



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Published 25 March 2026
SP Paper 1111
17th Report, 2026 (Session 6) (Session 6)

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Session 6 Legacy Report



Published in Scotland by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.



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Committee Membership



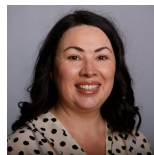
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Summary of conclusions and recommendations

Key scrutiny priorities

1. Annexe A sets out a list of key policy issues which we would encourage successor committees to set aside time to scrutinise in the 2026-31 Parliamentary Session.

Remit

2. The Committee's remit has been far too large from the outset, encompassing a diversity of matters in which there is great public interest, and in attempting to deal with this, the Committee has been thinly spread. The remit is also insufficiently cohesive. Overall, this has impacted the Committee's effectiveness, forcing it to be more of a responsive than a strategic, agenda-setting body, in large part focused on getting through government-generated business. This was not the role envisaged for Scottish Parliament committees.
3. While the precise parameters of committee remits will be for the next Parliament to consider, and there is no one "right" answer, our roving brief in relation to net zero and the environment has given us some insight into potentially effective synergies and what a logical and workable division of responsibilities might look like. It could, for instance, be along these lines:
 - A committee with responsibility for scrutinising energy policy and the just transition. It would lead on the scrutiny of overall governmental performance in driving net zero, and securing economic and social benefit from it, and in holding to account the minister in the next Scottish Government given that cross-cutting responsibility. It could have a roving brief to inquire into decarbonisation and the just transition in specific sectors outside its direct subject remit but only by agreement with the relevant subject committee, if they had no plans to do so, or lacked time. It would lead on coordinating committees' scrutiny of the next draft Climate Change Plan and have the most direct working relationship with the Climate Change Committee;
 - A Committee charged with considering environmental policy, rural development policy and rural land use as *integrated* matters: the interventions and trade-offs we need to achieve the twin goals of addressing the climate and nature crisis on our land and in our waters, and aligning these with other ambitions like having thriving, diversified rural and maritime economies;
 - A Committee on transport. This is too important, and high-spending, a policy area not to have a dedicated committee. This committee would lead on assessing progress in decarbonising the transport sector but also on the more everyday transport matters that the public care about: fares and ticketing; integrated transport; how our publicly-owned trains and ferries are performing; availability of buses; provision for cyclists; safety on public

transport; rural transport needs; etc. This committee could also lead on scrutiny of major Scottish Government-supported public works projects.

Decarbonising heat in homes should rest mainly with the committee charged with scrutinising overall housing policy, as has been the case, in practice if not entirely on paper, for most of this Session.

Committee membership and ways of working

4. In their October 2025 "[Strengthening Committees' Effectiveness](#)" report, the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee commented that:
 - "... churn in membership does not help create a sense of collegiate working as committee members need time to get to know each other and build up expertise and understanding; and
 - "We also agree with the concerns expressed that larger committees present practical issues with meeting management and ensuring there are opportunities to probe more deeply into issues."

We agree with this. We also agree with their view that committees should seek to normally reflect the gender balance of the Parliament, recognising the practical barriers that mean this cannot be done on all committees all the time. The Parliamentary Bureau and party business managers should consider working to avoid allowing significant gender imbalances to persist on a committee for long periods.

5. We recommend that successor committees hold a business planning day early on in the Session to hear from experts, set out some agreed principles on ways of working, and agree early scrutiny priorities. While it will be for successor committees to determine what works for them, based on our own experience, we think it is important for committees to find time from the outset for substantial inquiries based on carefully considered terms of references, with plenty of time for stakeholders and members of the public to provide their views. We also strongly recommend continuing to create spaces for more informal information-gathering, to ensure committees hear from a diverse range of individuals, by providing more accessible and potentially safer opportunities for people to share their experiences than in formal meetings.
6. We hope successor committees will be able to build on our international engagement in this Session, discussing practical matters of common interest in relation to green energy, decarbonisation and the environment with counterparts at the Arctic Circle Assembly, Icelandic Parliament and Nordic Council.
7. We note the use of People's Panels during Session 6, in which we took part, and invite successor committees to consider whether commissioning a panel would support scrutiny work in specific areas next Session.

Scrutinising the draft Climate Change Plan

8. The process by which consideration of the draft Climate Change Plan unfolded in this Session was unsatisfactory and lessons should be learned from it. We recommend to our successor committee that it ask the Scottish Government to commit, relatively early, to a timetable for having the next CCP in place, on the clear common understanding that, barring highly unforeseen circumstances, this will be adhered to. Specifically, the Committee should also seek an undertaking early in the next Session that a draft Plan will be laid in sufficient time to allow the Scottish Government to reflect properly on any representations made on the draft (by Scottish Parliament committees or others) before laying a final Plan. As a rough guideline, we suggest the gap be at least 8 weeks. In practice, this means that a draft Plan should be laid by no later than shortly after summer recess 2030. The option of passing amending legislation to ensure that the Scottish Government gives itself adequate "thinking time" should be held in reserve.

Wider reflections on scrutinising climate change policies next Session

9. The next Parliament, led by our successor committee on net zero scrutiny, will be the first to assess progress in emissions reduction against five-year budgets not annual targets. This may require some changes and there is an opportunity to consider what has emerged as good practice in other UK legislatures where five-year budgets have been the norm. To some extent, a switch to five-year budgeting is about avoiding short-termist thinking about "success" and "failure" in emissions reduction. But it will still be important to know early if policies are going off track.
10. We suggest the successor committee charged with net zero oversight continue to aim to have set-piece annual check-ins with the Climate Change Committee and Scottish Government to assess progress and any emerging areas of difficulty. Audit Scotland, the Scottish Fiscal Commission and Environmental Standards Scotland are other key bodies. We strongly encourage our successor committee to continue the dialogue about emissions policy we had with them during this Session. Jointly these bodies can provide a realistic take on how the ambitions of government (at all levels) and agencies match up over the longer term to the real-life challenges of delivery.
11. We also encourage our successor committee on net zero to play an active role early next Session in ensuring "early warning" or performance indicators that can serve as proxies for measuring progress in emissions reduction are in place across all sectors, that they look to be good, measurable indicators, and that there are clear regular reporting mechanisms for them.
12. We would also strongly encourage successor committees to make space in their work programmes to prioritise sector-specific inquiry work about decarbonisation, and to encourage other subject committees to do so. The best opportunities for such work may come early in the Session, before major legislation is rolled out. This is important work in itself but also good preparation for scrutiny of the next draft Climate Change Plan. The 120 days allocated to the Parliament for draft CCP scrutiny, likely towards the end of next session, is never likely to give committees much opportunity to drill down in depth into the practical detail of delivery in specific sectors. The groundwork must be laid earlier through a rolling

programme of inquiry work.

13. The Parliament has benefited over the years from a strong working relationship with the Climate Change Committee. Our successor committee leading on net zero scrutiny should continue to work on maintaining an effective relationship. As we said in a recent report, it was regrettable the CCC did not consider itself able to provide formal evidence during the period of committee scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan. We added (and repeat here) that:
 - ” Early in the next Session, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and the CCC should work together to find a constructive way forward, addressing any perceived or actual barriers to the CCC providing evidence during this crucial period.
14. It will be for the next Convener's Group to decide whether to continue to deem climate change and net zero to be a cross-cutting strategic priority for committees in the next Session. We think this has been successful in raising the profile and salience of these matters across committees, encouraging cross-committee scrutiny, and improving Members' and committees' access to information and data. It helped create the conditions for an unprecedented level of committee engagement in scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan. Whatever CG may formally determine next session, climate change is too big, systemic and multidisciplinary for one committee to cover it effectively. We encourage successor committees and the next CG to work to promote the same level of cross-committee cooperation and communication, and support for net zero scrutiny, as we achieved this session, and to support techniques and approaches to assist Members and committees in their work being continued into the next Session.
15. We would strongly encourage our successor committee leading on climate change in the next session to ensure that the Parliament plays an effective public role in considering the effectiveness of policies on adaptation to climate change and resilience in the run-up to the laying of a new National Adaptation Plan when the current one ends in 2029. This could include encouraging other committees to play their part in this work. Audit Scotland, ESS and the Scottish Fiscal Commission are again likely to be key partners in this work. There is also the option to commission research on the delivery of specific aspects of this in the run-up to 2029.

