

PEOPLE AND SCOTLAND'S ENVIRONMENT: AN INDEPENDENT VIEW FOR POLITICAL PARTIES, SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE AND PARLIAMENT BY ROGER CROFTS

Summary of recommendations

Improving the achievement of sustainable development by

- More comprehensive and coordinated strategy
- Statutory duties on Parliament and all public bodies and departments
- Annual independent audit reported to Parliament
- First Minister retain leadership and dedicated Environment Minister appointed to Cabinet
- Establish Sustainable Development Forum reporting to cabinet committee
- Prepare and consult on new environmental strategy for Scotland
- Apply sustainable development criteria to all public expenditure
- Apply environmental appraisal to all relevant expenditure
- Auditor General to review expenditure benefits for social justice and environmental stewardship.

Economic sectors working for society and the environment

Energy

- Stimulate R&D on all types of renewables
- Modify grid connection charges to stimulate non-wind renewables
- Develop geographical renewables strategy for Scotland
- Introduce incentive scheme for biomass
- Intensify housing energy savings campaigns

Agriculture

- Shift cash support to give more benefit to society and environment
- Auditor General to review social and environment benefits of support
- Establish pilot schemes to achieve more social and environmental benefits

Skills

- Improve skills training capacity to meet environmental market

Education and health benefits from the environment

- Citizenship for environment a key component of school curriculum
- Establish environmental best practice areas for public benefit
- Set up urban/rural schools twinning 'hearts and minds for the environment and society' schemes
- More effort on public understanding of how environment works
- Early implementation of responsible access in Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003
- More public and private resources for path networks
- 'Walk for the heart of it' campaign for less healthy citizens
- Initiative by farmers and health authorities on healthy diets

Improving Scotland's special places

- Early legislation to improve SSSIs and to re-establish NSAs
- New proposals for improving health of protected areas
- Properly funded positive support schemes for Natura 2000 sites
- Achieve World Heritage Site status for Cairngorms and the Flow Country
- Consult on and establish new National Parks

Making biodiversity action more effective and relevant

- Change priorities to achieve sustainable development objectives
- Statutory biodiversity duty on all departments and public bodies.

*******READ ON FOR THE DETAIL*******

Why a new agenda?

Preparations for elections are a time for reviewing progress and setting out new agendas. All political parties, and many non-government organisations, are engaged in this task. This is an independent statement covering a range of topics where more effective legislation, policy and action are needed (it does not include transport, pollution or waste which are well covered by others).

Significant progress has been made during the first parliamentary session: new legislation on water, national parks, wildlife crime, access; new EC wildlife protection and water management systems; strategies on elements of sustainable development; new consultative mechanisms on policy and action; funding maintained for environment. But changes are needed in strategies, funding, governance, and action to benefit the environment and to link people more effectively to it. Read on.

Why do people matter?

Everyone of us is in some way dependent on Scotland's environment: for the food we eat, for the clean air, for the copious supply of water, for the productivity of the soil, rivers and seas, for the opportunities for recreation and enjoyment and for spiritual and emotional stimulation, for the stimulus in education, for the outdoor laboratory, and for the many jobs it provides through tourism and leisure and through its care and stewardship.

Too often conflicts between development and protection, between rural and urban interests, between traditional and modern approaches, and most especially between people and wildlife have obscured the link between people and their environment. We must do better in all respects.

The environment is not something just for the government and its agencies, nor just for the environmental charities and their many thousands of members, important though the commitment and work of all of these organisations is. And the environment is not just a rural issue, it is equally important for those living in urban areas.

The environment cannot be seen, therefore, as the exclusive preserve of one body or group of citizens. It is the preserve and province of everyone. Inclusion of civil society in understanding the issues, influencing decisions, changing attitudes and behaviour towards the environment and taking positive action is the way forward. There can be both early wins and longer term gains as set out as follows with key recommendations in boxes.

CONNECTING THE PIECES

Strategies and structures for sustainable development

There are so many strategies and initiatives and action plans. But there is no overall agreed approach and no coherence between the well-intentioned efforts of public and charitable organisations concerning the environment and its contribution to sustainable development. Other sectors of Scottish life, such as enterprise, social justice and culture, have clear strategies. Now we need one for the environment.

