Written submission from the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, 18 November 2026

Many thanks for your invitation to give evidence on the Nature Connects Outcome in the Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024–2029 (SNAP3).

The missing piece of the ecological puzzle

1. In her foreword to SNAP3, the Cabinet Secretary recognised that "nature is one of our greatest and most precious tools at our disposal in building resilience to the impacts of climate change." Across government strategies, including SNAP3, the 4th Land Use Strategy, and the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026, the link between healthy habitats and climate adaptation is increasingly well understood.

2. UK and international evidence shows that nature-based solutions frequently outperform hard engineering on cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and co-benefits across flood, coastal, and heat hazards.[1]

3. But rewilding (the large-scale, process-led recovery of nature) remains missing from the Scottish Government's vocabulary and work. Current policy overlooks the missing piece of the ecological puzzle: the natural behaviour of healthy populations of wild animals and self-sustaining natural processes, and how those processes actively buffer Scotland against climate breakdown.

4. For example:

    - Restoring hydrology and keystone species such as beavers creates landscapes that can better attenuate peak flood flows, filter water and retain moisture during droughts.[2] [3]

    - Restoring natural grazing (alongside effective deer management) allows native woodland and scrub to regenerate naturally across catchments, stabilising soils and increasing vegetation complexity. This breaks up soil compaction, boosts water-holding capacity, slows overland surface runoff[4] and disrupts continuous fuel loads.[5]

    - Seagrass beds, native oyster reefs, kelp forests, and blue mussel beds attenuate waves, reduce wave run-up, and protect vulnerable areas from coastal flooding and erosion.[6]

[1] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969724046722?via%3Dihub
[2] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hyp.14017
[3] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hyp.70690
[4] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hyp.14453
[5] https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.13972
[6] https://www.crew.ac.uk/sites/www.crew.ac.uk/files/publication/CRW2022_02%20Marine%20Habitats_main_report_and_appendices_FINAL_2025_06_25.pdf

Rewilding as preventative spend

5. ClimateXChange estimates that Scotland needs £7.8bn–£14.2bn between 2026/27 and 2039/40 (£565m–£1.03bn/year) to adapt to our changing climate.[7] Roughly three-quarters of that investment will require public funding regardless of private finance innovations. This makes how our existing public budgets are spent critical. SNAP3 explicitly commits to shifting half of all agricultural funding to be conditional on delivering for climate and nature, including climate adaptation. But that promised transition is failing to materialise at the pace or scale required, leaving public funding disconnected from adaptation.

6. The Scottish Government's own commissioned economic research[8] notes that rewilding potentially offers a better benefit-cost ratio than other forms of restoration. Process-led rewilding delivers what ClimateXChange terms the "triple dividend" of adaptation: avoided flood and wildfire damages, rural economic stimulus (nature-based jobs and eco-tourism), and major health and wellbeing savings.

7. We need an open, honest conversation about why the Scottish Government has so far failed to seize this opportunity and how it can do so in the future.

From local action to landscape-scale adaptation

8. The 2025-26 SNAP3 Annual Report highlights welcome progress, including a record 15,448 hectares of peatland restored under Peatland ACTION, floodplain reconnection projects via the Water Environment Fund, and NatureScot's identification of 17 priority catchments out to 2045. SNAP3 acknowledges that nature-based interventions need to be delivered in an integrated manner across a whole landscape or catchment.

9. Yet project-by-project funding is creating islands of recovery rather than a connected, resilient landscape. Despite £75m+ granted through the Nature Restoration Fund, the proportion of protected sites in favourable condition remains stuck at 74.5% (well below the 80.4% recorded in 2016), while across the wider landscape, key indicators such as species abundance trends remain "too early to say."

10. Urban green and blue space grew by just 0.56% in the latest reporting year, while adult access within a five-minute walk has flatlined at 66-70%. Disconnection from wilder nature disproportionately affects low-income households and young people, compounding both physical climate risks (urban heat and surface water flooding) and mental health pressures.

11. Nearly 200 grassroots rewilding initiatives are already operating across Scotland, led by a variety of governance models including landowner clusters, private owners, crofters, farmers, charities, and community groups. Despite a

[7] https://www.climatexchange.org.uk/projects/climate-change-adaptation-investment-need-across-five-sectors-in-scotland/
[8] https://www.gov.scot/publications/environment-strategy-scotland-delivering-environment-strategy-outcome-scotlands-economy-evidence-base-policy-levers/

fragmented policy landscape, unsuitable funding, and a lack of government clarity, they are building climate resilience, creating jobs, and supporting community health and wellbeing by connecting people with local blue and green spaces.

12. Imagine how much more everyone could achieve with a coherent national plan that integrated rewilding alongside productive farming, crofting, and forestry.

Our recommendations

13. To accelerate delivery and maximise value for public money, the Scottish Rewilding Alliance urges the Committee to recommend that the Scottish Government:

- Commit to managing 30% of our land and seas on rewilding principles, explicitly embedding process-led rewilding and trophic recovery into the statutory biodiversity targets being set under the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026, providing clarity about how nature-based interventions sit together in the wider landscape.

- Reform public funding so landowner clusters, crofters, farmers, and community land trusts can access sustained, multi-year, landscape-scale support that blends public preventative spend with responsible private investment.

- Streamline regulatory pathways for keystone species recovery (including beavers and natural grazing management) so land managers can deploy natural flood and drought buffers at pace.

- Provide targeted ecological and planning capacity to local authorities so that councils can successfully map, adopt, and fund Nature Networks, prioritising wilder blue-green corridors in those communities who need them most.