The budget process and its links to climate change policy

16. We encourage our successor committee to continue to monitor all three strands of the Joint Budget Review over the coming session, and where necessary press for their roll-out. All three have the potential to add value, in terms of understanding whether budget choices are consistent with climate change goals. The strands are at different stages of development, with the climate narrative strand the most developed and Net Zero Assessment the least. The Net Zero Assessment strand is the most significant, in its capacity to improve the mechanics of actual government decision-taking relevant to climate change upstream of determining what specific interventions to make. Only in the coming

Parliamentary session will it be possible to begin drawing conclusions about all of this, and only if all three strands continue to be developed and become a mainstream part of budget planning in the manner indicated in the final JBR report.

Reflections on handling legislation

17. The Committee would encourage successor committees to be assertive in ensuring they have enough time to consider Bills allocated to them, not only at the outset of scrutiny, but later on in response to developments (for instance, the emergence of a specific problem with the drafting of a key section or imminent publication of a relevant report or study).
18. In relation to Bills containing framework provisions, we would urge successor committees to press the Scottish Government for reasons as to why important detail is not being set out on the face of the Bill and then to reflect on whether these are satisfactory. Committees should also consider whether especially important and widely-drawn powers in Bills should be made subject to a super-affirmative procedure. Overall, the increased use of framework provisions creates a risk of a "missing middle" in Parliamentary scrutiny: the period between the Bill being passed and subordinate legislation then emerging sometime later as the "finished product" in a policy development process in which the Parliament and its committees may have played little part. We recommend early reflection in the next Parliament on how to respond to this at an institutional level. Committees should also be vigilant in relation to subordinate legislation which itself delegates key detail about its operation to guidance or codes without drafts of these being made available for scrutiny with the instrument. In relation to subordinate legislation generally, committees should, whenever necessary, press the Scottish Government for a consistently good standard of accompanying documentation.
19. We suggest that in the next Parliamentary session the Parliamentary authorities, led by the Bureau, reflect on whether the deadline on lodging Member's Bills currently set out in Standing Orders guarantees committees sufficient scrutiny time. Whether or not there is any formal change to Standing Orders, we suggest that the Non-Government Bills Unit work with Members with the aim of lodging Members' Bills as early as possible, consistent with producing a well worked-up Bill.
20. There are serious defects to the process around legislative consent memorandums and motions that, at times, call into question the worth of committee engagement in the process. The most fundamental issue is of amendments triggering the need for consent being lodged so late in the UK Bill process that the lead committee has no time to come to a considered view. This is largely an issue for Westminster and Whitehall to solve and, if this is to happen, it will likely require the Scottish Government and Parliament campaigning together in a non-partisan manner. However, the Scottish Government could do more to help committees by setting out its views earlier, by way of a substantive and reasoned LCM, rather than sitting on the matter until late in the process when its dialogue with the UK Government concludes. If the situation does not improve in the next session, we would encourage successor

committees to continue to take this issue up with the Scottish Government, possibly through the Conveners Group.

Introduction

21. In a legacy report, a committee looks back over its work in order to draw some general and specific conclusions. The report is written mainly for our successor committee or committees in the 2026-31 Parliamentary Session, as they determine their early priorities. We hope that some others outside and inside the Parliament - the latter including the next Parliamentary Bureau, Conveners Group and Scottish Parliament Corporate Body - will also be interested in some of our views and reflect on them in their early decision-taking next Session.
22. The Committee was established in June 2021, along with most other committees and has existed for the length of this Parliamentary Session.
23. Three key issues form the main backdrop to this report. The first is that, after a good start, momentum in tackling climate change has slowed in recent years. We will not reach net zero by 2045 without sharper policy delivery. The damaging effects of climate change are **more clearly seen than ever** but, at the same time, what has so far been a relatively non-partisan consensus over the need for net zero policies might be breaking down. Whether this turns out to be true, the public are rightly concerned about quality of life and affordability issues, such as jobs and the cost of energy. We know that effective net zero policies make long-term economic sense and can deliver better outcomes for people's quality of life but policy-makers must demonstrably deliver on this.
24. Secondly, on the biodiversity crisis, it is less straightforward to quantify whether Scotland has recently been going forward or back, and regrettably the Committee has had less time to reflect on this during this Session than on net zero, but it is clear that there is much work to be done to repair our damaged ecosystems.
25. It will therefore be more important than ever for our successor committee or committees to keep on monitoring vigilantly the response of the Scottish Government and its agencies to both the climate and nature crises.
26. The third matter is the Committee's remit which, from the outset, has been much too big. Members have been privileged to serve on a committee with such interesting and important work to do and our report highlights areas where we believe we have made a positive difference. But ensuring that all significant matters falling within it are adequately scrutinised has been a close to impossible task and often frustrating. The rest of this report should be read in that context.
27. While each new Parliamentary Session brings new and often unexpected challenges, one of the most helpful things a committee can do in a legacy report is make suggestions for issues to scrutinise next Session, whether this is because it sees them as unfinished business from this Session or because there are specific reasons why the issue may come to a head in the next five years. A list of "headline" issues is set out in Annexe A of this report, along with a brief explanation of each. Annexes B-F are short sectoral summaries of the main areas within the Committee's remit, prepared by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) with help from our advisers. These briefly survey our work where relevant but are written to be future-focused. The main body of this report consists of our views on more general issues.

28. Annexe G lists interventions piloted or developed to assist the Committees, other committees and individual Members in the scrutiny of climate change-related matters, in furtherance of the Conveners Group decision to make climate change and net zero a strategic priority for committees this Session. Many of these interventions were useful and we hope they will be continued into the next Session.
 29. We formally signed this report off on 24 March 2026, the second-last sitting day of this Session. On this day, the Scottish Government published its [Climate Change Plan 2026-40](#) and, with it, a new [Environment Strategy](#) and new [Circular Economy Strategy](#). We simply note and link to them here. (There is some brief comment later in the report and annexes on these documents in anticipation of their future publication.)
30. Annexe A sets out a list of key policy issues which we would encourage successor committees to set aside time to scrutinise in the 2026-31 Parliamentary Session.

Remit

31. Broadly speaking, the Committee's remit encompasses:
- Overall delivery of climate change policies by the Scottish Government and progress in achieving "net zero" in carbon emissions by 2045;
 - All energy policy;
 - All transport policy;
 - Practically all aspects of environmental policy including addressing the biodiversity crisis;
 - The water industry and water quality;
 - Waste management, reuse and recycling;
 - Land reform.

The Committee has also led on Parliamentary scrutiny of the various independent or semi-autonomous public bodies operating within these policy areas; primarily the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, NatureScot, Environmental Standards Scotland, Scottish Water, the Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland, the Scottish Land Commission, and Zero Waste Scotland.

32. At the outset of the Parliamentary Session, another significant policy area that appeared to rest with the Committee was decarbonising heat in homes and buildings.
33. This breadth of responsibilities originates from the Parliament's agreement to a motion from the Parliamentary Bureau, when committees were being set up after the 2021 election, that there should be a committee that exactly mirrored the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET). This was a new role, effectively a "super-ministry" of diverse policy areas, with five Ministers working for or alongside the Cabinet Secretary.ⁱ
34. The Bureau would have known that a new NZET Committee would have an exceptionally large scrutiny area to cover. It seems not to have known that the Cabinet Secretary NZET remit encompassed most environmental matters, as it initially named the committee set up to mirror the remit of the Cabinet Secretary Rural Affairs and Islands (RAI), the Rural Affairs, Islands and *Natural Environment* Committee.ⁱⁱ Some initial uncertainty seems also to have existed on the governmental side. For instance, questions in the Chamber on ferries were initially taken by Cabinet Secretary RAI ¹ but shortly afterwards switched to Cabinet Secretary NZET (meaning that ferries were for this Committee). Whatever the merits of the actual decision to set up the NZET Committee, this initial uncertainty or confusion around roles did not help.

ⁱ Three at the start of the Session and five by September 2021 when [the Scottish Greens joined the government](#).