<p>A comprehensive and progressive environmental strategy for Scotland covering the next 2 decades to be produced in partnership for public consultation.</p>
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The environment is an important component of sustainable development. Good progress has been made in 2002 with the statement from the First Minister and the publication of *'Meeting the needs: priorities, actions and targets for sustainable development in Scotland'*. However, the focus of attention is still too much on waste, energy and transport, and not sufficiently on those other elements, such as enterprise and biodiversity, which can contribute. We need more coherent linkages between the action on social justice, enterprise development, and environmental stewardship and the development of a high-level set of indicators to allow progress to be monitored. And we should not ignore our contribution to the overall UK effort.

Cabinet Committee on Sustainable Development to review sustainable development strategy to make it comprehensive, measurable and ensure all components are coherent and consistent.

Parliament's Audit Committee to monitor to progress on sustainable development each year.

The mandates of the Parliament, Executive and the public bodies do not reflect the outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit over a decade ago. Their so-called 'balancing duties' of bodies are woefully out of date. Action is needed by the Parliament and by the Executive now.

Parliament to amend its Standing Orders to ensure all legislation is subject to a sustainable development scrutiny.

All government departments, agencies and local authorities to have statutory duties on sustainable development and for annual reports of progress to be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

As sustainable development is an overarching approach to the social, economic and environmental needs of all people and as the environment is not just an issue for rural areas, then changes in the administrative and reporting arrangements for these subjects are required in the Scottish Executive. It is no longer justified to administer these policies from a Department of Rural Affairs.

The First Minister should retain responsibility for sustainable development and the staff supporting this role should be in the central policy unit.

An Environment Minister at Cabinet level should be reinstated and the staff supporting this role should be separated from agriculture and other rural affairs.

The various **consultative mechanisms** have made good progress, such as the Youth Parliament, but more effort is required to ensure that they are more effective in engaging all sectors of civil society and that their views are used in the decision-making process.

Establish a Sustainable Development Forum reporting directly to the Cabinet Committee on Sustainable Development.

Reviewing and refocusing public expenditure

The use of public resources is the single most important way to deliver an integrated sustainable development agenda achieving social justice and environmental stewardship. A welcome initiative was the use of sustainable development as a criterion in the Spending Review 2002. Publication of the effects of this criterion on expenditure decisions would be a step forward. In addition, the formulae for determining the funding of local authorities should be updated to include measures of environmental and social justice in all services.

Scottish Executive to publish guidelines on and results of the application of sustainable devolvement criteria in expenditure decisions on central and local government funding.

The 'national accounts' should be revised to show the impact of the new methodology on decisions.

Alongside this, a new system of accounting for the effects, both beneficial and negative, of expenditure on the environment should be introduced for all major expenditure decisions at programme and project levels. This requires full consideration of such intangible but socially important factors as aesthetic and cultural values, alongside scientific understanding and economic perspectives.

Scottish Executive to implement environmental appraisal methods, including use of non-monetary values, at programme and projects levels.

Certain types of public expenditure have negative environmental effects and limited social benefits. The current price and production support systems for agriculture are a case in point. Those financial support streams which have perverse effects on other policies and components of sustainable development require to be reviewed independently. This is a role for the Auditor General for Scotland irrespective of the fact that many subsidies, but by no means all, are determined by the EC.

The Auditor General should scrutinise the effects of major areas of public expenditure on social justice and environmental stewardship. The agricultural support regime should be first, followed by enterprise, as these are the largest areas of expenditure with an environmental footprint.

GETTING KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS TO WORK FOR SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Balancing the energy portfolio: the right renewables in the right place

Ensuring that Scotland makes its contribution to the reduction in greenhouse gases and maintains stable supplies of energy for all of its consumers is a strategic social and environmental issue. Scotland has been a net exporter of energy for many years, but the longer term position of the diminishing lifespan of non-renewable sources of gas, coal and nuclear energy and the inadequacy of renewable solutions to bridge the supply gap requires to be addressed now. Although many of the policy issues are reserved functions, their impact on Scotland and devolved responsibilities is significant. Scotland supplies proportionately more of its energy from renewable sources, good progress has been made on new renewables and excellent high targets have been set for the future, particularly for onshore wind energy.

Scotland must continue to influence UK energy policy to achieve social and economic benefits and to utilise renewable environmental resources

More effort is required to stimulate research and development renewables other than onshore wind. Energy production from biomass would benefit farmers and other owners of land as well as the consumer. Scaling up developments on wave, tide and offshore wind energy production are merited.

