive non-native species (INNS) including a programme of island restoration and biosecurity. Establish an INNS inspectorate for Scotland. Give Ministers the power to regulate the release of non-native gamebirds where environmental damage, such as the risk of spreading avian influenza, is occurring or likely.

Move towards a Circular Economy

Lay the foundations for fairer and more sustainable resource use by creating a comprehensive and ambitious strategy and science based statutory targets for a circular economy, as required in the Circular Economy Act. Use powers under the Act to ban the destruction of unsold consumer goods. Introduce charges on single-use items beyond the planned charge on single-use cups.

Guarantee environmental justice

Establish a Scottish Environment Court, joining the environmental courts and tribunals which exist in over 2,500 jurisdictions across nearly 70 countries. Improve access to environmental justice by meeting our international obligations under the UN Aarhus Convention. Pass a Human Rights Act incorporating an enforceable human right to a healthy environment. Incorporating the right in Scots law has the potential to transform policy choices to tackle both environmental and health inequalities, making the connections between a healthy environment and healthy lives in Scotland. Ensure that people, workers and communities are at the heart of environmental action, and that government action across portfolios delivers a Just Transition.



Photo: Ross MacDonald/SNS Group



Photo: Ramblers Scotland

Photo: Scottish Environment LINK



Photo: Jamie McDermaid

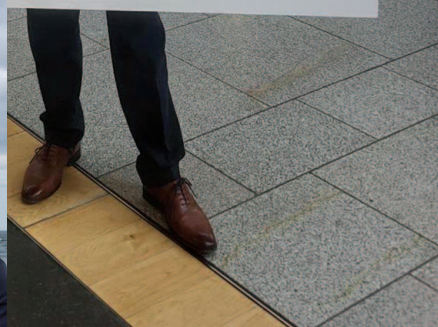


Photo: Colin Hattersley



Photo: Scottish Environment LINK



Protecting and restoring Scotland's habitats and species

By the 2026 election, we expect the Scottish Parliament to have legislated to introduce statutory nature recovery targets. An ambitious, science-based approach must be taken to setting these targets under secondary legislation. These targets will put nature recovery on the same legislative basis as climate, with the next and future Scottish Governments obligated to act and to report their progress.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's first delivery plan, which runs to 2030, sets out the current Scottish Government's plans to meet its ambitions: to halt biodiversity loss by 2030; to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030; and to restore and regenerate biodiversity by 2045.

Nature targets

The next Scottish Government must commit to **protecting and restoring Scotland's habitats and species** as it works to deliver on the statutory targets of the Natural Environment Act. This must include national programmes of habitat restoration and species recovery, and must ensure ecological connectivity across the landscape. The targets set under the Act must be ambitious and set a clear path to nature recovery and the creation of functioning ecosystems.

Scotland must also reach the international target of **30x30** – protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by the end of this decade.

The actions contained in the first Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan must be **fully costed and adequately resourced**. A 'whole of government' approach should be taken to delivering these outcomes – using the government's considerable power to restore biodiversity through its public agencies, agriculture and forestry funding, use of public land, and the planning system.

Nature recovery, however, cannot be achieved by government alone. The Scottish Government should recognise the vital importance of other stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, in delivering its ambitions, and take a **partnership approach** to delivery.

Funding nature restoration

Significantly more money is needed to flow into nature protection and restoration now, to meet the monumental challenge of reversing the nature and climate crises by 2045.

Funding nature restoration

There is a widely acknowledged funding gap between committed investment in nature restoration and the expected cost. The next Scottish Government must commit to making **real-terms increases in spending on nature**, accepting the need to do so in order to tackle climate emissions and adapt to existing warming through, for example, natural flood prevention. This real-terms increase should include, but not be limited to, the continuation of the **Nature Restoration Fund**.

The next Scottish Government should give due consideration to the advantages and disadvantages of different mechanisms to finance nature (both public and private) and the various roles that they might have. This should inform a vision and strategy on how the nature finance gap is going to be met in a comprehensive manner.

Significant progress can be made without additional spending by ensuring existing subsidies for agriculture and forestry deliver more for nature. The scale of the funding gap could also be reduced by effective regulation, for example by reducing deer densities.

