



Stop Climate Chaos Scotland briefing in advance of the debate on “Programme for Government – Growing Scotland’s Green Economy”

September 2024

Introduction

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) warmly welcomes this debate. It reflects that “tackling the climate emergency” is, rightly, one of the Government’s top four priorities, as set out in [the Programme for Government](#). Although this debate is entitled “Growing Scotland’s Green Economy”, we must recognise that the economy (green or otherwise) will be unable to function in a world where the climate crisis is not addressed. Indeed, in [his statement on the Programme for Government](#), the First Minister, rightly said:

“every one of these important actions – and indeed everything I have mentioned so far – will be rendered ineffective if we do not also address the greatest existential threat of our times. We must take effective action to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.”

This approach follows the observations made in his [“Priorities for Scotland” statement of 22 May 2024](#), when the First Minister said:

“The threat posed by the climate emergency – and the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss – is real and present, but so is the opportunity to successfully reach net zero and beyond”.

SCCS commends the recognition of the twin crises and the prioritisation of tackling this emergency. This briefing seeks to set out whether the Programme for Government has risen to that challenge and suggests issues that might be raised in the debate or on which Ministers might be questioned. It is based on SCCS’ [Proposals for inclusion in the 2024/25 Programme for Government](#), published in June 2024. If delivered, we believe the proposals we set out would help to ensure Scotland meets its emissions reduction targets and regains some leadership on action to address climate change, champion climate justice, and deliver co-benefits for health, wellbeing, jobs and tackling inequality.

Legislative proposals

SCCS notes the inclusion of a [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) Bill](#), which was subsequently introduced on 5 September 2024. While this should not have been necessary, SCCS recognises that “*we are where we are*”. We are pleased to note that it appears to be very narrowly drawn and addresses only the issues of establishing a carbon budget approach and a new timetable for the Climate Change Plan (CCP), and thus SCCS believes that the Parliament should move swiftly to agree to its provisions. However, in so doing, it should also challenge the Scottish Government: -

- First, to acknowledge clearly that the reasons for this proposed change relate to the failures to meet annual targets over recent years, and that this is, in a large part, due to the failure of the Scottish Government and its agencies to take the relevant actions or to act swiftly enough. While the UK Government was also at fault in delaying or not taking action, in reserved areas, and/or for creating budgetary pressures, there were and are many devolved areas where action has not been forthcoming (many such areas are discussed under ‘policy actions’ below).
- Secondly, the Scottish Government should be pressed on the planned timetable for the setting of carbon budgets and the production of the next CCP. While we support the principle of setting budgets based on expert advice from the Climate Change Committee, it is also important that the process is not subject to more or undue delay. In particular, **all efforts must be made to present the draft of the next CCP to Parliament by the summer of 2025** - otherwise, there is risk that, following Parliamentary scrutiny, there will be no time for consideration of Parliament’s recommendations and subsequent amendments to the draft plan before Parliament is dissolved for the 2026 election. This happened to the last CCP update in 2020/21 and has, no doubt, contributed to targets being missed and this bill



becoming necessary. It is important therefore to ensure that a re-occurrence of such a situation is avoided.

- Finally, of course, it should be remembered that we face a climate *emergency*. As such, there is no need to wait until a new CCP in 2025/26 to take action. The existing CCP/CCPu includes actions that have yet to be taken or measures that need further investment, and the Scottish Government announced [efforts to accelerate action on 18 April 2024](#), when this bill was first formally proposed. There remains a need for more and faster action both now, in the months to come, and in the new CCP. The Scottish parliament should challenge the Scottish Government to demonstrate that such action is being taken - some such issues are discussed under 'policy actions' below.

SCCS warmly welcomes the proposal to introduce a **Heat in Buildings Bill**. This should be based on the proposals in the consultation which closed in March 2024 (see [SCCS consultation response](#)). Those proposals were recently praised by the Climate Change Committee who said, "[if implemented, \(this\) could become a template for other parts of the UK](#)". To deliver significant benefits to household bills, health and emission reductions, there must be a swift passage of the Bill (no later than winter 2024), with clear and ambitious dates and targets, and a timetable for developing secondary regulations, with a commitment to stakeholder engagement.