35. There are good arguments for setting up subject committees so that they align with Cabinet posts. Foremost amongst these are that they create clear lines of Parliamentary accountability at the committee level. Another view is that the Parliament should use its initiative on committee remits to, in the first place, draw up remits that seem rational and practicable to it, and treat alignment with ministerial roles as a secondary consideration, not least because Cabinet roles might be altered over a Parliamentary Session.
36. On that note, in March 2023 the first major reshuffle of this session saw the role of Cabinet Secretary NZET disbanded, with most responsibilities split between three different Cabinet Secretaries.ⁱⁱⁱ Further reshuffles have led to the Committee's original responsibilities being now split, to the Committee's understanding, between six current Cabinet Secretaries.^{iv}
37. The March 2023 reshuffle was an opportunity for the Bureau to propose a reset of committee remits, but was it not taken. Nor did this happen when, in February 2024, Transport was restored as a full Cabinet position in its own right. Over the Session, the only formal change the Committee has secured was a February resolution 2023 determining (or clarifying) that "rural land use, wildlife crime and animal welfare" were for the RAI Committee, not the NZET Committee.^v
38. At around the same time, the Committee also came to a pragmatic understanding, short of a formal remit change, with two other committees that they would in practice take over lead consideration of some matters that previously rested with us, or were thought to do so. The most significant of these was decarbonising heat in buildings.^{vi}
39. These changes were welcome but did not change the overall picture of the Committee having a very demanding remit. This has first of all led to the Committee

ii In due course it was renamed ("Natural Environment" was removed) as its title was causing understandable confusion.

iii Overall net zero delivery, energy policy, transport policy, and most environmental policy went to the new Cabinet Secretary Net Zero and Just Transition, land reform and some discrete matters pertaining to land use or the environment (e.g. Ministerial oversight of the Royal Botanic Garden) went to Cabinet Secretary RAI, and fuel poverty and net zero heat in buildings went to the new post of Cabinet Secretary Social Justice, Housing and Local Government.

iv (1) Overall net zero delivery, most environmental matters - Cabinet Secretary Climate Action and Energy; (2) transport - Cabinet Secretary Transport; (3) land reform and some environmental matters- Cabinet Secretary Rural Affairs and Islands; (4) fuel poverty - Cabinet Secretary Social Justice; (5) decarbonising heat in buildings- Cabinet Secretary Housing; (6) Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow (delivery of MVs Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa) -Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic.

v The meaning of "rural land use" is itself open to interpretation but in practice has usually meant that policies about the land use primarily for commercial rather than environmental purposes go to the RAI Committee. Land reform remained with the NZET Committee.

vi The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee agreed that going forward it would generally lead on this. The Social Justice and Social Security Committee agreed that it would lead on fuel poverty.

having an exceptionally high volume of effectively mandatory "referred" work: legislation of all types, as outlined later, plus other matters like some statutory appointments. We also received an exceptionally high volume of formal correspondence from the Scottish Government and public bodies, as well as from professional bodies, unions, NGOs and members of the public, which required due care and attention.

40. Bodies such as SEPA, Scottish Water and NatureScot have significant powers, duties and resources. It is important to hear from them about their priorities, successes and needs and also to ensure they are held to account. We aimed to hold annual public "check-ins" with all these bodies as a minimum. There was also the specific task of monitoring Environmental Standards Scotland's transition during this Session into a fully operational independent body.
41. There is an understandable expectation that the Committee will take an interest in significant Scottish Government policy proposals, even where these are not formally mandatory. Examples in this session have included Scottish Government consultations on new energy and biodiversity strategies and on its new National Planning Framework, all of which we worked on. And when things go wrong - for instance problems with the delivery of ferries for CalMac or in implementing a deposit return scheme - the public and stakeholders rightly expect that the Committee will be taking evidence and looking to hold people and organisations to account.
42. Finally there were unexpected delays in laying some legislation and the draft Climate Change Plan and, with that, one unexpected Bill (see further below), which had consequences for our planning capacity throughout this session.
43. As an illustration of the challenge facing the Committee:
 - As of late March 2026, 1531 items of correspondence have been published on the Committee's webpage. This is by some margin more than any other subject committee. None have published more than 1000 letters; many have published substantially fewer;
 - The Committee has published 83 reports as this session nears an end. The next highest number of reports amongst subject committees is 65;
 - The Committee considered 33 UKSIs. One committee considered more than this: no other committee considered more than five UKSIs;
 - The latest available Scottish Parliament statistics, for [Parliamentary Year 2024-25](#), shows the NZET Committee met for over 121 hours, longer than any other committee. The [previous year](#) tells a similar story.
44. As to the cohesiveness of the Committee's remit, for most people energy and transport are discrete issues, each important in its own right - for all that there is a net zero link, as there is in practically all policy areas. This has been recognised at Cabinet level in the Scottish Government since the middle of this Session.
45. Land reform seems even further removed from core aspects of the Committee's remit: it is not clearly a delivery mechanism for net zero, despite this appearing to be one of the reasons for its initial inclusion in the NZET super-ministry and has not had much cross-over with other matters the Committee has considered this

Session. Having land reform in the NZET Committee remit led to us being allocated the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, even though around half of the Bill was not on land reform as commonly understood but concerned technical changes to the law on agricultural tenancies: matters for the RAI Committee. Consideration lasted well over a year. In the meantime, the Scottish Government introduced the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill. This contained key reforms on matters like biodiversity targets and environmental assessment- issues on which we had gathered evidence earlier in the Session- but with the Land Reform Bill still going through this Committee and the Scottish Government keen to make progress, the new Bill was allocated to the RAI Committee. The knowledge base and institutional memory of committees was not well used during this time.

46. Overall, the division of committee responsibilities on rural and marine matters has been complex: the NZET Committee led on environmental policy, flood management and river catchments, the Crown Estate, and land reform; but not on agriculture or commercial forestry, or on animal welfare (including wild animal welfare) which, along with rural development (but not land reform) were for the RAI Committee. In relation to the sea and shoreline, the NZET led on marine planning in general and on offshore energy, as well as the Crown Estate and general marine environmental policy, but not on fisheries or aquaculture. It is questionable whether this optimised a coherent approach to scrutiny.
47. In one area the Committee's remit has arguably been too *narrow* in that, while energy policy rests with the Committee's remit, the just transition from an oil and gas-based energy economy does not. It is natural to want to consider these two matters together. In March 2023, after its initial experiment in separating them, the Scottish Government reintegrated energy and the just transition at Cabinet Secretary level.
48. The Committee's remit has been far too large from the outset, encompassing a diversity of matters in which there is great public interest, and in attempting to deal with this, the Committee has been thinly spread. The remit is also insufficiently cohesive. Overall, this has impacted the Committee's effectiveness, forcing it to be more of a responsive than a strategic, agenda-setting body, in large part focused on getting through government-generated business. This was not the role envisaged for Scottish Parliament committees.
49. While the precise parameters of committee remits will be for the next Parliament to consider, and there is no one "right" answer, our roving brief in relation to net zero and the environment has given us some insight into potentially effective synergies and what a logical and workable division of responsibilities might look like. It could, for instance, be along these lines:
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committees' scrutiny of the next draft Climate Change Plan and have the most direct working relationship with the Climate Change Committee;

- A Committee charged with considering environmental policy, rural development policy and rural land use as *integrated* matters: the interventions and trade-offs we need to achieve the twin goals of addressing the climate and nature crisis on our land and in our waters, and aligning these with other ambitions like having thriving, diversified rural and maritime economies;
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How we worked

Membership

50. Subject committees in this Session have had between seven and ten Members. The Committee has had seven. Overall, a smaller membership has probably helped rather than hindered us in getting through the Committee's formidable workload. One disadvantage relates to work outside the Committee's core meeting time, such as a visit or online discussion with stakeholders on a midweek evening: events where showing face to people outside the Parliament who have made time to meet us is important. A small membership often left us exposed to the risk of very low attendance on the Committee side.
51. The Committee started the Session with four female and three male Members. Membership changes have since left us with six male and one female Member for some time. Everyone supports the principle of having a Parliament that, as much as possible, "looks like Scotland" including on gender balance. Exactly what this means in practice, for instance at the granular level of committee membership is a nuanced matter, as a recent Scottish Parliament report on committee effectiveness noted. For a body like a Parliamentary Committee, which gathers evidence in public and goes out to meet people in communities around Scotland, a 6:1 gender balance might raise an issue of public perception and about the balance of perspectives round the table.
52. Like all committees in this Session, we have experienced membership churn, with only two Members having served continuously. Membership changes over the course of a five-year Parliament are unavoidable and to a degree welcome, as they can bring in fresh thinking and different experiences. Beyond a certain point, change becomes destabilising. It can reduce effectiveness by undermining shared ways of working and the solid base of institutional memory Committee Members have built up together.

Business planning days

53. Churn is a relevant consideration in the context of business planning days. These are informal events, typically held by committees in their first few weeks, hearing about how committee staff can help them, with some "blue-sky thinking" from subject experts from outside the Parliament. Some preferred ways of working (e.g, how to collectively prepare for evidence sessions or how to discuss and agree reports) and some early scrutiny priorities are then agreed. These are very useful events and we strongly recommend successor committees hold one early in the next Session. While we hope for less committee churn next Session, membership changes will undoubtedly happen and this - plus sometimes unexpected developments or changes in political priorities - means committees should be realistic about the length of a business planning day's "half life". If it provides a solid foundation for the first two years of a committee's work it is work well done. After this a "refresher" event should be considered.

