

Correspondence from NatureScot, 10 September 2026

Dear Stuart,

Thank you for inviting me to attend the committee last week to discuss our priorities for this session of Parliament. During the session, you highlighted that the committee will come back to matters of Public Service Reform (PSR). We have a good story to tell about our actions to secure joined up, efficient, people focused delivery. This is set out in our new Corporate Plan [which is available on our website](#). We believe our Plan offers a strong base from which we can help build the new organisation.

The First Minister is clear that PSR proposals should not be the end in and of itself, but the means by which the public sector will deliver on its priorities. The new body, working closely with the entire public sector, should be able to execute a strategy that accelerates effective, funded, large-scale action to tackle the nature-climate crisis to the benefit of the people of Scotland.

We hope the answers provided in this response will support the work that the committee takes forward in the coming years to scrutinise activity across the nature sector to execute this long-term strategy.

Organisational priorities across Session 7

1) What do you see as the priority areas which this Committee should focus on this session to have the most impact?

As I told the committee, ambitious, clear, and evidence-based statutory biodiversity targets will be a critical driver of public sector sustainability strategies. I recognise that the committee will scrutinise secondary legislation on the targets and I look forward to further engagement on this matter.

Restoring healthy nature

The committee has already raised questions about Scotland's commitment to safeguard 30% of Scotland's land and seas by 2030. We are leading this ambitious initiative through our land-based Nature30 programme. [You can see the details on our website](#). We would be happy to discuss this programme with you, along with efforts to maintain existing and future protected areas in good ecological health.

Nature networks, which are the responsibility of Local Authorities, should connect protected areas and enable species to move. As they are part of the suite of nature recovery measures in Scotland, they may also merit committee interest. In addition, it is important to consider the marine environment and action that is being taken to ensure healthy habitats, protected where necessary and capable of maintaining sustainable stock levels.

Growing nature investment

Extensive and impactful nature recovery requires higher levels of investment from the public sector and commercial and philanthropic interests. We are seeing increased interest in this space, underpinned by the Scottish Government's lead on principles of good investment and positions on a blended approach to public and private finance. I believe there would be enormous value in the committee exploring natural capital and the mechanisms available to drive what the Scottish Government calls high integrity, responsible nature finance.

Resilient Places

We are focused on a priority to strengthen climate, economic and social resilience in all our communities through nature recovery. What are called 'nature-based solutions' have been shown to provide impressive returns on investment, often at lower cost compared to hard infrastructure across entire catchments and along our coasts. Green infrastructure, especially in our urban spaces, is a critical part of the third Scottish National Adaptation Plan.

We have seen positive examples in recent years which demonstrate the benefits that can be gained. In Glasgow, the Clay Pits Local Nature Reserve (LNR) project changed a 10ha derelict site into an attractive greenspace with active travel routes, recreational opportunities and a sense of community at the fore. The other part of the project provided a surface water drainage solution for the regeneration of key vacant and derelict sites including Sighthill, Hamiltonhill and Cowlares through dynamically managing the water level in the canal to provide flood storage. Meanwhile, the Middlefield Greenspace and Regeneration Project provided a high quality, open greenspace in northern Aberdeen. The introduction of a series of smooth all-abilities paths, the uncovering of a local burn, the addition of meadows and wetland areas which help mitigate flooding, play areas and linking of local communities were positively received.

Further, we see green (social) prescribing having an impact on people's wellbeing and we believe that everyone should have access to a green space in Scotland. There is already a good story to tell, but with so much more to do we are clear that the committee's inquiries and recommendations would be of enormous benefit.

2) In particular where do you think engagement by the Climate Action Committee could help to enhance public participation and awareness?

Reconnecting people with nature

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has identified people's disconnect from nature as one of the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. We need to reconnect people with nature and increase support for nature-positive action if we are to stand any chance of fully regenerating nature in Scotland by 2045. We would welcome the committee's interest in the data around public concern for the nature-climate crisis, attitudes towards taking nature-positive public behaviours and the extent to which action being taken across the nature sector (public, eNGO, commercial, etc) is having an impact or could if campaigns are strengthened.

Pre-budget scrutiny

- 3) *What implications do the commitments in the Programme for Government have on your resource needs for the 2027-28 Scottish Budget, and what do you expect your key financial challenges to be in the next financial year?*

Following the Programme for Government announcement we are in the early stages of fully considering the requirements that will be needed to support the transition to a new environment and nature body for 2029. We anticipate there will be a need to identify capacity and resource to support the transition, while ensuring that we do not detract from our ability to deliver on our 2026–2030 Corporate Plan.

With regards to key financial challenges, we note and appreciate the continued programme funding received to support delivery on Peatland Action and the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF). With a continued annual budget cycle, versus multi-year commitments on these programmes, there are continued timing and overall forward commitment challenges.

Wider inflationary pressure on the organisation will be similar to all bodies, and the wider economy. We are diversifying our income streams, and in 2026/27 we have made significant progress with the introduction of offshore wind cost recovery charging. We will continue to develop opportunities for income generation and cost recovery but recognise that our core budget continues to be under pressure.

We continue to seek efficiencies in line with the Scottish Government's target to reduce the costs of corporate service functions by 20% by 2030, freeing up resource for frontline delivery for nature. A significant element of these efficiencies relates to office/property savings across our estate.

