



Strengthening Delivery of the Scottish INNS Action Plan (2026–2032)

June 2026

Key points:

- This briefing sets out a number of targeted, deliverable actions to strengthen the implementation of the Scottish Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Action Plan 2026–2032.
- It is intended to inform ongoing analysis by Environmental Standards Scotland and next steps in terms of delivery from NatureScot and Scottish Government.
- The Action Plan provides a strong framework, but the challenge is not its intent; it is whether it can be translated into practical, funded and rapidly deployable action on the ground.

Overall Assessment

The [Scottish Invasive Non-Native Species \(INNS\) Action Plan 2026–2032](#) sets out a clear and well-structured approach that broadly aligns with the wider Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. However, there is widespread concern across LINK members that the development process has not fully captured stakeholder input, and that consultation has been rushed and insufficiently iterative.

There is also a timing disconnect, with the Plan published ahead of key outputs from ESS. This has contributed to uncertainty about how parallel policy processes will be aligned in practice, particularly around enforcement and the review of the Code of Practice under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act.

While the framework is broadly sound, it does not yet provide the delivery architecture required to achieve the intended outcomes. In particular, there is limited clarity on funding, accountability, sequencing or operational responsibility. A consistent message from stakeholders is that the Plan now requires an accompanying Delivery and Investment Plan to translate ambition into implementation.

An urgent need is a clearly defined strategic control project pipeline linked to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy delivery framework. There is currently limited clarity on how priority control projects will be identified, prioritised and sequenced at a national level, or how they will be progressed from concept through to delivery. Without this, there is a risk that effort remains fragmented and that projects are not sufficiently developed or coordinated to attract sustained

public or private investment. Establishing a more systematic, nationally coordinated pipeline would help ensure that interventions are targeted, investment-ready and aligned with long-term strategic priorities

Priority Asks

1. **Establish an INNS Rapid Response Fund**

This ask is supported by Scottish Crofting Federation and NFU Scotland

The fund should be piloted within 12 months, with the aim of full operation within 24 months . It should allow resources to be released within weeks of detecting a new high-risk invasive species when there is still a realistic chance to remove it quickly and cost-effectively.

Existing funding mechanisms are often too slow and project-based, meaning early eradication opportunities are routinely missed. This leads to higher long-term costs and a shift toward permanent control rather than prevention and eradication.

What is being asked of Scottish Government/NatureScot:

- Develop and pilot a rapid response mechanism for INNS within 12 months
 - Ensure that approved interventions can be initiated within 10 working days of a confirmed high-risk incursion
 - Enable access for delivery partners without complex application processes in urgent cases
 - Establish a clear triage and decision-making system to support rapid, evidence-based action

2. **Strengthen delivery accountability**

Within 12 months, Scottish Government and NatureScot should publish delivery responsibilities for the existing INNS Action Plan. There is currently insufficient transparency on who delivers what, how actions are sequenced and how progress is monitored. This creates a delivery gap even where policy intent is clear.

What is being asked of Scottish Government/NatureScot:

- Publish a formal action-by-action delivery responsibility matrix within 12 months
- Assign named lead organisations and delivery partners for each Action Plan commitment

- Set out annual reporting requirements, including measurable indicators for delivery progress
- Clarify the escalation route where delivery is not achieved (including ESS scrutiny where appropriate)

This is not a request for a new strategy, but for basic operational governance of an existing plan.

3. Strengthen prevention, enforcement and biosecurity capacity

Within 24 months, Scottish Government should publish data on enforcement activity under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, including use of Species Control Orders, and commit to a programme to increase operational use of existing powers. Evidence suggests existing tools are underused and inconsistently applied, while local authority capacity constraints limit practical enforcement on the ground.

What is being asked of Scottish Government/NatureScot:

- Publish annual data within 12 months on:
 - Number of Species Control Orders considered and issued
 - Use of enforcement powers under WANE Act INNS provisions
- Conduct and publish a delivery gap analysis within 18 months identifying barriers to use of enforcement tools
- Develop and implement a targeted capacity support programme for local authorities within 24 months, including rapid response guidance and access pathways to central support
- Clarify and strengthen escalation routes to NatureScot, including whether the Non-Native Species Inspectorate requires additional funding or expanded powers to support delivery

4. Update priority species lists and horizon scanning

Within 18 months, Scottish Government and NatureScot should update priority species lists to reflect the 2023 horizon scanning evidence base and commit to a fixed two-year review cycle.

Current lists are outdated and do not reflect emerging risks, weakening surveillance and early response.

What is being asked of Scottish Government/NatureScot:

- Publish updated Prevention and Management Priority Species lists within 18 months
- Clearly map alignment with 2023 horizon scanning outputs
- Commit to mandatory review every 2 years, with publication of changes and rationale
- Embed updated lists into operational surveillance systems

There is also a need to ensure INNS is properly embedded in wider policy and research systems, including the [Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture \(ENRA\) Research Strategy](#). INNS is currently under-represented and should be explicitly prioritised in future research commissioning. Consideration should also be given to strengthening INNS coordination through an expanded or dedicated Centre of Expertise function.

Conclusion

These asks are grounded in consistent evidence across the INNS Action Plan, the [Invasive Non-native Species in Scotland: A Plan for Effective Action](#) report and LINK member consultation responses. There is strong consensus that:

- Early intervention is significantly more cost-effective than long-term management
- Current funding and governance structures are not aligned with rapid response needs
- Enforcement and prevention mechanisms are underdeveloped
- Delivery is constrained by lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities and resourcing

There is also growing recognition, including through the INNS Finance Summit, that more flexible and better-targeted investment is needed to enable delivery at scale.

The Action Plan sets the right direction. The priority now is implementation. These asks are intentionally focused, deliverable within 1–5 years, and designed to make existing commitments operational in practice rather than adding further strategy.

This briefing is supported by:

Trees for Life
The Atlantic Salmon Trust
Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
Plantlife Scotland
Scottish Wild Beaver Group
John Muir Trust
RSPB Scotland
Nature Foundation
Woodland Trust Scotland
Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group
Cairngorms Campaign
CIEEM
Scottish Wild Land Group
Scottish Wildlife Trust

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