Scottish Environment LINK submission to Labour Policy Forum

January 2025

Submission to Scottish Labour Policy Forum

Nature, Physical and Marine Environment

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.

LINK's 2026 manifesto proposals are currently under consideration by our members. We will be happy to share full details of our proposals later this spring. This submission highlights key areas we believe Labour should consider in their manifesto development and should be understood as an interim document.

Background

Scotland's natural environment is globally significant. Scotland has however suffered from a high level of historic nature loss and faces even greater threats today, with 1 in 9 species at risk of extinction.

Climate change poses unprecedented threats to our natural environment. But restoring nature can help us in the fight against spiralling emissions and will help us adapt to warming that has already happened.

Research conducted by Diffley Partnership shows that:

- **Three quarters of people in Scotland say they worry about the natural environment.**
- **8 out of 10 people in Scotland have noticed the impact of climate change, nature loss, or pollution in their local area.**
- **Concern is evident across both urban and rural Scotland – 7 in 10 people living in rural Scotland believe the Scottish Government should do more to make farming and fishing environmentally sustainable.**

The next Scottish Government must take meaningful action to ensure Scotland has resilient and healthy ecosystems; to protect and restore our habitats and species; and restoring nature to protect us against climate change.

Key priorities

Protect and restore Scotland's habitats and species.
Deliver on the statutory targets expected under the Natural Environment Act to reverse the decline of our environment and to tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss. Reach the international target of 30x30 and protect 30% of land and sea for nature by the end of this decade. Utilise the power of government to restore biodiversity through the work of public agencies, agriculture and forestry funding, the use of public land, and the planning system.

Increase investment in nature restoration.

Deliver a real-terms increase in spending on nature, including through the continuation of the Nature Restoration Fund. Ensure best value for money by reforming public funding for agriculture and forestry. Use tax powers, such as aviation taxes, to invest in nature.

New ambition for our native woodlands.

Commit to at least half of new woodlands being native and provide more support for natural colonisation. Create at least 9000 hectares of new native woodland annually until 2045.

Reduce deer densities nationwide to levels consistent with natural regeneration of our native woodlands. Expand deer management incentives and support the development of venison supply chains.

A national mission to restore Scotland's peatlands.

Take advice from the Climate Change Committee on an appropriate target for peatland restoration and commit to significantly increasing the pace of action. Establish a programme of action to remove and prevent further invasion of non-native conifers onto peatlands.

Restore and clean up our lochs, rivers and freshwater bodies.

Commit to a Water Act to modernise our water and wastewater services. Significantly improve the monitoring of sewage overflows into the aquatic environment. Restore free-flowing rivers and use functioning floodplains to reduce the impact of flooding. Take a source to sea approach to water pollution by preventing debris and litter entering the marine environment from our rivers.

Protect Scotland's seas with community-focused marine planning.

Deliver for the environment, for coastal communities, and for marine industries by transitioning to a new spatial management regime with mechanisms for local governance. Review Scotland's fishing capacity informed by ecosystem health as well as fish stocks. Ensure the fishing fleet is fully documented through Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras. Effectively integrate aquaculture into regional marine planning with an ecosystem-based approach.

More info:
Ensuring the effectiveness of Scotland's MPA network
LINK consultation response summary: fisheries management measures within Scottish offshore marine protected areas
Consultation response – Remote Electronic Monitoring

Help farmers and crofters deliver for nature.
Increase the level of support provided to agri-environment schemes as the first step in increasing the proportion of agricultural funding which directly supports nature- and climate-friendly farming. Create a fairer system by increasing support for smaller farmers and crofters and reducing payments made with few conditions to the largest landowners. Transition to a system where three quarters of public funding directly supports environmental outcomes. Use the power of public procurement to support local and sustainable producers.

More info:
Report: Farm for Scotland's Future: the case for change
Farm Funding and the Scottish Budget, 2025-2026

A Nature Network for Scotland.
Establish a national nature network, providing connectivity across the landscape through the creation of corridors and stepping stones between our best sites for nature. Support local authorities to deliver towards a national network through regional collaboration.

More info:
Consultation Response: Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2022
Scottish Wildlife Trust briefing: Nature Networks

Empower Regional Land Use Partnerships to drive change.
Deliver Regional Land Use Partnerships across Scotland as a vehicle to link national targets with local delivery. Provide sufficient resources for the partnerships to drive landscape-scale change and collaboration. Empower the partnerships to inform decisions on public funding by identifying opportunities and priorities at a local and regional level.

More info:
Report attached to email

Tackle invasive non-native species.
Commit to an ambitious programme of action to tackle invasive non-native species (INNS) including a programme of island restoration and biosecurity. Establish an INNS inspectorate for Scotland. Give Ministers the power to regulate the release of non-native gamebirds where environmental damage, such as the risk of spreading avian influenza, is occurring or likely.

More info:
Invasive Non-native Species in Scotland: A Plan for Effective Action

End resource waste.

Move towards a sustainable, circular economy where we reuse resources and reduce waste. Use powers under the Circular Economy Act to ban the destruction of unsold consumer goods. Introduce charges on single-use items beyond the planned charge on single-use cups.

Guarantee environmental justice.

Expand the remit of the Scottish Land Court into a Land and Environment Court, joining the environmental courts and tribunals which exist in over 2500 jurisdictions across nearly 70 countries. Pass a Human Rights Act incorporating the human right to a healthy environment. Ensure that people, workers and communities are at the heart of environmental action, and that government policy is in line with the principles of a Just Transition.

More info:

ERCS: The clear and urgent case for a Scottish Environment Court
ERCS: Advocacy Manifesto: Summary of Recommendations

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