Tax powers can be used to encourage behaviour change and to raise revenue for investment in nature and climate. The Scottish Government should:

- Introduce an **infrastructure levy** on developers and ensure that the revenue generated can fund green and blue infrastructure
- Use **aviation taxes**, such as the introduction of a **private jet tax** and **frequent flyer levy**, to invest in nature with a high carbon benefit
- Support local authorities to utilise the **visitor levy** to invest in nature recovery, green and blue infrastructure, and outdoor access services and infrastructure
- Explore the potential for other forms of fairly-levied and progressive tax, including forms of land taxation, as tools to tackle the climate and nature crises





Woodlands and deer management

Scotland's native woodlands are an incredible part of our natural heritage. They are essential habitats for a range of species and offer enormous potential for tackling climate change. Scotland's Rainforest and Caledonian Pinewoods are globally rare. However, our woodland cover is much lower than other European countries.

Restoring and expanding our native woodlands has long been recognised as a policy imperative to respond to the twin nature and climate crises, and to enrich people's lives by providing more opportunity to experience nature.

Despite these clear public priorities, native woods only cover 4% of Scotland's land. Policies to date have been passive in nature and have failed to drive change at the pace or scale required.

Overgrazing by deer is a major obstacle to restoring our native woodlands. There are as many as one million wild deer estimated to live in Scotland – as much as double the 1990 population – and, with no natural predators, improved deer management is essential to meet our nature and climate goals.

Native woodlands

Ring-fence at least 50% of forestry grants to support native woodland restoration and expansion through measures like sustainable herbivore management to support the return of nature-rich woodlands across the nation. At least **9,000ha of new native woodland** should be created annually until 2045 with natural colonisation as the default woodland establishment approach in buffer zones around Ancient Woodlands.

Improve the impact of productive forestry by ring-fencing a further 25% of forestry grants to **initiate a sustained transition to more resilient, nature-friendly forestry** design and management practices. Taking steps to increase the diversity of trees grown and the proportion of commercial forestry kept under continuous cover would make a significant contribution to the richness and resilience of biodiversity supported in Scotland's economically productive forests. These practices are also likely to offer more opportunities for small, community scale forest-based businesses to become viable, thus increasing total employment, particularly in rural areas.

Ancient woodlands and their 50m buffer zone should be protected to allow them to be at the heart of nature's recovery in the landscape and of the 30x30 target of protecting 30% of Scotland's land and sea by the end of this decade.

Native woodlands

The next government must deliver commitments to document our ancient woodlands in a **National Register**. The next step is to develop ways of protecting these valuable parts of our heritage so that they can act as wellsprings for nature's recovery in the years to 2030 and then beyond. This will mean both **statutory protection** from damage and enhanced grant support for action that will restore, expand and connect ancient woodlands across our landscapes.

Deer management

Following changes to the legal framework for deer management through the Natural Environment Act, the Scottish Government must ensure an effective and robust approach to reducing deer densities to sustainable levels. **NatureScot's full range of statutory powers should be deployed** where necessary to support habitat enhancement and the recovery of nature. Priority sites should include National Parks, Scotland's Rainforest, and protected areas where deer damage is identified as a cause of unfavourable condition.

The Scottish Government should ensure that a coordinated approach is taken to deer management across all areas of Scotland, both in the uplands and lowlands, so deer populations are maintained at sustainable levels and damage to public interests is prevented.

Following analysis of the Cairngorms National Park, Central Scotland and South Loch Ness deer management incentive pilots, **incentive schemes should be expanded nationally**.

Financial support should be provided to **facilitate community participation in deer management** and for community initiatives such as venison larders to **provide supply to local markets**. Marketing of venison as a source of healthy meat should be properly supported by all relevant Scottish Government Agencies.

Data collection led by NatureScot as the competent deer authority should be improved to ensure an **effective national system of deer management data** to inform cull targets and other related management actions.

The Common Ground Forum's approach to collaboration and consensus building between stakeholders should set the background for a Just Transition and full recommendation of the Deer Working Group's recommendations.



Peatlands

Two thirds of the UK's peatlands are in Scotland. The Flow Country, the vast peatland habitat in Caithness and Sutherland, was awarded World Heritage Status in 2024.

Peatlands have the capacity to be an incredible carbon sink – but, in poor condition, they actually emit carbon. The majority of peatlands in Scotland are highly degraded and our peatlands are a significant contributor to our overall emissions. Scotland is significantly off track meeting the Climate Change Committee's milestone for peatland restoration.

