

Natural Environment Bill - Stage 3 Briefing

January 2026

Key points:

- Almost half of Scotland's species have declined since the 1970s, with 1 in 9 at risk of extinction; biodiversity health ranks in the lowest 15% globally.
- Healthy ecosystems store carbon, reduce flood risk, and provide clean air, water, food, tourism value, and mental and physical wellbeing.
- The Natural Environment Bill can embed legally binding nature recovery targets, strengthen governance, and ensure public bodies deliver measurable outcomes for forests, deer and National Parks.

Summary

The Natural Environment Bill will require the Scottish Government to introduce legally binding targets for nature. The Bill also includes reform to laws around deer management and National Parks. These measures are essential to stop biodiversity loss, restore habitats at scale and make sure the public can hold government accountable. Restoring nature is an essential part of tackling climate change and adapting to the impacts of a warming world. This Bill comes in the context of the global "30 by 30" target to protect at least 30 percent of land and sea by 2030.

Stage 3 of the Bill is also an opportunity to take action on wider environmental issues, including ensuring sustainable forestry and tackling invasive non-native species.

LINK's priorities:

1. *Effective, legally binding targets and accountability* - Public bodies should be required to act to halt declines, restore ecosystems and deliver measurable results. This includes targets on species, habitats, and protected sites, as well as clear action plans on invasive non-native species. Deadlines, reporting and Parliamentary oversight are needed to make sure these targets lead to real improvements on the ground.
2. *Strong governance for National Parks* - National Parks must have clear purposes, evidence-based decision making, and systems to deliver policy coherence and make sure public bodies work in line with Park Plans. Supporting these areas is also key to protecting biodiversity hotspots, boosting climate resilience, and maintaining the cultural and recreational benefits that nature provides.
3. *Sustainable land and wildlife management* - This includes clear, enforceable standards for forestry, ecologically effective deer management to allow woodland and upland restoration, and effective control of invasive non-native species to prevent damage to habitats and wildlife. Together, these measures ensure Scotland's land and wildlife are managed for nature recovery and for communities.

Supporting these priorities through Stage 3 amendments will make sure the Bill delivers real, lasting benefits for nature, climate and people across Scotland.

Priority Amendments MSPs Should Support/Oppose

Nature Recovery Targets

Amendment 22	Beatrice Wishart MSP	Support - The existing biodiversity duty is amended to require public bodies contribute to achieving statutory nature targets. Ensures policy coherence and makes public bodies accountable for delivery, not just target-setting.
Amendments 46 & 47	Mercedes Villalba MSP	Support - Separates the 'habitat' target topic to require separate targets for both habitat extent and habitat condition.
Amendment 65	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Introduces targets on the condition of designated natural features on protected sites, on land and at sea. Protected sites are our most important sites for biodiversity.
Amendment 67	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Requires that targets are set within 12 months of the Act receiving Royal Assent.

National Parks

Amendment 71	Tim Eagle MSP	Oppose - Adds <i>economic growth</i> to Park aims. The aims in the Bill already include sustainable economic development, making this amendment unnecessary and risks diluting the overall social and environment aims.
Amendment 73	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Requires Ministers to seek expert advice before proposing new National Parks. Improves transparency and evidence-based decision-making.
Amendment 32	Mark Ruskell MSP	Support - Provides flexibility over who can act as Reporter for National Park proposals. Allows the most appropriate expertise to be used.
Amendment 74	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Makes a technical change by inserting a new sub-clause to enable the definition of "cultural development" to be added through Amendment 75, improving clarity and legal drafting.
Amendment 75	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Defines <i>cultural development</i> to avoid ambiguity and protect focus on natural heritage.
Amendment 76	Ross Greer MSP	Support - Requires public hearings for planning appeals on major or national developments in National Parks. Improves democratic scrutiny for high-impact decisions.
Amendment 77	Sarah Boyack MSP	Support - Strengthens the duty on public bodies to actively implement National Park Plans. Helps align public sector action with agreed Park priorities.

Sustainable Forest Management

Amendment 40	Mercedes Villalba MSP	Support - Gives Ministers powers to make further provision in connection with sustainable forest management (including the implementation of the forestry strategy). This is an opportunity to turn UK Forestry Standard guidance for sustainable forest management into specific requirements, via regulations, and achieve improvements in forestry practice.
Amendment 41	Mairi Gougeon MSP	Support - Extends responsibility for unlawful felling.

Deer Management

High deer densities are degrading habitats, suppressing woodland regeneration and undermining nature restoration. Scotland's deer population is estimated at around one million. LINK supports new NatureScot powers (sections 6ZA & 6ZB) and full implementation of accepted Deer Working Group recommendations.

Amendment 50	Rhoda Grant MSP	Support – Gives the right to request and receive a response from NatureScot where poor deer management is causing harm, improving transparency and accountability.
Amendment 93	Mark Ruskell MSP	Support – Requires NatureScot to intervene where high deer impacts are damaging protected sites, ancient woodland, Atlantic rainforest, the Flow Country or peatlands, ensuring effective action to restore priority habitats.
Amendment 98	Mark Ruskell MSP	Support – Requires a National Deer Management Programme with clear population estimates, cull targets and funding plans, providing a strategic framework to reduce deer impacts and deliver nature recovery.
Amendment 20 and Amendments 20A, 20B, 20C, 20D, 20E	Jim Fairlie MSP Mark Ruskell MSP Tim Eagle MSP	Support – Introduces a National Deer Management and Venison Plan. We support amendment 20, as further amended by 20A-20E which strengthens clarity and accountability by requiring population estimates, area-based cull targets, funding plans and wider stakeholder involvement.
Amendment 59	Beatrice Wishart MSP	Support – Requires a publicly accessible national deer management dashboard, bringing together population estimates, cull data and control measures in one transparent system.
Amendment 78	Edward Mountain MSP	Oppose - Rolls back male deer season reforms, undermining welfare and restoration objectives.
Amendment 97, Amendment 133	Rachael Hamilton MSP	Support – Requires Ministers to assess barriers to venison processing and develop a venison action plan to strengthen supply chains, increase capacity, and expand



and Amendment 134		the availability and use of venison, including within the public sector.
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Invasive Non-Native Species

This amendment ensures Scotland has a clear, accountable plan to prevent, monitor, and manage invasive non-native species, which are a major threat to biodiversity, ecosystems, and native species.

Amendment 159	Beatrice Wishart MSP	Support - Requires an action plan on invasive non-native species, ensuring clear policies, monitoring, and control measures. Strengthens accountability through public consultation and Parliamentary oversight, protecting native habitats and biodiversity.
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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.

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