

## Background

The impact of climate change is increasingly evident. While climate change has often been perceived as a *future* problem, rising temperatures and extreme weather are now *current* issues. While climate mitigation is urgent and vital, even reaching our Net Zero targets will mean living on a warmer and stormier planet. The earth's natural carbon cycle has been broken and our only way to reestablish that is to commit to restoring nature at scale. An emergency focus on net zero is an urgent need, but so is beginning the longer road back to a carbon cycle coming back into a more natural balance for the years after 2045. This is why climate adaptation measures will become increasingly important and politically salient.

In 2024 the third Scottish National Adaptation Plan (SNAP3) was published, covering the period up until 2029. The Climate Change Committee said in 2023 that “overall progress on adapting to climate change in Scotland remains slow, particularly on delivery and implementation”.<sup>1</sup>

Climate change is a key driver of nature loss ([State of Nature report 2023](#)) and adaptation is a key issue for nature conservation. Risks from climate change include damage to functioning ecosystems, damage to habitats through extreme weather, species extinction, increased incidence of disease and new and spreading Invasive Non-Native Species. However, nature restoration can play a significant role in climate adaptation, through, for example, flood prevention, or using increased canopy cover to reduce ground temperature in rivers or urban areas.

As climate adaptation is likely to become an increasingly important political issue, we propose that LINK increase the prominence we give to climate adaptation as an issue, highlighting:

- The important role nature restoration can play in adapting to a warmer and less stable world
- The urgency of action to support nature itself to adapt, with a focus on resilience, functioning ecosystems, and connectivity
- The message of hope that nature restoration and positive change on the ground gives.

## Public Opinion

- Research by Britain Talks Climate has found that **the most frequently cited impact of climate change by people in Scotland is harm to nature and wildlife**.<sup>2</sup>
- Polling commissioned by LINK has found that:
  - When asked about benefits for their local area of action to protect the environment, enhanced climate resilience was the second most popular response (55%) after improved public health and wellbeing (64%).
  - The public are significantly more likely to have noticed the impact of climate change in their local area (68%) than of nature loss (45%)
  - Two thirds (66%) of people say that they are concerned about the impact of climate change on food production in Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/adapting-to-climate-change-progress-in-scotland/#key-messages>

<sup>2</sup> <https://climateoutreach.org/britain-talks-climate/climate-big-picture-2024/scotland/>

- In focus groups commissioned by LINK, participants were particularly aware of climate impacts including changing temperatures, extreme weather events, and changes to species in their area.

### Proposed language

Recently LINK has consistently used the messaging “nature is the first line of defence against climate change”. When tested in a focus group environment, this was understood and well received.

“Nature-based climate adaptation” is a potential frame that encapsulates our priorities. For public audiences, this could be expressed as “restoring nature to protect us from climate change” and / or “making nature more resilient to climate change”.

When talking about this publicly it may be helpful list examples of specific ways that nature-based practices help with climate adaptation. Some examples that could be used are listed below:

- Scotland’s peatlands act as a valuable form of carbon storage – the more we can do to protect and restore them, the more we are doing to improve our climate
- Salt marshes are another valuable habitat which act as natural coastal protection systems
- Natural flood defence systems like tree planting and restored peatlands can make a difference as climate change makes flooding more and more prevalent
- Agriculture has a big role to play in in making nature more resilient to climate change – for instance, more trees on farms both stores carbon and decreases the risk of flooding and damage to our food systems
- Marine ecosystems such as deep-sea sediments are important long-term carbon stores. By restoring the health of our seas, we can help them protect us from climate change.

### Policy context – Scottish Government

The third national adaptation plan’s ([SNAP3](#)) first outcome is “Nature Connects”, which states that “our efforts to address the risks posed by climate change, and to ensure a just transition, must have nature at their centre.”

[Adaptation Scotland](#) is run on behalf of the Scottish Government by SNIFFER at an organisational level for public sector, businesses and communities. It provides resources to enable organisations to include adaptation strategies in their own organisational activities.

### Relevant policy areas – high level summary

#### Wildlife

The Wildlife Group’s cross-cutting interest in ecosystem, habitat and species resilience is clearly linked to climate adaptation. Habitat and species resilience to change can only be delivered through maintained ecosystem complexity and habitat connectivity.

The 2022 [Biodiversity Strategy consultation response](#) and 2023 [strategic framework consultation response](#) both include a range of positions on issues of resilience. More specifically, the [INNS report](#) sets out LINK’s position on one significant aspect of adaptation.

#### Planning and protected areas on land

Ecological connectivity is central to LINK’s approach on adaptation. LINK developed the concept of a national ecological network, later branded as a ‘nature network’, outlined [here](#).

The [National Planning Framework 4](#) embraced this approach and embedded the concept of nature networks as a responsibility for local authorities within Local Development Plans. While LINK members welcomed this, there is an urgent need for support for local authorities to effectively implement this. However, action at local authority level only is insufficient: we continue to argue that ecological connectivity requires strategic coherence on a national scale. Local nature networks must contribute towards a national ecological network functioning across council boundaries.

Additional policy mechanisms, including the expansion of protected areas and improved strategic land use, are also necessary.

The importance and contribution of protected areas is summarised in the [30x30 on land report](#).

### **Agriculture**

The new system of agricultural funding has the potential to drive a transition to sustainable and regenerative agriculture. Climate change is a significant threat to food security. Agroecological techniques can support the resilience of food production, and are therefore a fundamental climate adaptation measure. The [Farm for Scotland's Future report](#) summarises LINK's position on this area (pgs.10-12, 21-23).

### **Marine**

Changes in Scotland's marine environment are speeding up as a result of climate change and warming seas, yet Scotland's policy response is extremely slow. LINK's [Ocean Recovery Plan](#) outlines key adaptation action through marine protection and marine management, addressing the key drivers of change. Marine measures to embed adaptation are included in the 2022 [Biodiversity Strategy consultation response](#) and 2023 [strategic framework consultation response](#).

### **Woodlands and Deer**

Trees, planted or regenerating in the right place, will play a critical vital role in allowing wildlife to move through and live across our landscapes in response to extreme weather and the changing climate. They can also improve climate resilience in a number of contexts, including in flood risk management, agroforestry, and increased canopy cover in urban areas. This is in addition to the important role woodlands play in sequestering carbon.

To achieve the benefits of forestry for natural flood management, it is essential that continuous canopy cover is maintained, rather than clearfell and restock silviculture which means tree cover is removed at regular intervals. Our trees, woods and forests also need our help to be resilient to the impacts of climate change (pests, diseases and abiotic threats such as drought, wind and wildfire). Increasing diversity of species, structures and silviculture are essential, especially in Scotland where we are over-reliant on one non-native species (Sitka spruce) despite the arrival, establishment and spread northwards of the European bark beetle (*Ips typographus*), the major economic pest of spruce in Europe.

LINK's [response](#) to the 2023 consultation on the future of the Forestry Grant Scheme proposed measures to support the diversification and resilience of forestry, as well as increased support for management of existing woodland. LINK's 2020 [report](#) on managing deer for climate communities and conservation has been the basis for continued work on the importance of effective deer management in increasing woodland cover and limiting soil loss.

### **Freshwater**

Climate change poses considerable risks of both drought and flooding. There are also risks to the biodiversity within freshwater habitats. [This briefing](#) summarises LINK's position on a range of issues, including water resource management, flood risk management, and the restoration of rivers and smaller freshwater bodies.

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