Peatland restoration

Recognising the vital role of the habitat for both nature and climate, the next government should declare a **national mission to restore Scotland's peatlands**.

The Scottish Government should **take advice from the Climate Change Committee on an appropriate target** for peatland restoration and commit to significantly increasing the pace of action. Public investment should be increased, and there is a strong case – due to the importance of Scotland's peatlands to UK-wide climate targets – for additional investment from the UK Government. Government also has a role in encouraging and facilitating private investment in peatland restoration.

As part of wider action to tackle invasive non-native species, a programme of action to **remove and prevent further invasion of non-native conifers onto peatlands** should be established.

Commercial afforestation on peat soils more than 30cm in depth should be prevented, while allowing native woodland creation, particularly through natural colonisation.



Freshwater habitats and water quality

Scotland's freshwater habitats – our rivers, lochs, and ponds – are iconic and are central to our biodiversity. But climate change and pollution pose challenges not just to our natural freshwater environment but to the water supplies we all depend on.

Water resources

Monitoring of sewage overflows into the aquatic environment should be dramatically improved. Improvements to monitoring in 2024 increased coverage from just 7% of overflows to 32% – in comparison to monitoring of 100% of overflows in Wales and England. Reliance on overflows can be reduced through investment in the sewerage network, with frequently spilling overflows, and those affecting protected areas, prioritised.

Scotland should take a **source to sea approach to tackling water pollution**. This should include installing screens on sewer overflows to prevent debris from entering the water environment; investing in Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, rain gardens, and green roofs; and banning all avoidable single-use plastics in sanitary items. **SEPA should improve monitoring for chemical pollution with monitoring programmes for novel pollutants** such as pharmaceuticals, veterinary medicines, agricultural chemicals, and persistent pollutants such as PFAS.

Rivers

Free-flowing rivers and functioning floodplains can lessen the impact of flooding, as well as contributing to biodiversity restoration through habitat creation. The Scottish Government should support projects that aim to restore freshwater habitats, including native riparian woodland creation for climate adaptation, and to remove unnecessary or defunct structures from rivers.



Invasive non-native Species

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are one of the five principal direct drivers of global biodiversity loss. In Scotland, INNS are the single biggest pressure affecting the condition of our protected areas and threaten iconic habitats and species.

Climate change increases the risk of non-native species establishing and posing a risk to the natural environment.

INNS

The Scottish Government should commit to an **ambitious programme of action to tackle invasive non-native species**, including:

- The completion to full eradication of current island INNS initiatives, including the Orkney Native Wildlife Project (stoats) and the Western Isles Mink Project
- A programme of island restoration and biosecurity, prioritised for seabirds following the catastrophic impact of avian influenza
- Government-led action to prevent incursion of grey squirrels into the Highlands, with strategic, targeted, landscape scale grey squirrel control embedded in the operations of public bodies
- A programme of action to remove and prevent further invasion of non-native conifers onto peatlands and native woodlands, with the polluter pays principle applied to commercial forestry
- A dedicated strategy for *Rhododendron ponticum* management
- Improved monitoring of freshwater habitats for INNS

A fully operational INNS inspectorate for Scotland should be established.

Scottish Ministers should be given adequate power to **regulate the release of non-native gamebirds in specific circumstances** where environmental damage is occurring or likely, and/or in order to mitigate potential risks around the spread of diseases to wildlife, such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).



Food and Farming

Agriculture covers three quarters of Scotland's land. While our farmers and crofters do a vital job in producing food, the intensification of agriculture over decades has been a major cause of wildlife decline. Farming is also one of the main sources of climate emissions in Scotland and is one of the most exposed and vulnerable sectors to the impacts of climate change. Despite this, too little of public support for agriculture goes towards helping farmers and crofters deliver for nature and climate and build resilience to climate change impacts – with most of the half billion annual budget delivered through ineffective area-based payments that disproportionately benefit the largest landowners.

Greener agricultural funding

The Scottish Government should **increase the proportion of agricultural funding which directly supports nature- and climate-friendly farming**. The Scottish Government should also reduce the proportion paid through basic direct payments which deliver minimal positive environmental outcomes.