Inquiries, "snapshots" and "check-ins"

54. Our remit and the volume of referred work that came with it was a massive challenge to strategic, long-term planning. A diet of mainly referred work meant that to our regret some policy areas were not as intensely scrutinised as we would have wished (see sector-specific annexes for more information). Notably, there has been practically no time for post-legislative scrutiny, despite the Conveners Group identifying it, rightly, as a priority for committees in this Session.
55. We had two long inquiries in the first half of the Session: on [the role of local government and its partners in delivering net zero](#), and on [the future of ferry services](#). These could be called "conventional" inquiries, in that they started with scoping out a relatively detailed remit, then agreeing an outline schedule of visits and witnesses (the latter updated as the inquiry continued) and a general call for views that gave respondents eight weeks or more to reply. Both led to Chamber debates.
56. This is without doubt the best way for committees to gather in-depth evidence on specific matters and produce reports with impact, seeking to move the debate on and hold people and bodies properly to account for performance and delivery. A key message of this report is that successor committees should look to do more of this. But these turned out to be the last such inquiries we had time to undertake, as work volume and scheduling problems took over. Inquiry work thereafter was more opportunistic, as we looked to be nimble and make space for "snapshot" inquiries over perhaps two or three weeks - in between mandatory work - with a short report or letter agreed shortly thereafter. Public "check-ins" with public bodies (to discuss their annual reports and accounts and key priorities) or with Cabinet Secretaries (to discuss key issues of public concern within their remit) also became a major element of our work. In at least one case, mandatory work (on a legislative consent memorandum) was turned into effectively a [mini-inquiry that went wider than the LCM itself](#).
57. Whilst more limited in impact - and with far less opportunity for buy-in from stakeholders and the public than we would have wished - these are all valid ways for committees to try to cover key issues when time is tight, and at least draw out some headline issues.

Visits and informal engagements

58. Meetings, mainly comprising public evidence-taking followed by formal decision-taking, were the mainstay of the Committee's work. Committees are public-facing bodies which means taking public evidence and publicly holding people and bodies to account. This is important for transparency. But being public-facing also at times means meeting people where they are and this is a crucial aspect of any committee's work. Visits and informal engagements are first a learning experience for Members themselves, providing insights formal evidence sessions cannot. But they also help give more credibility to the committee's work and eventual outputs, like its reports.
59. As noted, there are challenges in arranging visits and other informal events with a

smaller committee. They also tend to take place when Members look to arrange constituency business or possibly cross into weekends. They are nonetheless crucial to have, and we made a significant number during this Session, travelling the breadth of Scotland: from Orkney to Langholm, and from the Uists to Aberdeen, amongst other places. Every significant inquiry or major Bill involved at least one visit. Two trips to the Ferguson Marine shipyard at Port Glasgow (where the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa were being built) are examples of visits also adding value in relation to "rolling" scrutiny work that was never formally an inquiry.

60. Beside site visits, we ensured there was almost always a community element to visits, where we met grassroots bodies or individuals with an interest relevant to the matter in hand: small business owners, farmers, small charities and volunteer groups, etc. The increasing normalisation and mainstreaming of online communication also provides brilliant opportunities for committees to connect with seldom-heard groups: it can help remove cost, time and travel barriers, offering a chance for people from diverse communities to engage.
61. Good examples of the value of both types of discussion (i.e. in-person and online) come from our work on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill.² In Aberfeldy, we met a cross-section of locals who talked frankly about some of the pressures the community felt- house prices, jobs, local services, etc - and the role they felt local land ownership patterns played in these- in a way that could not have been reproduced at a formal committee meeting. There was similar straight talking at an online meeting about tenant farming, held on a weekday evening when people were more likely to be available. People from across rural Scotland talked about the variety of experiences, good and bad (sometimes shockingly so) in their and their families lives as tenant farmers. This brought home the added value remote meetings can bring to scrutiny, with both discussions leading to questions to the Scottish Government during later scrutiny of the Bill.
62. In these and similar cases, we benefited from the patient preparatory work of the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT) working over several weeks with local and sectoral third-sector partners to identify and connect with potential participants and provide assurance that they could share their experience safely. This underlines that committees need to allow for lead-in time to make these events work well.

Deliberative democracy and People's Panels

63. This Session committees, led by the [Citizen's Participation and Public Petitions \(CPPP\) Committee](#) have experimented with models of [deliberative public engagement](#), principally in the form of "People's Panels". In its legacy report, the Scottish Parliament's Conveners Group (CG) concluded that these pilots had "improved scrutiny, strengthened trust and deepened public understanding." It looks highly likely that People's Panels will be a feature of scrutiny next Session (the CPPP Committee report recommended that CG commission four panels over the 2026-31 Session). There are views that Panels may add value tackling "stalemated" policy questions where traditional political processes have struggled, long-term thinking is needed, and difficult trade-offs may be involved.³

64. We were pleased to be part of this pilot work when CG approved our proposal for a People's Panel on how well the Scottish Government was engaging with the public on climate change and emissions reduction targets. In Spring 2024, 23 individuals, randomly selected from across Scotland and weighted to ensure a good balance in terms of demographics and views, convened at the Parliament to hear from experts and collaborate to produce recommendations to support committee scrutiny. There is more information on the process - who the Panel heard from and how they deliberated - and on the outcome in the [report](#) that the Panel themselves prepared, with help from PACT.
65. We took evidence from some of the panellists shortly afterwards and made use of their conclusions and recommendations in further briefings for evidence sessions. Conclusions and recommendations were grouped around four core themes - accessible policy, community-led action, transparency and household support. We also shared the Panel report with the Scottish Government to seek its views on the conclusions and recommendations and subsequently took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary. The Scottish Government called the report an "important source of evidence" for the review of their Public Engagement Strategy which influenced policy actions to explore longer term funding for Climate Action Hubs and improve data collection to monitor changes in public attitudes and behaviour about climate change. ⁴ The themes in the report also had an important "second life" later in the Session. They were a source of evidence when we undertook scrutiny of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill under a fast-tracked timetable, and they framed our discussions and consultations with communities and young people when we considered the draft Climate Change Plan.
66. We thank the People's Panel, and those experts who contributed evidence to the process, for the time they took to contribute to the Committee's work this Session.

International engagement

67. The Committee's opening months coincided with preparations for COP26 in Glasgow and the event itself. The Convener and Members took part in work around the conference and accessed and presented at some events. With help from [Globe International](#), it was an especially useful opportunity to forge links with legislators around the world and discuss different ways of holding governments to account on reducing emissions. The following year, we again collaborated with Globe to host from Edinburgh an online event for legislators from around the world at COP27 in Egypt.
68. In this Session, the Committee led the Scottish Parliament's engagement with the [Arctic Circle Assembly](#), held annually in Reykjavik each October. The Assembly is the largest international gathering on the Arctic and near-Arctic, with thousands of delegates from a variety of disciplines: politics, academia, NGOs, regulators, etc. The event has a strong slant on green energy, decarbonisation, and the environment. From the Parliament's perspective, a key aspect of the Assembly is its openness and non-hierarchical approach, with practically all seminars and events open to all and no difference in status and access between delegates from devolved and nation state-level Parliaments. Attendance also enables direct contact with politicians and experts from places not that different from Scotland, allowing for

very practical discussions about policies and interventions that have or have not worked well, on matters like energy self-sufficiency, heat in buildings, nature conservation, or even inter-island tunnels. Committee Members took part in all three Scottish Parliament delegations (2022, 2023, 2024) and led seminars in two of these (on Scotland's wind energy journey and on our nascent natural capital policies).

69. Attendance at the Assembly also created an opening for the Committee to build links with two other democratic institutions. The first was the Icelandic Parliament, the Althing, and especially its Environment and Communications Committee, whom we have been pleased to meet four times in this Session: thrice in Reykjavik and once in Edinburgh. There was a real interest in learning from each other: for instance about the different approaches our two countries had taken so far on wind power. The second body is the Nordic Council, a forum for discussing and agreeing policy for legislators from all the Nordic nations and autonomies, where initial connections have been made with potential for growth in the next Session.⁵

70. In their October 2025 "[Strengthening Committees' Effectiveness](#)" report, the Standards Procedures and Public Appointment Committee commented that:

- "... churn in membership does not help create a sense of collegiate working as committee members need time to get to know each other and build up expertise and understanding; and
- "We also agree with the concerns expressed that larger committees present practical issues with meeting management and ensuring there are opportunities to probe more deeply into issues."