Enterprise bodies and research councils to stimulate R&D on all types of renewables.

Scottish Executive to develop incentive scheme for biomass production by farmers and other landowners.

In addition, there is a need to stimulate commercial activity by setting an attractive price of energy from these sources into the national grid.

Scottish Executive, in consultation with Whitehall and the grid companies, to develop proposals for pricing to stimulate renewables other than onshore wind.

Energy conservation has to remain a critical element of energy policy. Renewed effort to communicate to the public ways of reducing energy use and reducing household costs without diminishing quality of life should be developed. This should include the impact of use on climate change and the consequences for future generations.

Scottish Executive to develop further household energy saving campaigns.

There is some resistance to developing a spatial strategy for renewables on grounds that it constrains the industry. However, in order to ensure that social and environmental justice are fully taken into account, decisions are not taken on an ad hoc basis and decision making is speeded up, a spatial strategy should be prepared by the Scottish Executive in consultation with the industry and other relevant interests. This should take into account community and consumer views, military restrictions, and environmental advantages and constraints.

Scottish Executive to lead in the production of a spatial renewables strategy for Scotland in consultation with consumer, industry and other interests.

Farmland is society's asset

Society has benefited enormously from the farming community through security of food supply, low cost of purchase and quality of produce, but the costs to society in financial support to farmers, the damage to the environment of the intensive CAP farming regime and the loss of jobs mean that the industry is neither environmentally nor socially sustainable. This is not farmers fault. '*A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*' and the report on agri-environment are steps forward. But the big issues are the need for urgent reform at EC level through the Mid-term Review of the CAP and its longer-term review, and in Scotland a more imaginative approach under the Rural Development Regulation and other schemes which already provide substantial flexibility and incentive.

UK and Scottish support for the EC Agriculture Commissioner's proposals on decoupling price and production support from food production is both essential and welcome. What Scotland needs is a two-fold approach: to exploit its market advantage in quality foodstuffs and to deliver a wider range of benefits for civil society. On the latter, farmers have key roles to play in conserving and enhancing the diversity of wildlife, regulating the quality of waste water, reducing flooding through floodplain management, improving the natural quality of the soil and maintaining its productivity, providing access to the public, maintaining and improving the fabric of the countryside through care of buildings and hedgerows, and producing energy from waste products and biomass. Some farmers believe that they should not be 'park keepers' but a new multi-faceted role, suitably stimulated through a radical change in the financial support regime, reducing the unbelievable red-tape in farming support and contracting farmers to deliver a range of goods and services to society is well overdue. The monies saved by 'modulating' funds from production support should be much greater than planned, so that the farming community can see a more viable future and society as a whole can recognise the wider and beneficial role which farmers will be playing.

Scottish Executive and all political parties to support the shift in agricultural support from price and production to a wider range of benefits for society.

Scottish Executive to develop and implement rapidly a series of pilot schemes for contracting farmers to deliver a range of goods and services to the community.

The idea of financial support to farmers being linked to compliance with basic environmental standards has been around for many years. This 'cross compliance' occurs in many other sectors and should be part of the new package for farmers. In addition, given the continuing importance of the agricultural industry to maintaining communities in some parts of Scotland, a complementary scheme for social stewardship should be devised. Concern has been expressed by many commentators about the perverse effect of agriculture support on the environment and also the scale of public resources without the necessary level of accrued benefits. Recognising that these issues are determined at UK and EC levels, it is nevertheless important to assess their effects on Scotland's environment and its people. This is a task which Audit Scotland should undertake as a matter of urgency.

Scottish Parliament, as a second stage of land reform, to approve environmental and social stewardship schemes for farmers as a prerequisite of public financial support.

Audit Scotland to review the effect of agricultural support on society and the environment in rural areas and report on inconsistencies.

Improving skills and opportunities for environmental jobs

Studies have shown that the environment provides many thousands of jobs directly and indirectly. Demand is likely to remain high for those with expertise and experience in managing natural resources and running viable businesses in the environmental sector. Greater management of designated sites and the more integrated approach to special areas, such as National Parks and river basins, is called for under EC Directives and Scottish legislation. Also, tourism related to Scotland's natural heritage still has substantial growth potential.

Training bodies providing practical environmental skills should assess the markets and ensure that competition does not lead to loss of the necessary facilities. Emphasis needs to be given by training agencies and bodies to business and management, as well as environmental, skills.