As immediate priorities, funding should be increased for the successor to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, organic farming, and advice and training. There should also be new funds established to facilitate collaboration for environmental and supply chain purposes, and additional funding to support a wider range of agroforestry options to improve uptake among farmers and crofters. The funding system should support the maintenance and expansion of existing areas of semi-natural habitats within the farmed landscape, such as species-rich grasslands. Farm payments should support access to the countryside as a public good including through funding the creation of paths.

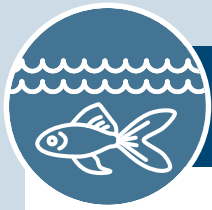
We should move towards a system where farmers and crofters are paid to deliver in the public interest. **Three quarters of farm subsidies should be paid to support environmental outcomes**. Funding should be required to meet targets to increase the proportion of agricultural land achieving official organic certification, to reduce harm from **pesticides**, and to reduce nitrogen loss and waste.

To deliver this necessary change, the Scottish Government should upgrade the outdated and inefficient IT system used to process agricultural payments.

For as long as direct payments continue, the Scottish Government should make use of its powers to cap, taper and frontload payments to make funding more redistributive – **providing a higher level of support for smaller farmers and crofters**.

Public procurement

Local authorities and other public bodies provide food through schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, staff canteens, and prisons. The Scottish Government should **utilise the collective power of this public procurement to support local and organic producers**, modelled on a healthy and environmentally friendly diet.



Marine

With an area six times larger than the land, Scotland's seas are one of our greatest assets whose shores comprise an astonishing 10% of Europe's coastline. Maritime heritage is key to Scotland's cultural identity and has played an important role in shaping our communities, particularly those on the over 90 inhabited islands. But despite their significance, climate change, unsustainable fishing, industrial development and pollution have caused widespread degradation across marine ecosystems.

Marine planning

We need to **protect Scotland's seas with community-focused marine planning**. Our fishing industry and coastal communities need a healthy marine environment. But balancing economic use and conservation requires careful, evidence-led planning, informed by the knowledge and needs of local communities to deliver a Just Transition. The next Scottish Government should prioritise an inclusive approach to the roll out of Regional Marine Planning, ensuring that marine businesses can operate sustainably within their local area, enhancing marine nature and supporting thriving coastal communities.

The government must deliver an effective **marine protected areas network based on ecosystem health**, including identifying important areas of blue carbon for protection and enhancement inside and outside the MPA network, sustained by an updated and ecosystem-based National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2).

The ambitious programme of offshore wind development in Scottish seas must deliver positive outcomes for both climate and nature. Offshore wind should only be delivered in locations and in ways that it can deliver nature-positive outcomes. The establishment of a Marine Recovery Fund must be fully resourced and supported by a robust governance framework, to guarantee that compensation effectively safeguards marine ecosystems and coastal communities. ScotWind leasing round monies should be ring fenced for nature. The Scottish Government must ensure consistency between NMP2 and NPF4 on the need for compensation to be complemented by a requirement to deliver biodiversity enhancement in the marine environment.

Ministers should also commission an **independent review of marine governance** to assess the effectiveness of decision-making structures, identify areas for improvement, and recommend reforms. The next Scottish Government must embed transparency in all marine decision-making processes, support societal inclusion, ensure that biodiversity and sustainability are given appropriate weighting in line with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and rigorously apply the precautionary principle to safeguard Scotland's marine environment for future generations.

Fisheries

The next Scottish Government should **transition to a new spatial management regime**, including an inshore low impact fishing zone comprising of No-Take Zones, static-gear only zones, low impact mobile-gear only zones (but only where this can be demonstrated) and areas for nature conservation (e.g. marine protected areas). This new approach should include **mechanisms for local governance**.