We agree with this. We also agree with their view that committees should seek to normally reflect the gender balance of the Parliament, recognising the practical barriers that mean this cannot be done on all committees all the time. The Parliamentary Bureau and party business managers should consider working to avoid allowing significant gender imbalances to persist on a committee for long periods.

71. We recommend that successor committees hold a business planning day early on in the Session to hear from experts, set out some agreed principles on ways of working, and agree early scrutiny priorities. While it will be for successor committees to determine what works for them, based on our own experience, we think it is important for committees to find time from the outset for substantial inquiries based on carefully considered terms of references, with plenty of time for stakeholders and members of the public to provide their views. We also strongly recommend continuing to create spaces for more informal information-gathering, to ensure committees hear from a diverse range of individuals, by providing more accessible and potentially safer opportunities for people to share their experiences than in formal meetings.
72. We hope successor committees will be able to build on our international engagement in this session, discussing practical matters of common interest in relation to green energy, decarbonisation and the environment with counterparts at the Arctic Circle Assembly, Icelandic Parliament and Nordic Council.

73. We note the use of People's Panels during Session 6, in which we took part, and invite successor committees to consider whether commissioning a panel would support scrutiny work in specific areas next Session.

Climate Change Plan: scrutiny of the draft Plan

74. The Committee started this Session knowing that one of our main tasks would be scrutiny of a draft of the next Climate Change Plan. The CCP is a strategy document which outlines how the Scottish Government intends to meet carbon emissions reduction targets across all portfolio areas and sectors of the economy. The law at the time required a new one to be laid by March 2025. Early in the Session, the Scottish Government committed to laying a draft in the Parliament by November 2023, meaning a new one would be in place by no later than late Spring 2024.
75. It is only as the Committee is finalising this report, in the last few days of this Parliamentary session, that a new CCP is about to be laid. The story behind this is detailed in paragraphs 41-77 of our [recent report on the draft CCP](#) but in summary:
- by autumn 2023 the Scottish Government considered it was no longer in a position to lay a satisfactory draft by November and instead committed to meet the statutory backstop of March 2025 for a finalised Plan;
 - by spring 2024, the Scottish Government had accepted new Climate Change Committee (CCC) advice that it was bound to miss a key statutory emissions target and considered this left it no choice but to bring in a Bill to amend the law. This would also involve moving the CCP deadline back, to give itself more time to adjust to the CCC's advice and the revised process;
 - the Bill was agreed to by the Parliament in autumn 2024. It did not create a clear backstop for laying the next CCP. Instead, a new requirement for the CCC to provide advice on interim emissions targets would kick off a process of several steps, ending up with the Scottish Government having to lay the next CCP;
 - before, during and after passage of the Bill, the Scottish Government committed to having a new Plan in place before the election, provided they got the CCC's advice sufficiently early.
76. Delay in laying a new Plan was detrimental in the general sense of leading to what the CCC described to us as a "vacuum"⁶ in climate change policy, rather than the reset and new momentum the new Plan could potentially provide. It had two other specific outcomes that affected the Committee.
77. First these largely un-signposted delays inhibited the Committee's forward planning. There were significant periods when we did not know when to expect the CCP. The 2024 Bill, which became the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act, made what we believe will be a positive change to the regulatory framework for climate change policies (see below), but was another unexpected matter for the Committee to deal with and meant yet more time spent discussing the process and metrics of net zero rather than how to make it happen.
78. Secondly, the Scottish Government was left with an extremely narrow landing space

to lay a draft Plan, have it considered by the Parliament in line with statutory deadlines, take account of the Parliament's views, as well as responses to its own concurrent consultation, and then lay a final and concluded Plan before dissolution. In our [Stage 1 report on the 2024 Bill](#), we had warned of this risk, pointing to treatment of the last draft Climate Change Plan^{vii} in the Parliament as an example not to follow.⁷ In last month's [report on the draft CCP](#) we said it was:

” ... disappointing now to be in a situation where the Scottish Government has given itself a maximum of three weeks to reflect on recommendations from Parliamentary Committees and consultation responses from experts, industry and the public. While we accept that the process laid out in statute does not give the Scottish Government complete control over timetabling, this is not good practice and lowers confidence that we have a robust consideration process. There are steps a future Scottish Government could take to ensure this result is avoided when the next draft Plan is laid.⁸

79. We also made a more specific comment that "the absence of a statutory minimum period before the Scottish Government can lay a finalised Plan: so that it has time to reflect on Parliamentary recommendations and consultation responses, should be addressed early in the next parliament "⁹ and undertook to revisit this in our legacy report.^{viii}
80. A specific issue for a future committee to note is that when the Scottish Government laid its draft Plan in the Parliament in November, launching the statutory 120-day Parliamentary scrutiny period, it also launched a public consultation on the draft. This created handling difficulties for the Committee: we wanted to hear from experts and the public but knew that parallel public consultation would confuse. Instead we:
- had a general call for evidence in summer 2025 on what should be in the Plan;
 - specifically asked four key regulators, again well in advance of the draft being laid, what the components of a "good Climate Change Plan" would be (more on this in next section);
 - ran an online discussion forum during the 120-day period, targeted (with assistance from PACT) at harder to reach individuals and groups, rather than being a general consultation.

vii Technically a CCP "update" rather than a Plan laid formally under the statutory process. The Scottish Government left itself three weeks to consider committees' comments on the draft and did not, in the end, make any changes to it

viii The relevant provision is 35(1) of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which does not require a pause period between 120-day period of Parliamentary consideration of a draft Plan and the laying of the final Plan. It must be read alongside section 35A(1)(b) of the 2009 Act which requires the Scottish Government to "have regard" to (amongst others) any recommendations or resolutions about the draft Plan from the Scottish Parliament or any report about the draft Plan by the CCC. What this means in practice is unclear but it appears the Scottish Government is satisfied that around three weeks is adequate time, legally, to have regard to the Parliament's and CCC's views on the draft, otherwise it would have given itself more time.

This, or something broadly similar, is a possible blueprint for a future committee if, as we expect, the same specific issue recurs when the next draft Plan is laid.

81. The process by which consideration of the draft Climate Change Plan unfolded in this session was unsatisfactory and lessons should be learned from it. We recommend to our successor committee that it ask the Scottish Government to commit, relatively early, to a timetable for having the next CCP in place, on the clear common understanding that, barring highly unforeseen circumstances, this will be adhered to. Specifically, the Committee should also seek an undertaking early in the next Session that a draft Plan will be laid in sufficient time to allow the Scottish Government to reflect properly on any representations made on the draft (by Scottish Parliament committees or others) before laying a final Plan. As a rough guideline, we suggest the gap be at least 8 weeks. In practice, this means that a draft Plan should be laid by no later than shortly after summer recess 2030. The option of passing amending legislation to ensure that the Scottish Government gives itself adequate "thinking time" should be held in reserve.

Wider reflections on monitoring delivery of climate change policies

Monitoring emissions in an era of carbon budgets

82. Next Session, our successor committee will be measuring progress in driving down emissions against five-year carbon budgets rather than straight-line annual targets. This is the norm in other UK legislatures but will be new for the Scottish Parliament.
83. We see this change as positive for two main reasons.^{ix} First, the link between what are in effect new interim emission reduction targets and the independent advice on setting these - from the CCC - is now more direct. The numbers in the agreed carbon budgets are exactly what the CCC advised. Previously, advice was noted but the Parliament then went on to set its own targets.¹⁰ In the CCC's view it was the impossibility of reaching the statutory target set for 2030 that was the main factor delaying the laying of a new CCP in this Session. In April 2024, they told us they had had "deep concerns" about the realism of this target from the outset, that it was the "wrong" target, and had "said that we had no path to hit it".¹¹
84. Secondly, with interim targets measured over five-year spans, this might mean less attention paid to short-term trends and "blips" (like a cold winter) and more on what works in the longer term. Whilst this is good, there is a balance to be struck, given the need to continue to move successfully at pace if we are to meet the 2045 target and to correct course if things are going wrong.^x
85. The Scottish Government will continue to produce its own annual emissions data (albeit time-lagged by around 18 months). The draft Climate Change Plan also committed the Scottish Government to providing "early-warning indicators" for each sector of the Plan, although it did not itself set these out. These indicators would not be an unpolished or "raw" form of emissions data obtained earlier than the official data: they relate to specific outcomes considered to have a positive climate change impact. (An example might be percentage of new car registrations that are ultra-low emissions vehicles.) Our [report on the draft Plan](#) said that:

^{ix} There is more extensive discussion of these issues in our [Stage 1 report on the Climate Change \(Emissions Reductions\) \(Scotland\) Act Bill](#), paras 52-83

^x Until the passing in 2024 of the Bill that brought in carbon budgets, the Scottish Ministers had to produce a report on how they would compensate for failure to make an annual emissions target (a "section 36 report") any year they missed a target. The report is now only be needed if a five-year carbon budget was not met. We said in our report that this could be too late and that there should be an earlier trigger. The Scottish Government did not agree and kept the Bill as it was in this area.

