



## **Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill – Call for Views**

August 2025

### **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 organisations, 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 consultation response was written by LINK's Governance Group.

#### **1. Response**

**Do you think that more needs to be done to embed sustainable development and wellbeing as primary considerations into public policymaking? Please tell us why.**

Yes.

Sustainable development is a term used widely in legislation, including in legislation with direct relevance to the natural environment, such as legislation on National Parks, land reform, planning, and the marine environment. 'Wellbeing' as a concept does not occur widely in existing legislation, but has had increasing prominence in policy in recent years particularly in relation to the proposed 'wellbeing economy' approach.

The relentless pursuit of short-term economic growth has come at significant environmental cost. The unsustainable use of our natural resources has directly caused crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Similarly, prioritising economic growth above wider public interest considerations can cause negative outcomes for society as a whole. In this context, both sustainable development and the wellbeing economy are concepts which have considerable merit in ensuring that policy is designed with long-term sustainability in mind.

**What is your view on the policy objectives of the Bill, as set out in the Policy Memorandum?**

LINK members share the concerns set out in the Policy Memorandum about the impact of short-termism on achieving our environmental goals, and strongly support the policy objective of delivering policy coherence for sustainable development.

**Which of the following best expresses your view on section 1, which requires public bodies to have due regard for the need to promote wellbeing and sustainable development?**

Strongly support.



LINK is supportive in principle to the concept of the proposed public sector duties.

Consideration should however be given to both the strength and enforceability of these duties and their interaction with existing duties, not least those related to climate change, biodiversity, and good food. While public bodies are subject to a range of duties these are often expressed in a weak or unenforceable manner, and the range of duties on public bodies risk becoming cluttered or contradictory.

This Bill is an opportunity to repeal or amend outdated duties that can contribute to public bodies acting in a manner that undermines sustainable development and/or wellbeing - for example, the duty for our environmental agencies to deliver economic growth (caveated as “sustainable economic growth”).

**What is your view on the definition of “public body” (in section 17(2))?**

We support this definition.

**Is there a need for statutory definitions of wellbeing, and sustainable development?**

**Yes**

**What is your view on the definition of “sustainable development” (in section 2)?**

LINK would only be able to support the definitions proposed if significant amendments were made. These amendments would need to ensure that (a) the intrinsic value of the environment was included and (b) that social/economic activity must recognise local and global environmental limits. We note that many of the definitions referenced in Sarah Boyack's original consultation paper included these elements and would commend these as options for any amendments.

We note that the definition is influenced by the original concept of sustainable development found in the UN World Commission on Environment and Development report Our Common Future in 1987.

As proposed the two definitions are connected, as sustainable development is defined purely in relation to the wellbeing of current and future generations. As discussed in greater detail in the answer to the subsequent question, the definition of wellbeing is too narrow in relation to environmental outcomes, which in turn causes the definition of sustainable development to be inadequate.

This could be solved either by expanding either the definition of sustainable development to fully incorporate ecosystem health and environmental limits, or by amending the definition of wellbeing.

The Bill's effectiveness (and potential benefits) all revolve around this definition - as the operation of the duty and the work of the Commissioner will be wholly dependent on the definition and its interpretation. This issue is, therefore, the most important one to 'get right' and, at present, significant amendments as described above are necessary.

**What is your view on the definition of “wellbeing” (in section 3)?**



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The definition of wellbeing refers to the natural environment solely in relation to “access... for health, leisure and relaxation”. While these are certainly relevant considerations to a definition of wellbeing, they are far too narrow to fully incorporate the relationship between the natural environment and human wellbeing. This is particularly significant because, as noted above, the proposed definition of sustainable development is tied solely to this definition of wellbeing.

As it stands, the Bill does not consider overall ecosystem health or environmental limits, including, notably, a safe climate. Issues such as the impact of pollution on human wellbeing are absent, and though arguably implicit within the provision around human health, this seems to fall short of the intended policy outcomes of the legislation.

**Which of the following best expresses your view on section 4, which establishes a Future Generations Commissioner?**

Neither support nor oppose.

LINK members consider the introduction in Wales of a Future Generations Commissioner to be an innovative piece of policymaking, and welcome the intention to build in an independent, long-term view into policymaking which is all too often driven by short-term interests and electoral cycles. In earlier consultation LINK offered caveated support for the introduction of such a Commissioner in Scotland (originally proposed as a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Commissioner).

We do however note the findings of the SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee, which recommended that such bodies should only be established as a last resort. There is a risk that, without a clearly defined role and powers of enforcement, a new Commissioner could add clutter to a landscape where there are already a number of bodies responsible for similar outcomes.

For example, the Commissioner’s proposed powers of investigation would allow it to examine areas where Environmental Standards Scotland already hold investigatory powers but stronger powers of enforcement.

While there may still be a role for a new Commissioner, we would encourage MSPs to consider how best a Commissioner could add value to the public and deliver on the policy objectives of the Bill.

This response was compiled on behalf of LINK Governance Group and is supported by:

Keep Scotland Beautiful  
Marine Conservation Society

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