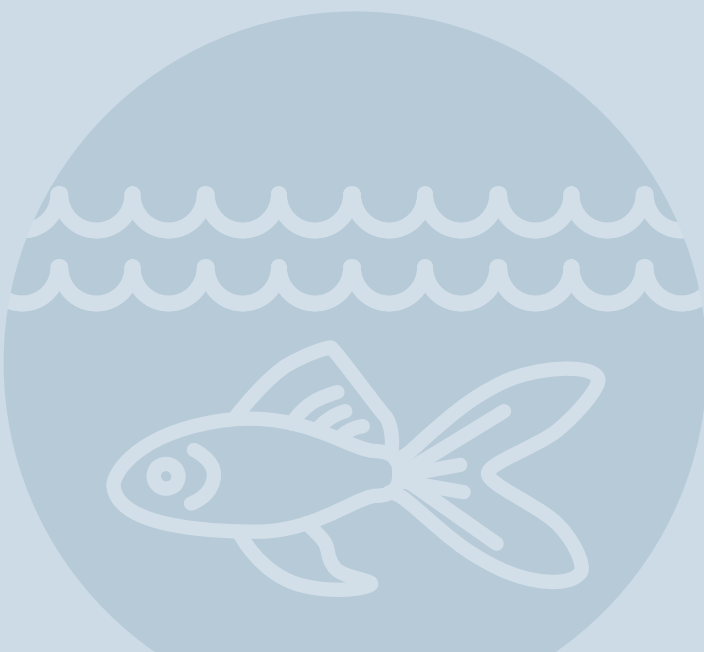
The Scottish Government should undertake **a review of Scotland's fishing capacity**, informed by habitat and ecosystem health as well as fish stocks, as the basis of a just transition to nature friendly, climate smart fishing. Fisheries Management Plans must be developed for **all commercially targeted stocks and species** in Scottish seas, which deliver on the objectives within the Fisheries Act 2020.

The fishing fleet should be required to be fully documented through **remote electronic monitoring** with cameras to improve data collection, support progress to eliminate the bycatch of non-target species, and help to end illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture should be effectively integrated into regional marine planning with an ecosystem-based approach, with poorly sited farms relocated and unsuitable areas used for low-trophic aquaculture or returned to nature.

All feed ingredients used in Scottish aquaculture should be certified as responsible to MarinTrust standards, working towards Marine Stewardship Council certification of sustainability. **All salmon farms should be Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certified** and a seaweed aquaculture Code of Good Practice developed and implemented.





Planning

The planning system has an important role to play in tackling nature loss and climate change, including by contributing to the development of nature networks. An effective and resourced planning system can meet the needs of the economy, of communities, and of the natural environment. Development should prioritise good placemaking and compatibility with environmental targets, including through the requirement for biodiversity enhancement.

Planning system delivers for nature and climate

The planning system should be **sufficiently resourced** to deliver its objectives, including on nature and climate. The Scottish Government should ensure that there is **sufficient ecological expertise within planning authorities** to deliver its objectives, including the facilitation of nature networks and the creation and protection of green-blue infrastructure.

Currently, there is a lack of detail on how developers should demonstrate compliance with the requirements to deliver biodiversity enhancement. The Scottish Government should ensure the design of any biodiversity metric for Scotland is effectively resourced while also improving national guidance on Biodiversity Enhancement.

The current system allows developers to lodge appeals when applications are refused, but communities have no right to appeal decisions that negatively impact on the quality of their local environment. This imbalance should be ended by implementing an **equal right of appeal in planning** for communities.

The long-standing issue of vehicle tracks built without oversight or scrutiny, often for activities such as grouse moor access, should be ended through the **removal of permitted development rights for hilltracks**. Hilltracks should be subject to full planning permission.

The National Planning Framework (NPF4) contains clear policies on the protection of woodland and this should be strengthened in the next parliament by the delivery of a comprehensive **National Register of Ancient Woodland** so inappropriate development proposals which would damage or destroy native woodland would not be permitted.

Urban trees and woodlands should be recognised as critical infrastructure delivering multiple benefits for Scotland's communities and environment, with this reflected through quality placemaking and planning processes.

The Scottish Government should promote a Tree Equity approach, ensuring that **every community has access to trees and woodlands**, including urban communities with poor access to nature. A Tree Equity approach should be embedded in Local Authority and regional spatial planning and in urban woodland and forestry strategies.

The Scottish Government should adopt national planning guidelines for reducing light pollution, supported by **light pollution** reduction targets to protect the nocturnal environment while meeting societal needs.



Land use and Nature Networks

The 2009 Climate Change Act requires the Scottish Government to produce a Land Use Strategy, which sets a high-level direction for sustainable land use.

Delivering our ambitions on climate and nature will mean translating national targets into local action. To restore nature at scale, these local projects need to add up to something bigger – with the work of farmers and foresters, of conservation projects, and of protected areas delivering ecological connectivity across the landscape. The two mechanisms that can help deliver this are Nature Networks and Regional Land Use Partnerships.