” Having a comprehensive mix of "early warning indicators" across the breadth of the plan will also be vital if it is to be a successful delivery document. Not only would this assist the Parliament, academia and regulatory bodies in their scrutiny work, it would also provide a public service of setting out progress in particular areas in a relatively straightforward way. The Committee recommends that:

- the Scottish Government should publish early warning indicators at the earliest opportunity;
- the Scottish Government should consider renaming the indicators to be "performance indicators";^{xi}
- regardless of this, they should frame the indicators clearly around performance - with each one tracking a clear delivery goal with read across to corresponding significant policies in the CCP;
- the Scottish Government should consider developing an indicators-based "dashboard" as a transparent and accessible way of communicating net zero progress to the public. The CCC should have a role in monitoring progress against the relevant indicators.¹²

86. Crucially, another way for future committees to track progress is by having in-depth inquiries into decarbonising specific sectors: whether that is one over-arching area (e.g transport) or an area within that (e.g. freight or trains). We hope committees operating in our areas of scrutiny in the next Session will have more time for such inquiries than we have had. Performance indicators and emissions data could be a jumping-off point for in-depth analysis of performance, delivery, opportunities and barriers. Scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan is a narrow window of opportunity to consider how to decarbonise specific sectors and ideally the main work should be done earlier.

Key scrutiny partnerships

87. Annual Scotland progress reports by the Climate Change Committee will continue to be key analysis of progress under a carbon budgeting regime, as they were under annual targets. These reports provide not only key emissions data but also high-level analysis of how the Scottish Government is faring in each sector, drawing early attention to areas of potential risk where a Plan B may be needed.

88. The Parliament has benefited for some time from a fruitful relationship with the CCC. In the first half of this Session, we continued what had become the regular practice of having the CCC give evidence on their report a short time after it issued. Delays in CCP timetabling affected the timing of CCC reports later in this Session, and a specific issue also arose with their most recent report (see below). The CCC gave evidence on other occasions; for instance on their May 2025 carbon budget advice to the Scottish Government. They have briefed or given evidence to other committees in this Session. They have also given briefings to Conveners Group ,

^{xi} We said this because the indicators could be used to track success as much as failure.

further to CG's agreement to make climate change a strategic priority for committees.

89. The CCC is the statutory independent adviser to all four governments of the United Kingdom and to the UK Parliament. It is not in the same legal sense an adviser to the Scottish Parliament (or other devolved legislatures) but for most of its existence this appears never to have been an issue. Officials on both sides have also benefited from a good relationship. Within the bounds of its resources and responsibilities, including the responsibility to be independent of governments and politics, it has responded positively to requests for evidence or briefings and over the years been a valued "candid friend" of the Parliament in its work on net zero. We hope the CCC will continue to speak up about climate change, and governments' responses to it, in the frank manner we have become used to.
90. An issue arose late in this session when we invited the CCC to give evidence on the draft CCP, as they had done for prior draft iterations in previous Sessions. It was important to hear from them given their role providing the advice on carbon budgets and also as they have a specific legal responsibility to comment on the draft Plan in any Scotland progress report falling in a year when a draft is laid.
91. Unfortunately the CCC were of the view that they could not provide evidence until their own report on the draft Plan was out. This would be just within the 120-day period allocated by statute for Parliamentary consideration but too late for the Committee to take account of in our own report, which had to be published at around the same time.^{xii} The CCC did provide evidence on 3 March, two days before the Parliamentary debate on the draft and we are grateful to them for doing so. It is important to put on the record the CCC Chief Executive's recent comment during the session that they "will never do a public hearing if we have not finished our analysis. That precedent is long established in the work of the CCC."¹³ Nonetheless, it came as a disappointment and a genuine surprise to the Committee that they could not directly contribute to the evidence base for our report.
92. There are also three Scotland-based oversight bodies who will perform a crucial role in helping successor committees monitor delivery in emissions reductions and other areas of climate change policy:
- Audit Scotland with their focus on internal governance, partnerships and value for money in the public sector. Their work on climate change this Session included sector-specific reports (for instance on [decarbonising heat in homes](#)) and more general surveys like their [How the Scottish Government is set up to deliver climate change goals](#) report that we took evidence on this Session;
 - The Scottish Fiscal Commission which looks at the long-term financial sustainability of the Scottish Government and public sector's legal and policy commitments. This includes [important work during this Session on climate change](#) on which we again took evidence;
 - Environmental Standards Scotland whose powers and duties include power to carry out investigations (and "pre-investigations") about public authorities'

^{xii} They did offer to provide the Committee with a private informal briefing within the timescale, which was declined. There is more discussion of the circumstances in paragraphs 72-77 of our [report on the draft Climate Change Plan](#).

adherence to environmental law and standards, including matters like [whether a Scottish Government Climate Change Plan is compliant with statutory requirements](#).

All three, along with the CCC helped us prepare for scrutiny of the draft CCP by responding to a request for views on [what would make a 'good' Climate Change Plan](#) before the draft itself was laid.

Climate change as a cross-committee priority

93. Despite the challenges to effective scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan outlined above, we are satisfied that we carried out an effective job under the circumstances, hearing from a wide variety of interests over the available period, and presenting a detailed report to the Parliament covering all the main aspects of the draft. It helped hugely to have support from other committees. Nine contributed, more than for any prior draft Plan, with five in particular providing in-depth discussion of matters within their remit in reports or letters of their own.
94. Scrutiny of climate change and net zero has been helped considerably by the Conveners Group's decision, early in the Session, to make this matter a cross-cutting priority for all committees. Amongst other things, this created a positive environment for cross-committee scrutiny of the draft CCP. In the run-up to laying it, the NZET Committee ensured other committees were kept apprised of developments and key milestones, through a combination of Convener correspondence, discussions at CG, and official-to-official communications informally and at seminars. Specialist briefings were prepared for all major sectors covered by the Plan and on cross-cutting matters, such as the division of devolved and reserved responsibilities on net zero.
95. The CG's decision has also been helpful in unlocking specific interventions to assist Members and staff in this Session. For instance, CG agreed to request annual briefings on progress on emissions from the CCC. Tailored support was also offered to help MSPs, identify climate relevance, interpret evidence, and incorporate climate questions into inquiry, legislative or budget scrutiny. The NZET Committee also secured an external advisor on net zero and climate change with an express role of being available to assist other committees in their work in this area. A proposal agreed to by CG of embedding a change in Standing Orders was less successful. This was intended as an express requirement for promoters of Bills to "show their working" in supporting documents as to how the Bill would impact emissions (in effect a mirror image in legislation of some of the good practice the Scottish Government are seeking to embed in their budget preparation work- see below). The door is open to our successor committee to re-open this matter in the next Session. If so, experience shows that it would be best to build interest in this as early as possible.^{xiii}

^{xiii} Although first broached at Conveners Group early in the Parliamentary Session (relevant correspondence between this Committee and the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), formal consideration on a specific rule change by the SPPA Committee took place only in January 2026. In [subsequent correspondence](#), the Committee said they did not consider they had been

96. Annexe G provides more information on initiatives piloted in this Session under the auspices of the CG strategic priority, which we hope will be continued and developed into the next Session.