Enterprise agencies to work with training providers to ensure sufficient capacity to meet environmental market requirements and to provide necessary business and management skills as an integral part of courses.

There is increasing recognition of and action on promoting tourism based on Scotland's internationally important natural attributes of scenery and wildlife. The new plan of the *Tourism and Environment Forum* and the strategy of the Executive provide a good way forward. Ensuring sustainable use of the environmental tourism assets in the hands of public bodies, such as the Forestry Commission and SNH, those owned by charitable bodies such as RSPB and NTS, and those in private ownership will provide experiences attractive to visitors and maintain and create jobs.

Greater effort by public and charitable bodies and private owners in the delivery of environmental tourism.

ACHIEVING EDUCATION and HEALTH BENEFITS FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Making the environment vital in lifelong learning

Many citizens have views about the environment, there is an ever increasing supply of knowledge and information, there are disagreements between different constituencies and stakeholders, and the values, attitudes and behaviour of individuals is critical to progress. Formal and informal education throughout life about the interaction between society and its natural environment has to be much higher up the political and public agenda than at present.

A number of aspects relevant to all sectors and ages in our society are important if citizenship from an environmental perspective is to be improved:

- greater understanding of how environmental systems and processes work (for example, the carrying capacity and natural limits of use of the environment);
- greater understanding of how human activity can assist and how it can impede the state of health of the environment;
- greater understanding of the effects of our lifestyles on the environment through travel, tourism, energy consumption, waste production and recycling, and indirectly through the 'footprint' elsewhere, for example in tropical food producing regions; and
- clear understanding of the values which we hold as individuals: what we like, what we inherit, what we pass on, what we value just because it exists, and how we can put a value of these intangibles.

To take matters forward the following proposals are made.

Scottish Executive and Learning and Teaching Scotland to ensure that the citizenship curriculum in schools has citizenship for the environment as a critical component.

Education authorities and environmental bodies to support the establishment of public environmental demonstration areas throughout Scotland.

Education authorities with the support of Executive Ministers and the New Opportunities Fund to establish twinning arrangements between urban and rural schools to bridge the understanding gap and to develop a '*Hearts and Minds for the Environment and Society*' programme.

Research institutes and funding agencies to place more emphasis on the understanding of environmental systems and processes, and especially more emphasis on communicating knowledge and information in an understandable way to the public.

A healthy environment for a healthier population

Scotland's relatively poor health record is well known and many initiatives are in place to improve the situation. Use of the outdoors for exercise and the production of healthy food from our farms are two ways the environment can contribute.

With the passing of the access provisions in the Land Reform(Scotland) Act 2003, these provisions and the codes of access behaviour should be implemented immediately.

Immediate implementation of new statutory access provisions and associated access codes.

The 'Paths for All' programme provides a mechanism for stimulating the development of path networks for all types of informal activity and for all ages and abilities. Greater provision of path networks and providing resources for their longer term maintenance is essential.

Greater public and private sector support for the development and maintenance of path networks, especially near to where the majority of people live.

Outdoors exercise is a well proven way of benefiting the health of individuals. Campaigns have already been launched but a greater effort is required to target those who are socially disadvantaged and have poor health.

A 'Walk for the Heart of It' campaign should be run by recreation and health authorities targeted on those individuals and communities where improved personal health through exercise is desirable.

The food produced in Scotland is of high quality and there are many kite-marking schemes and 'A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture' gives emphasis to maintaining standards and developing market niches. As part of the First Minister's healthy eating initiative, education demonstrations on preparing low fat/low calorie meals from high quality produce should be set up. This could be part of the urban/rural hearts and minds for the environment and society programme suggested earlier.

Agriculture and Health Departments to establish an initiative to promote healthy diets by linking food producers and consumers.

IMPROVING SCOTLAND'S SPECIAL PLACES

Scotland should be proud of its special environmental assets of wildlife and scenery. Many areas and sites are designated and protected because of their special qualities, but often the various types and the processes of their establishment have been criticised as fragmented, confusing, negative and restrictive. Safeguarding these assets and meeting European and international obligations is appropriate, alongside increased benefits to society. Statutory and practical improvements are needed urgently:

- to clarify the purpose of protected area types,
- to ensure greater engagement of communities of interest in designation and management,
- to improve funding continuity in the longer term and switch from negative to positive incentives,
- to ensure that monitoring schemes are in place to determine trends in quality, and
- to provide access to the public for education and enjoyment.