SCCS welcomes the proposal for a **Natural Environment Bill**. The measures in such a bill, including statutory nature recovery targets, should enable better recognition of the need to restore nature, both for its own sake but also for its role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. In particular, this should give greater impetus to measures to restore Scotland's internationally important peatlands, to expand native woodlands, and to better manage our marine and coastal habitats. All these natural systems can contribute to reducing net emissions, as well as protecting communities and businesses from the impacts of climate change.

As such, SCCS welcomes the commitments to "restore at least 10,000 hectares of degraded peatland" and "create at least 10,000 hectares of woodlands" in the year ahead - these targets are lower than those previously set, albeit that they reflect what has, in practice, been delivered. Despite this, therefore, efforts must be accelerated and, if possible, these targets exceeded; in particular, the woodland target needs to focus especially on the expansion of native woodland. In addition, similar ambition is needed for the protection of freshwater wetlands and for coastal and marine habitats, all which represent a significant carbon store and, if unprotected, a potential source of significant additional emissions.

Finally, the Natural Environment Bill should be seen as a possible legislative vehicle to deliver on the Scottish Government's commitment to banning the sale of peat for horticultural use (see [SCCS consultation response](#)) and to announce a clear timetable for its implementation.

SCCS is disappointed, however, that the Programme for Government has delayed the proposed **Human Rights Bill** (including a statutory Human Right to a Healthy Environment) and includes no mention of any **Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill**.

A statutory Human Right to a Healthy Environment, including the substantive feature related to a 'safe climate' and associated procedural rights, would allow all Scots and our communities to hold public bodies to account if they fail to deliver the necessary action to address the climate crisis.

The proposals, previously consulted on, for a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill would introduce a statutory definition of sustainable development (in particular to recognise climate mitigation and adaptation as essential elements) and a Future Generations Commissioner (to steer policy development with the aim of ensuring a safe climate for future generations). These measures would make policy development related to climate change both more focused and with greater clarity to long-term goals and implications for people, the economy and the environment.

Members may wish to ask Ministers: what steps are being taken to ensure that the delayed Human Rights Bill is progressed, and the current plans are in relation to a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.



Budgetary matters

SCCS' [Proposals for inclusion in the 2024/25 Programme for Government](#), published in June 2024, included reference to the importance of financing climate action fairly, and called for:

- A commitment to follow-up the welcome Scottish Government-commissioned research on **fiscal measures** with a short life working group to assess the findings and explore which/what/how to implement, and embed the “make polluters pay” principle into financial decision making. In particular, this work should focus on identifying measures that can encourage and/or fund action to reduce emissions in agriculture, transport and buildings. There should be a commitment to include ‘*Make Polluters Pay*’ principles (while protecting low income households) in the upcoming **draft Tax strategy**. SCCS briefing on [Making Polluters Pay and Delivering Climate Justice](#) sets out fiscal measures that make polluters pay and/or support behaviour change to address the climate crisis and the cost-of-living crisis in tandem (see also briefings from SCCS member, the [Poverty Alliance](#)).

SCCS is therefore disappointed that there is no mention of these matters in the Programme for Government; it even fails to mention the Scottish Government’s own work, consultation on, and plans to publish a Tax Strategy. It is even more disappointing that the recent announcement of budget savings included [ending the ScotRail Peak Fares pilot, cuts to the sustainable and active travel budget](#) and to the [Nature Restoration Fund](#). Although, at this stage, short-term and applicable to the current financial year, it is vital that these resources are restored as soon as possible.

Addressing the climate and nature emergencies will need investment - and, as the First Minister has said everything else “*will be rendered ineffective if we do not also address the greatest existential threat of our times.*” Therefore, it is vital that the Scottish Government address the need for this investment in order to achieve the necessary changes in heating, transport and agriculture. Recognising the financial challenges of our times, SCCS’ work on fiscal measures (see above) recognises that this will mean spending existing resources better and raising new revenue fairly.