Expert and specialist support for committees

97. The Committee and committees generally have benefited from increased expert and specialist support in its climate change and net zero scrutiny this Session. Early in the Session, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) was authorised to recruit an additional net-zero energy specialist and a further research specialist on long-term secondment to assist in bolstering committees' work in furtherance of the "strategic priority" goals it had identified. The Committee has also welcomed having two independent advisors from the academic sector to assist in our work.^{xiv}
98. Through a post funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, the Parliament has strengthened its work on academic engagement to support net zero scrutiny in this Session. This helped the Committee's research staff develop new tools and approaches for engaging the academic community and mapping stakeholder expertise. This helped us get timely insights and expertise from academia, including from voices and perspectives from academics from across the UK who had never engaged with the Parliament before. Examples of how this work has helped us include:
- piloting of Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) for scrutiny of the draft CCP that helped identify key academics with relevant expertise who would be well placed to give evidence;
 - an engagement event that brought 35 academics together with clerking and SPICe colleagues at the start of the draft CCP scrutiny period to identify suggestions of priority issues for scrutiny across the sectors covered by the CCP. Outputs from this event fed into Committee briefings;
 - strong representation of academics in oral evidence sessions on the draft CCP.
 - away from CCP scrutiny, numerous climate academics giving evidence in the Scottish Parliament for the first time to support NZET Committee climate scrutiny of issues spanning climate resilience, carbon budgets to sustainable aviation fuel.

Adaptation and resilience

99. We had insufficient time to adequately monitor the performance and policies of the
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provided with sufficient, and sufficiently clear, information to persuade them a change in Standing Orders would produce positive change.

^{xiv} Of these, one advised on environmental regulation from a legal perspective so was not directly a "climate change adviser" but in practice the Committee and SPICe researchers found that both advisers were able to provide useful insight and counsel on different aspects of climate change work.

Scottish Government and public bodies on adaptation to climate change and resilience to extreme weather events in this Session. Perhaps because it is easier to map progress in emissions reduction than in adaptation and resilience, where "progress" is more ambiguous, and also because there is no "set-piece event" for it equivalent to Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft CCP as set out in statute, there is a risk of adaptation and resilience being relatively less scrutinised.

100. The current National Adaptation Plan (SNAP3) runs from 2024 to 2029. There will be an opportunity for committees in the next Session to be involved in appraising the success of SNAP3 in the run-up to its replacement. However committees end up being configured in the next Session, it is important to bear in mind that scrutiny of adaptation and resilience to extreme weather is, or should be, a collective enterprise for committees in much the same way that scrutiny of the draft CCP is. For instance, the issues could be considered through the lens of agriculture and land use (e.g, drought or peatland fires), the NHS (e.g. threats to people's health from extreme weather), or the work of emergency responders (e.g, responses to flood or fire). As in other areas, there is also the option of laying the groundwork for future scrutiny through commissioned research.
101. The next Parliament, led by our successor committee on net zero, will be the first to assess progress in emissions reduction against five-year budgets not annual targets. This may require some changes and there is an opportunity to consider what has emerged as good practice in other UK legislatures where five-year budgets have been the norm. To some extent, a switch to five-year budgeting is about avoiding short-termist thinking about "success" and "failure" in emissions reduction. But it will still be important to know early if policies are going off track.
102. We suggest the successor committee charged with net zero oversight continue to aim to have set-piece annual check-ins with the Climate Change Committee and Scottish Government to assess progress and any emerging areas of difficulty. Audit Scotland, the Scottish Fiscal Commission and Environmental Standards Scotland are other key bodies. We strongly encourage our successor committee to continue the dialogue about emissions policy we had with them during this Session. Jointly these bodies can provide a realistic take on how the ambitions of government (at all levels) and agencies match up over the longer term to the real-life challenges of delivery.
103. We also encourage our successor committee on net zero to play an active role early next Session in ensuring "early warning" or performance indicators that can serve as proxies for measuring progress in emissions reduction are in place across all sectors, that they look to be good, measurable indicators, and that there are clear regular reporting mechanisms for them.
104. We would also strongly encourage successor committees to make space in their work programmes to prioritise sector-specific inquiry work about decarbonisation, and to encourage other subject committees to do so. The best opportunities for such work may come early in the Session, before major legislation is rolled out. This is important work in itself but also good preparation for scrutiny of the next draft Climate Change Plan. The 120 days allocated to the Parliament for draft CCP scrutiny, likely towards the end of next Session, is never likely to give committees much opportunity to drill down in depth into the practical detail of

delivery in specific sectors. The groundwork must be laid earlier through a rolling programme of inquiry work.

105. The Parliament has benefited over the years from a strong working relationship with the Climate Change Committee. Our successor committee leading on net zero scrutiny should continue to work on maintaining an effective relationship. As we said in a recent report, it was regrettable the CCC did not consider itself able to provide formal evidence during the period of committee scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan. We added (and repeat here) that:

” Early in the next Session, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and the CCC should work together to find a constructive way forward, addressing any perceived or actual barriers to the CCC providing evidence during this crucial period.

106. It will be for the next Convener's Group to decide whether to continue to deem climate change and net zero to be a cross-cutting strategic priority for committees in the next Session. We think this has been successful in raising the profile and salience of these matters across committees, encouraging cross-committee scrutiny, and improving Members' and committees' access to information and data. It helped create the conditions for an unprecedented level of committee engagement in scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan. Whatever CG may formally determine next session, climate change is too big, systemic and multidisciplinary for one committee to cover it effectively. We encourage successor committees and the next CG to work to promote the same level of cross-committee cooperation and communication, and support for net zero scrutiny, as we achieved this Session, and to support techniques and approaches to assist Members and committees in their work being continued into the next Session.

107. We would strongly encourage our successor committee leading on climate change in the next Session to ensure that the Parliament plays an effective public role in considering the effectiveness of policies on adaptation to climate change and resilience in the run-up to the laying of a new National Adaptation Plan when the current one ends in 2029. This could include encouraging other committees to play their part in this work. Audit Scotland, ESS and the Scottish Fiscal Commission are again likely to be key partners in this work. There is also the option to commission research on the delivery of specific aspects of this in the run-up to 2029.

The budget process and its link to climate change policy

108. Over this Session, the Committee tracked progress in implementing the [Joint Budget Review](#). This was also the matter we pursued most consistently in our annual pre-budget representations to the Scottish Government. The JBR's remit was "to improve budget information on climate change – to understand and reduce spend that will 'lock in' future greenhouse gas emissions and increase alignment between the budget and climate change plans."^[1] It started as a joint review by Scottish Government and Parliament officials but the three strands of future working to emerge from the JBR's June 2022 [final report](#) were for the Scottish Government to implement and develop.
109. Strand 1 was to establish a "climate impacts narrative section" within the Budget: a "qualitative description of the impacts of policy" and thus far is most developed of the three. Strand 2 was to expand the taxonomy approach currently applied only to capital spending, to cover all resource and capital spending. The "taxonomy approach" is a classification system for budget spend lines, setting how they align (or don't) with emissions reduction goals. The 2022 report said this would be developed over the coming years, with the Scottish Government considering how to both "deepen" the taxonomy and expand its coverage so it will be more useful for scrutiny. The Scottish Government pledged to consult the Parliament as this is developed.
110. We welcomed initial work to develop a climate narrative and taxonomy approach to accompany and inform the Budget but they require further development. This means providing more depth and detail on information or data, showing where it has come from and, where required, how it aligns with that source (e.g. work by the CCC or the Scottish Government's own work in preparing its annual monitoring report on the CCP).
111. The taxonomy approach was introduced essentially as a traffic-light system, with spend lines graded as having a neutral, negative or positive impact on emissions reduction (the latter two further graded as "high" or "low"). This has the advantage of simplicity but there is not enough granular detail given for a proper understanding of how the system helps the Scottish Government take key spending decisions that drive forward, or are at least consistent with, emission reduction goals. We also noted that some budget lines labelled as "positive" appear to have only a limited connection to climate change or that a single quite high level spending line (for instance, the running costs of an environmental agency) could be labelled as "positive", without further breakdown. Overall, the taxonomy approach could do more to "join the dots" on how thinking about net zero has informed specific budget decisions.
112. Strand 3 of the JBR's output was development of a Net Zero Assessment process to evaluate the climate impact of policies and their associated budgets early in the policy development stage. The Scottish Government said this would filter policies, identifying those with a high impact and lead to more precise calculations on the impact of policy decisions on the climate. The Scottish Government piloted the Assessment in 2024 and in a [2025 review](#) described this as "successful", with the

key finding that “the pilot proved the methodology is workable and credible and can be recommended for wider roll out across the Scottish Government”. Some challenges were listed including that:

- On the basis of prior experience, "intensive resources" would be needed for roll-out across government.
- The Assessment must align with other SG impact assessments, on governance, processes and analysis.
- There would need to be early engagement on running the Assessment with relevant policy teams considering new policies, which "is a challenge, even for established impact assessments".