A programme for improving the management, funding, understanding and status of Scotland's protected areas should be developed.

The legislation on **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** is now out of date: it is not user friendly, and is in urgent need of statutory improvement to clearly define its purpose, remove compensation (except in special cases), to establish funding schemes for positive management, and other technical measures. The outcome of the '*Nature of Scotland*' consultation should be taken forward to new legislation immediately.

Modern legislation for SSSIs and wildlife to be approved at an early date.

Natura 2000, the most powerful mechanism to protect species and habitats of European importance, is now largely in place on land. Effort and resources are now needed for the long term beneficial management of the sites. Most important are: the removal of those support mechanisms which damage sites through inappropriate use or over use, provision of resources for positive management to meet the needs of the Directives, streamlining the process for dealing with proposals for change, ensuring that all 'competent authorities' undertake their duties, and engaging local communities in achieving benefits from the designation. In addition, implement of the Natura 2000 at sea needs priority, making full use of the lessons learned on land and recognising that different approaches are necessary.

Environment Minister to deliver financial basis for long term health of Natura sites, ensure engagement of all appropriate authorities in decisions and management, and give priority to implementation at sea.

St Kilda is currently Scotland's only natural **World Heritage Site** but proposals exist for the Cairngorms and the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. There is no guarantee of successful inscription on the List and, in particular, integrated management plans and action will be needed in both locations. For the Cairngorms, this should be a clear objective of the National Park Authority. For the Flow Country, a new mechanism is required, either a National Park or other approach such as the Natural Heritage Area which was established in 1991 for just such a purpose.

Cairngorms National Park Authority to be tasked to take forward plans and action aimed at securing World Heritage Site status for the Cairngorms.

Mechanism for integrated management of the whole Flow Country to be devised and implemented following consultation to achieve World Heritage Site status.

There is no longer statutory protection for Scotland's most outstanding landscapes: the 40 **National Scenic Areas**. Urgent action is required to rectify this gap and to ensure that the management of these internationally important areas is secured for the benefit of the nation. This should be part of the '*Nature of Scotland*' legislative proposals.

Scottish Executive to prepare urgently legislative proposals on National Scenic Areas.

Great progress has been made on the establishment of **National Parks** in Scotland: the primary legislation is passed, the first Park is established and the second is at an advanced stage. The forward agenda is two-fold. It is essential that the first two parks add real value in environmental, social and economic terms, particularly by the use of zoning, that all agencies work productively together to deliver the agreed plans, and that those incentives which militate against the Park's purposes are removed.

Scottish Environment Minister to give clear Directions to all public bodies in the two areas about the exercise of their powers and functions and the use of their resources to achieve the Parks plans and purposes.

Consideration should be given to further National parks in Scotland. The key criteria for identification will be the need for integrated management and action in areas of the highest natural heritage quality (both land and sea) and where current mechanisms to achieve this and to engage all of the local and wider constituencies of interest are not working effectively. Attention should be given especially to new parks covering the marine environment. Areas where this approach might be beneficial are the Small Isles and surrounding seas, the Argyll Islands and surrounding seas, and Wester Ross.

Public consultation exercise on new National Parks. Those with a marine component should be favoured.

MAKING BIODIVERSITY ACTION MORE EFFECTIVE AND RELEVANT

Good progress has been made in implementing the Convention of Biological Diversity. The focus has been largely on species and on drawing up action plans, but has been more limited on the wider agenda set out in the Convention and the contribution of biodiversity to sustainable development. Future priority needs to be on:

- making a more explicit link between biodiversity conservation and sustainable development by addressing those aspects of the Convention so far paid little or no attention: the sustainable use and genetic diversity of Scotland's natural resources and the benefits that can be derived for civil society;
- determining what action is achievable within existing resources and adjusting existing action plans accordingly;
- explicitly linking action in plans with other aspects of the Convention, particularly protected areas where substantial resources are committed and on the Ecosystem Approach which has yet to be introduced; and
- placing a duty on Ministers, government departments and public bodies to implement the Convention and its contribution to sustainable development (but do not follow the statutory basis in place in England and Wales).

Scottish Biodiversity Forum to review and change the priorities.

Cabinet Sustainable Development Committee to ensure biodiversity contribution to sustainable development is implemented.

Scottish Executive to bring forward legislative proposals for a biodiversity duty on departments and public bodies.

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