The Scottish Government must, therefore, commit to reviewing its budget and tax strategy to revise its approach to revenue and spending in line with the Programme for Government’s strategic priority of tackling the climate emergency. This will mean significant shifts in how existing money is spent (e.g. in agriculture, see below) but also consideration of new revenue raising and spend, such as the ideas proposed in SCCS’ [Making Polluters Pay and Delivering Climate Justice](#).

Other policy measures

SCCS’ [Proposals for inclusion in the 2024/25 Programme for Government](#), published in June 2024, included a number of other policy and/or implementation measures that the Scottish Government need to undertake in addition to new legislation. These included:

1. **Publish the final version of the Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan**, confirming a policy of a presumption (and commitment to vocally argue) against new oil and gas licences and developments (including those fields consented but yet to be developed). This presumption should be accompanied by a clear plan to manage the wind down of the North Sea basin, which is already maturing, and deliver a Just Transition for affected workers and communities, as well as a commitment to refuse consent for any new fossil-fuel based energy developments within devolved competencies, including the proposed gas-powered power station in Peterhead.

(The Programme for Government indicates that this strategy will be published “shortly” (page 25), although there is no clearer timescale and no mention of the presumption. However, the references to a “renewables revolution” and to a Just Transition are welcome, albeit lacking substance.)

2. Publish and implement detailed **Just Transition Plans for the transport, agriculture and land use, and buildings sectors**.

(The Programme for Government mentions that these plans will be published (page 30), but there is no timescale and indication of the likely substantial content.)



3. Implement the **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024**, and **swiftly develop secondary legislation on farm payments**, so as to reform the system of agricultural support and provide for a just transition to low carbon farming and reducing emissions.

(The Programme for Government indicates an intention to “support farmers and crofters to reduce emissions and deliver biodiversity improvements” and for the sectoral just transition plan (see #2 above) but there is limited detail and no timescale.)

4. A (re)commitment to spend 10% of the **transport** budget on active travel (meaning at least £320m in the forthcoming budget), widen concessionary fares schemes for public transport and confirm the autumn publication of a **finalised (and actionable) ‘route map’ to delivery of the 20% reduction in car-kilometres**.

(The Programme for Government makes a welcome pledge to “make it easier for people to walk, wheel, or cycle on everyday journeys through our Active Travel Infrastructure Fund, the National Cycle Network, and People and Place Programme” (page 26). However, in practice, [the active travel budget has been cut for this year](#) and there is no indication of when or how this will be restored.

Secondly, the Programme for Government states “Progress our ambition of a 20% reduction in car use by 2030, with a route map including a timeline for implementing ‘demand management’” (page 26). This is welcome, albeit that there is again no timescale for the publication for the actual publication of the route map, which was first promised in the CCPu in 2020/21. Notwithstanding that concern, however, it is welcome that there is a recognition of the need for ‘demand management’ - this approach needs to be extended to other areas, [including aviation](#).)

5. A commitment to **attend COP29** and build-on leadership and profile in relation to international climate justice at previous COPs, as well as highlighting and/or announcing new domestic action. This should include maintaining and significantly increasing the Climate Justice Fund, including funding for loss and damage and by generating new and additional funds by making polluters pay (see below). It should include working with international partners to seek further commitments on climate action and delivering a Just Transition, especially an effective and fair implementation (including policies on grants rather than loans and to gender equality). It should also include efforts to follow-up the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration.

(There is no mention of COP29 in the Programme for Government, although the commitment to “continue to lead on climate action internationally and support the Global South’s demand for climate justice” is welcome. This is said to be delivered through leadership roles in Regions 4 and Under 2 (as President and co-chair for 2024-26 respectively), bringing devolved governments together to agree ambitious actions, and our world-first £36 million Climate Justice Fund.)