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Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy

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Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy

The Scottish Government has published a consultation paper as the next stage towards *Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy*.¹ This sets out a vision and proposed outcomes for 2045, as well as what is needed by 2030 to achieve these. A significant feature of the paper is the recognition that previous ambitions have not been met and of the need to address shortcomings in governance and accountability and to ensure mechanisms for mainstreaming biodiversity into all areas of activity. Responses to the consultation are sought by 8 September, 2022.

<<This paragraph gives more background but probably should be omitted>>

Progress towards the strategy (originally due in autumn 2022) has been disrupted by delays to the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15). This was due to be part of a high profile environmental "double-feature" in 2021 along with the Climate COP26 in Glasgow but will now take place in December 2022. There are fears that momentum in tackling the biodiversity crisis has been lost because of the delays and the loss of association with the climate crisis and also that attention to the global discussions will be diverted by the clash with the football World Cup Finals.

In describing the strategic context, the paper highlights Scotland's Environment Strategy and a number of other major documents setting out strategies on agriculture, forestry, fisheries, land reform and the Circular Economy. The paper then proposes the main vision: "By 2045 we will have substantially restored and regenerated biodiversity across our land, freshwater and seas". Further elements of the vision seek a natural environment that is "richly diverse, thriving, resilient and adapting to climate change" and that "everyone will ... play their role in the stewardship of nature".

Individual sections then consider the outcomes proposed for 2045 across rural environments, the marine environment, freshwater environments, coastal environments, urban environments as well as from an overall perspective. These are mostly phrased in broad terms, seeking an improvement from the current position - e.g. "The extent of restored catchments and improvements in ecological status of rivers, lochs and wetlands [will have] increased".

The outcomes are supported by statements of "what we need to have by 2030" to achieve the desired outcomes, again mostly phrased in broad terms, although with some more specific points, e.g. a reformed agricultural subsidy scheme and reductions in the impacts from deer browsing and grazing. There is also a vision under the heading "Across our land and sea – Overall health, resilience and connectivity" that calls for the establishment on land of Nature Networks at a landscape scale to demonstrate widespread improvements in biodiversity and an increase in carbon sequestration across ecosystems.

The paper recognises that the vision, analysis of the problems and priorities for the future have not greatly changed in the last 15 years. However, these ambitions have been undermined by key shortcomings in the governance and accountability structures and in establishing mechanisms, including economic policy, that ensure a central place for biodiversity in the way that Scotland lives and works. To redress this, the paper proposes ministerial level strategic leadership, statutory targets and the mainstreaming of biodiversity values into policies, regulation and planning at all levels of government. The paper also highlights the need for investment from the public and private sectors within a

¹ [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2022 - Scottish Government - Citizen Space \(consult.gov.scot\)](https://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/biodiversity/biodiversity-strategy-2022)

market that accounts for natural capital and applies Just Transition principles, with businesses assessing and reporting on their dependence and impacts on biodiversity.

Public engagement is also viewed as essential, with outdoor learning for children playing a part in improving literacy on climate and biodiversity issues. An increased role for citizen science, communities and volunteers is also proposed. Improved monitoring, including of progress towards statutory targets, is also called for, supported by an independent body (to be determined) to monitor and report on progress towards these targets.

Governmental ambitions to tackle the loss of biodiversity are nothing new, but this paper brings a welcome appreciation that major steps are necessary across many areas of government, business and society if these are to be fulfilled. As the paper states: “Reversing biodiversity loss cannot be achieved through traditional conservation measures alone – these must be accompanied by a more fundamental, society-wide shift to sustainable consumption and production.”

Achieving this remains a major challenge, especially at a time of economic and political disruption, and a simple measure such as setting statutory targets will not by itself ensure that these can be met. This paper demonstrates that there are now signs that the scale of the problem and of the widespread changes needed to tackle it are being recognised, and that steps to establish the necessary framework are being planned. There is, though, a lot to be done in a short time if even the initial steps towards the necessary transformation are to be made by 2030.

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