



## **Environmental Standards Scotland Strategy**

August 2025

### **Introduction to Scottish Environment LINK**

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 50 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**

##### **Our vision**

**By holding public authorities to account, we will ensure that Scotland's people and nature benefit from a high-quality, healthy environment through improved compliance with and better implementation of effective environmental law.**

**1.0. On a scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', how much do you agree or disagree that this vision, as presented in ESS' draft Strategy, is the right vision for the organisation to be working towards?**

- Strongly agree

#### **Principles**

##### **Our principles**

**We will:**

**be independent and trusted  
be evidence driven  
be open and transparent  
engage widely  
seek to resolve issues through agreement wherever possible  
prioritise our efforts and resources to maximise our impact**

**2.0. On a scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', how much do you agree or disagree that these principles, as presented in ESS' draft Strategy, are the right principles for the organisation to be working with?**



- Agree

### 2.1. Do you have any comments on ESS' principles, as laid out in the draft Strategy?

The principles identified are broadly appropriate, and LINK members strongly support the need for ESS to be independent, evidence driven, open and transparent, and to engage widely.

We do not believe it is necessarily appropriate for issues to be resolved through agreement "wherever possible". It is reasonable that some of the issues investigated by ESS will be appropriately resolved through this process. However, to state that - as a principle - ESS will work towards agreement "wherever possible" risks creating a culture in which reaching agreement with underperforming public bodies is prioritised over the most effective enforcement of environmental law. By its nature, resolution through agreement offers a lower level of public scrutiny than more formal use of ESS's powers.

We propose that this principle is amended to state that issues should be resolved through agreement "where this is appropriate and proportionate".

### Priorities

#### **Our priorities**

**while we will consider all concerns raised with us by members of the public, we will focus most of our proactive work around four priorities:**

**Climate change: Scotland's approach to mitigation and adaptation**

**Nature: Scotland's approach to reversing the decline in biodiversity**

**Resources: Scotland's approach to reducing resource use and waste and developing a circular economy**

**Water: Scotland's approach to improving the freshwater and marine environments**

### 3.0. On a scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', how much do you agree or disagree with ESS' approach to prioritisation, as set out in sections 3.1-3.5 of the draft Strategy?

- Agree

### 3.1. Do you have any comments about ESS' approach to prioritisation, as laid out in the draft Strategy?

Improving access to justice in environmental matters is not currently amongst ESS's priorities. Paragraphs 4.13-4.14 of ESS's 'Consultation information for draft Strategy 2026-2031' document indicates that ESS understands the importance of access to justice in environmental matters and compliance with the Aarhus Convention.



**Scottish Environment LINK** the voice for Scotland's environment

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Given the importance of access to justice in addressing the environmental problems listed in the four priority areas, we recommend that improving access to justice is added to ESS's strategy as a priority.

## Strategic Objectives

**Our strategic objectives:**

**Objective 1. Securing compliance and improving effectiveness**

**Objective 2. Analysing and investigating environmental concerns**

**Objective 3. Monitoring and scrutinising environmental performance**

**Objective 4. Engaging and communicating effectively**

**Objective 5. Being an efficient and effective organisation**

Section 4 of ESS' draft strategy presents five strategic objectives and describes the approach ESS proposes to take to deliver these objectives:

### Objective 1. Securing compliance and improving effectiveness (Paragraphs 4.1-4.3)

**4.0. On a scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', how much do you agree or disagree with ESS' approach to delivering this objective(1)?**

- Agree, subject to comment in answer to question 4.1.

### **4.1. Do you have any comments on this objective, or ESS' approach to delivering this objective(1)?**

This objective has to be considered in the light of the concern, expressed above, about the risks of creating a culture in which reaching agreement with underperforming public bodies is prioritised over the most effective enforcement of environmental law. Thus, it should be stated unequivocally that ESS will use the full range of its powers to secure, as effectively as possible, compliance.

**Q5.0 Do you have any comments about ESS' proposed approach to evaluating its impact and measuring its performance, as outlined in Section 5 of the draft Strategy?**

The KPIs should be published, as well as the annual reports on progress. KPIs should also be subject to consultation - as per the strategy - as they are intrinsic to the strategy's implementation.

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

Keep Scotland Beautiful



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Scottish Wildlife Trust

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEMM)

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