Finally, 2027/28 will be the first year of a new pay settlement period for us, and other public bodies. We await the Scottish Government pay policy for 2027/28, prior to opening discussions with our trade union partners. Until such time as a pay settlement is agreed our in-year resource allocation position remains uncertain.

Specific policy areas and forthcoming policy milestones

- 4) *The Scottish Government has indicated that it is not expecting statutory nature targets to be introduced within the next year. What are your views on the proposed timescales?*

It is clear from the Scottish Government's Programme for Government that they are focused on relentless delivery, including in tackling the nature-climate crisis. I welcome their commitment to deliver the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, including the introduction of statutory biodiversity targets.

We recognise the importance of delivering robust and measurable statutory targets to underpin our efforts to address the nature emergency. Given the urgent need to act, the sooner we can get targets in place the better. That is why both the pace of

delivery and securing meaningful targets are front and centre of our involvement and support for this work.

However, this is a substantial programme of work, requiring consideration of a range of factors to ensure that statutory targets can deliver positive results for nature. We believe the work carried out by the Scottish Government's Biodiversity Programme Advisory Group has laid a strong foundation. Working with Scottish Government partners, we can produce challenging yet realistic targets.

While the processes for establishing targets in statute move forward, it is important to reiterate that work to address biodiversity loss continues with urgency through action on the ground, such as the work being taken forward through the Nature Restoration Fund and by the Peatland Action programme (both of which we manage). The strong pipeline of projects that we are seeing through these and other programmes demonstrates the appetite and capacity to deliver at large scale.

I can assure members that we will do everything in our power to deliver meaningful statutory biodiversity targets that prompt substantial action from all of Scotland's public sector.

5) What engagement will your organisation expect to have in the development of statutory nature targets?

We continue to work closely with the Scottish Government on the phased implementation of the Natural Environment Act's provisions, to ensure an effective and practical transition to the new framework it sets out.

This includes our significant involvement in the development of statutory biodiversity targets. We have moved quickly in advising the Scottish Government of options for targets, with the support of our Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). Additionally, our representatives who sit on, and advise, the Biodiversity Programme Advisory Group continue to support with the technical elements around the development of targets and indicators.

We will have further engagement in the final development of the targets and expect that the Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) will consult again with our SAC on further iterations as they are developed. In addition, we are working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and researchers across Europe to ensure that we keep abreast of global best practice on targets and indicators. Through this work, we will continue to hold a central role in informing the final target framework and ensuring that a broad range of evidence is considered before statutory targets are set.

6) What are your views on progress, and the anticipated timescales for action and delivery, of Ministerial duties under the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 to set targets for a circular economy and to produce a statutory code of practice on household recycling?

We are supportive of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024, including the commitment to introduce targets for the delivery of a circular economy.

The circular economy in Scotland is primarily viewed in terms of material flows and waste. These are important matters, but ones that do not fall within the direct scope of our remit. As such, we are not best placed to comment on the timescales for the introduction of targets and the production of a statutory code of practice on household recycling.

However, a circular economy that includes the rural and marine economies, natural resource use and associated key element and nutrient cycles in soils - including carbon - would be both directly, and indirectly, relevant to our work. In this wider framing, soil health, and water flows/quality, including regenerative principles and practices, are central to a circular rural economy helping to recover nature, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and build resilience to climate risks.

More generally, we continue to engage proactively with the Scottish Government and our partners across the public sector to support Scotland's transition to a zero waste and circular economy.

7) How are you working with other organisations to tackle pollutants such as 'forever chemicals', microplastics and sewage-related contaminants in drinking water and water bodies and their upstream sources?

This matter does not sit within our remit, and we have no comment to make currently.

8) What are the key obstacles to progress on water and climate resilience within the current legislative framework?

The current legislative framework is essential to our efforts to tackle obstacles to water and climate resilience, especially when coupled with the ambition of relevant strategies including the Climate Change Plan; the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; the Scottish National Adaptation Plan; the Circular Economy Strategy; and the Vision for Agriculture. We are encouraged by the fact that climate resilience is clearly embedded as a central priority of the Scottish Government for this Parliamentary session.

The emerging policy environment provides the platform to proactively address practices that overexploit uses of the land and sea and increase vulnerability to climate risks in the process. The key challenge we face is the rapid pace and large scale of the change that is needed, which requires significant funding, expertise, resource and broad support. If we cannot move at the pace and scale required to address the challenge of extreme weather and the changing environment, Scotland's other priorities for the economy, health and wellbeing will be more difficult to achieve.

That is why statutory biodiversity nature targets are so important, as they will help to accelerate delivery across all uses of the land and sea, reducing our vulnerability to climate risks. As indicated, we also believe that nature-based solutions offer a cost-effective solution to building our climate resilience at a catchment scale. During the session, we used the pertinent example of the River South Esk Catchment Partnership. The Partnership has put nature at the heart of resilience including through peatland restoration, woodland planting, natural flood management and controlling invasive non-native species. The approach taken along

the South Esk is an exemplar of how progress can be made at scale, and can be seen elsewhere on catchments like the River Dee, Spey, Peffery and Tweed.

I trust this information answers the committee's questions. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further clarification or additional information.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Halfhide

Chief Executive