

SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT LINK PRESS RELEASE

WEDNESDAY 15TH JULY

GDP figures fail to tell the whole story

GDP figures released today for Scotland show us that the Scottish economy grew by 0.6% in the first quarter of 2015. Scottish Environment LINK believes that GDP takes no account of the affect economic activity has on people or the environment and whilst GDP has risen, the quality of our environment continues to suffer.

Lloyd Austin, Head of Conservation Policy for RSPB Scotland and a member of LINK's economics taskforce said *"Economic activity, measured solely by GDP, is a poor proxy for the type of activity that supports employment, income and an improving quality of life."*

"GDP growth can be positive because of accidents, poor health, environmental degradation – and does not take account of inequality or social justice. It is therefore a poor measure of the Country's 'success' if it fails to measure over exploitation of our environment, our contributions to climate change, reduction in biodiversity and reduced fish stocks."

The Scottish Government is currently hosting a roundtable on their National Performance Framework. This framework sets out a range of indicators against which the progress of the country can be gauged. Scottish Environment LINK supports the use of an improved range of indicators that can adequately reflect the wellbeing of society and the health of our environment. For example, better biodiversity indicators, and indicators for air quality, people's local environment, work quality and median household income.

Lloyd Austin added *"The Scottish Government should be commended for reviewing its National Performance Framework – but this review and the nation's approach to 'success measures' should move away from the over-simplistic and, at times, counter productive use of GDP growth."*

"We need wider and improved measures of economic well-being, that take account of the quality of economic activity, as well as social and environmental factors."

Key examples of the disconnect between GDP and our environmental performance:

- Scottish Government press release on May 14th celebrated the 'record high' volume and value of fish landings and the importance of fish to the Scottish economy. However, the Scotland Performs indicator shows us

that fishing rates are unsustainable with only 38% of our total catch consistent with scientific guidance (2014 data)

- Breeding seabird populations also suggest that the health of our marine ecosystems are under threat with numbers of 12 key species declining by 42% since 1986 (2013 figures). Terrestrial breeding birds, the Scottish Government's indicator for biodiversity, show a decrease of 10% between 2012 – 2013 (latest data), during which time the economy grew by 1.7%.
- And latest figures on our carbon footprint (which includes emissions associated with imported goods) shows that, despite our reductions in domestic emissions, our climate change impact is still increasing - Scotland's carbon footprint increased by 5% on the previous year (2011 – 2012)

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

Scotland's GDP figures were released today.
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Economy/GDP2015Q1>

Scottish Environment LINK is promoting a suite of indicators that can adequately reflect the wellbeing of society and the health of our environment as well as the state of our economy. Given the oft-quoted adage that 'what we measure affects what we do', it is argued that, through better indicators, public policy will be better guided. Link to Flourishing Scotland page and NPF paper
<http://www.scotlink.org/workareas/economics-forum/>

Scottish Government is currently hosting a roundtable on the SG National Performance Framework
<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms>

Wild bird population figures from
<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/biodiversity>
<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424905.pdf>
<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B536405.pdf>
<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B424907.pdf>

Marine environment figures from Scotland Performs
<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/marine>



[Fish Landing article http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Fish-landings-18d6.aspx](http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Fish-landings-18d6.aspx)

Carbon footprint figures from

<http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/carbon>