Regional Land Use Partnerships

Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) are a promising model that can play a role in empowering stakeholders and local communities in decisions over land use. The Scottish Government should commit to **delivering RLUPs across Scotland** and to providing **resources proportionate to their potentially transformative value** in delivering for nature, climate, and local communities.

A key function of RLUPs is the development of Regional Land Use Frameworks (RLUFs). By showing how a region of Scotland will contribute towards national objectives, these frameworks can usefully inform decision making by identifying priority areas and opportunities for investment.

Regional planning should inform decisions around public spending, including agricultural and forestry subsidy. RLUFs should also play a role in supporting high integrity private investment.

Once regional frameworks are in place across Scotland, the Scottish Land Commission's recommendation that these frameworks should be given a statutory basis should be considered.

Nature networks

Nature networks are corridors and stepping stones of ecological connectivity that link together areas of high biodiversity value. Nature networks are vital to restoring nature at scale. The Scottish Government should commit to the development of a **national nature network** and to supporting local authorities to work in collaboration at a regional scale. Nature networks should be integrated into the development of regional land use frameworks, with planning authorities both informing and being informed by wider land use priorities.

Land Reform

Future land reform legislation must do more to influence land use in the public interest, including for environmental outcomes, and should apply a **public interest test** at the point of transfer of significant land holdings. The right of responsible access is a significant achievement of earlier land reform legislation. The opportunity should now be taken to ensure that the **access rights are being effectively upheld and prioritised by both national and local public bodies**.



Sustainable Economy

The global climate and ecological emergencies are closely linked to the quantity of products that we use and consume, how they are made and the way in which they are disposed. We need to change our economy to extract less from the planet, re-use what we've already taken and reduce our waste – creating opportunities for local jobs. We need products that are made to last, are easy to repair and can be reused many times. Scotland's producers and retailers should be responsible for the whole life cycle impact of their products and we need governments to lead the way with a comprehensive and cross-cutting agenda on making our economy more circular and operating within planetary boundaries.

Circular economy

The Scottish Government must develop a comprehensive, ambitious and science-based **strategy and statutory targets for a circular economy** in Scotland, as required in the Circular Economy Act.

The Scottish Government should use its powers under the Circular Economy Act to **ban the destruction of unsold consumer goods**.

Further steps should also be taken to **introduce charges on single-use items** beyond the planned charge on single-use cups.

Provision of high quality **reuse and repair services** should be improved with an ambition that everyone in Scotland can access these.

The Scottish Government should use powers available under Section 82 of the Climate Change Act to **increase the use of recycled material** in goods produced in Scotland.

Nature-related green economy

As part of efforts to develop a green economy, the Scottish Government should support nature-related jobs and ensure that sufficient skills exist to deliver our ambitions for nature restoration. The Scottish Government should actively support the development of **new vocational routes into nature-related green jobs**, including, for example, apprenticeships, skills bootcamps and other skills-based qualifications.



Environmental governance

Communities and civil society must have the ability to enforce their substantive and procedural environmental rights. But the Scottish and UK Governments are in breach of their responsibilities under the UN Aarhus Convention, an international treaty which enshrines our procedural environmental rights. We must also have a new Scottish Human Rights Act that includes the human right to a healthy environment. 164 out of 193 UN Member States now recognise the right which the UN sees as a critical tool for holding public bodies and big polluters to account in order to protect and restore the natural world.

Access to justice

Environmental courts and tribunals exist in over 2,500 jurisdictions across nearly 70 countries worldwide, bringing together the expertise and legal powers needed to uphold environmental rights. A **Scottish Environment Court** should be introduced to improve access to justice and ensure that we can all hold polluters and public bodies to account. This could be achieved by expanding the remit of the Scottish Land Court into a Land and Environment Court.

The Scottish Government must improve access to environmental justice by meeting our international obligations under the UN Aarhus Convention.

After delay to the expected Bill, an early priority for the next parliament should be to pass a **Human Rights Act**, incorporating an enforceable **human right to a healthy environment to protect our substantive and procedural rights**.

Public bodies

Scotland's environmental agencies will play an important delivery role in reaching our climate and nature targets. Alongside NatureScot and SEPA, there are a number of public bodies who make a contribution to environmental outcomes, including Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, Crown Estate Scotland, and our National Parks.

These **public bodies should be adequately resourced** to perform their responsibilities and should be required to deliver on nature and climate as their priorities.



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