113. The Net Zero Assessment process has the potential to be positive in developing more climate-friendly policies but it is only in the coming Session that it will become clear how significant a feature of government decision-making it will be. A [January 2026](#) response from the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy was helpful in answering some of our questions about the Assessment (and on the other two strands of the JBR), although some responses raised fresh questions a committee in the next Session may wish to tease out.^{xv}

114. A specific question for a future committee to reflect on may be the extent to which Net Zero Assessment has been mainstreamed and normalised across the main spending departments. The Cabinet Secretary's January response provided detail on "significant engagement and awareness-raising" about the Assessment that was ongoing across government, but the Committee was interested to note that when, shortly afterwards, we asked the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and officials about their plans for using the Assessment process, they indicated that they had little to say on this and the question related to a matter that should be answered by the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy.¹⁴

115. We encourage our successor committee to continue to monitor all three strands of the Joint Budget Review over the coming session, and where necessary press for their roll-out. All three have the potential to add value, in terms of understanding whether budget choices are consistent with climate change goals. The strands are at different stages of development, with the climate narrative strand the most developed and Net Zero Assessment the least. The Net Zero Assessment strand is the most significant, in its capacity to improve the mechanics of actual government decision-taking relevant to climate change upstream of determining what specific interventions to make. Only in the coming Parliamentary session will it be possible to begin drawing conclusions about all of this, and only if all three strands continue to be developed and become a mainstream part of budget planning in the manner indicated in the final JBR

^{xv} One example is the letter's clarification that a "screening test" is used to exclude proposed new policies from the Assessment on *de minimis* grounds. The metric for this is the amount of emissions the new policy would generate. A key feature of the Assessment, as we understand it, is that runs early on in policy development- when the full impacts of a policy (including emissions) are presumably still be worked out.

report.

Legislation

116. Here we set out general observations and recommendations on legislation in its various forms. More specific policy-related comments arising from our legislative scrutiny are in the relevant sector-specific annexes.

Bills

117. We considered four Bills as lead Committee:

- Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill;
- Land Reform (Scotland) Bill;
- Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Bill;
- Ecocide (Scotland) Bill (this was the only Member's Bill).

On current trends, this is probably around the average of what a subject committee can expect to receive during a Session but needs to be placed in context of the Committee being generally busy with a large amount of referred work, of all types (including the draft CCP), as discussed earlier. All four Bills touched on complex subjects and required careful scrutiny. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill in particular was long. It touched on matters relatively new to the Committee. Our direct involvement with the Bill began in March 2024 and did not end until summer recess 2025, when Stage 2 drew to a close.

118. There were scheduling issues around all four Bills, with the Bills on climate change and land reform introduced somewhat later than the committee had initially understood, which was unhelpful for our forward planning. As discussed earlier, it had not been part of the Scottish Government's plan to introduce the Bill on climate change at all, and considering it required the Committee to clear the decks of other planned work in September and October 2024. While the Bill was still expedited, we successfully pushed for more time to consider it at Stage 1 than the Scottish Government would have wished and consider this time well spent. To its credit, the Scottish Government responded positively to our request for more time to consider the Bills on the circular economy and land reform, mainly in order to take account of key documentation produced during the scrutiny process.

119. The Ecocide Bill, a Member's Bill, proposed by Monica Lennon MSP (also a Member of the NZET Committee^{xvi}) was introduced on 29 May 2025. This is already quite late in the five-year Parliamentary calendar and it was referred to the Committee at a time when, on top of a continuing stream of other mandatory work, the scrutiny process for the draft Climate Change Plan was heating up, carbon budget regulations having just been lodged. The Bill passed Stage 1 despite our recommendation (by a majority) that we did not see "a realistic prospect of the key concerns raised in this report being addressed comprehensively within the limited time remaining before the end of this Parliamentary Session" and therefore did not support the general principles of the Bill.¹⁵ It looks like at dissolution the Bill will fall at Stage 2.

120. While the Committee's position at Stage 1 was not unanimous, we all agree that if (a) the Bureau had been more aware of the Committee's heavy workload during the critical period for the Bill and (b) the Bill had been introduced earlier, there would have been a much better prospect of it reaching a Stage 3 vote before dissolution after a sufficiently thorough Stage 2 process.^{xvii}
121. There is generally thought to be a growing trend (not just in Scotland) of Bills being "framework Bills". In an inquiry into this matter earlier in this Session, the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee defined these as:
- ” ... legislation that sets out the principles for a policy but does not include substantial detail on how that policy will be given practical effect. Instead, this type of legislation seeks to give broad powers to ministers or others to fill in this detail at a later stage.¹⁶
122. That Committee concluded that wherever possible:
- ” ... the detail of legislation to be spelled out on the face of a Bill to allow for transparency, proper democratic engagement, and so that stakeholders and parliamentarians can engage with and scrutinise solid proposals. The Committee recognises the need in some cases for primary legislation to provide flexibility, by allowing for laws to be updated without requiring further Bills. In such cases though, the Committee argues for any delegated powers to be clear and well defined, and steps to be taken to strengthen scrutiny of both the primary legislation delegating the power and subsequent secondary legislation made under it.¹⁷
123. Few, if any, Bills are entirely framework in their drafting but many contain a large number of framework provisions, sometimes covering some of the most important elements of the Bill. This was the case with the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill. In our [Stage 1 report](#) we sought to set out a collective view on the challenges of scrutinising framework legislation:

^{xvi} In accordance with Standing Orders, Monica Lennon took no part in relation to deliberation or decisions about the Bill in Committee. The Labour Party substitute Sarah Boyack was entitled to take part in these and in most cases did.

^{xvii} The Bill was introduced on 29 May 2025. The normal deadline under Standing Orders for lodging a Member's Bill is the first sitting day in June in the year before an election year. (Rule 9.14.15)

” The Committee has sought to scrutinise both the general principles of the Bill and give some consideration to potential future secondary legislation. This has presented a challenge. It is difficult to express an informed view on the Bill's interplay with UK Internal Market requirements. That will take place when powers created by the Bill are used, and subordinate legislation is laid in the Scottish Parliament. It is also hard to scrutinise the financial implications of potential future secondary legislation stemming from any framework Bill, as the Finance and Public Administration Committee underlined in their report.

Whilst some Committee Members found what sometimes seemed like a lack of detail on the face of the Bill disappointing, others welcomed the opportunity this ought to provide for the Scottish Government and key stakeholders to shape future legislation together, under a process of co-design. All Members agree that the Scottish Parliament must have ample opportunity to consider regulations derived from these enabling powers, including having meaningful opportunity to consult widely on the most complex ones. In some cases, this will require amending the Bill to create space for enhanced and meaningful consultation and scrutiny.^{18 xviii}

124. The reference to the UK Internal Market Act 2020 is on the face of it quite specific but the Committee expects how a Scottish Parliament Bill interplays with the Act, and the extent to which key provisions (including subordinate legislation made under a power created by the Bill) may be put at risk by the Act will be an ongoing aspect of future Bill scrutiny, especially at the interface between environmental protection and consumer law. A shared understanding of how the 2020 Act affects devolved powers is far from settled and, in any case, may depend on how "activist" a UK Government chooses to be in using it, rather than just on a legal interpretation of certain provisions.^{xix}

Subordinate legislation including the consent process for UK subordinate legislation

125. Dealing with subordinate legislation on diverse matters, as reflects our remit, has been a major and constant element of the Committee's work. If, as is broadly agreed, there is now more framework primary legislation, it follows naturally that there will be more, and more important, subordinate legislation for committees to consider down the line, and this has been our experience. Effective communication at official level can help manage the flow. This requires Scottish Government to be aware of, and take an interest in, the Committee's work schedule.

^{xviii} Some regulation-making provisions in the Bill were subsequently amended to create a "super-affirmative" approval process in light of these comments. Broadly, this means making express provision in a Bill to provide more time than normal for the Parliament to consider subordinate legislation made under a particular provision.

^{xix} The new UK Government announced a review of the 2020 Act in 2025, publishing a [review response](#) in July, which committed to improving the operation of the Act, to create more certainty, including for devolved governments. This October 2025 [SPICe blog](#) discusses the background context to, and outcome of, the review.

126. The increased use of Bills with framework provision, followed up sometime later by detailed subordinate legislation, presented as a finished product with which the Parliament can only agree or disagree,^{xx} also raises the risk of a "missing middle" in Parliamentary scrutiny: the space between the Bill becoming law and detailed policy on specific matters being threshed out and finalised. Unless expressly provided for in the relevant Act, the Parliament has no formal role in this process. If, when the instrument then comes before the Parliament, and there are misgivings with aspects of it, there is only the nuclear option of voting it down entirely.
127. There is nothing to stop a committee seeking active involvement in the policy formation stage of an important issue but it may not always have time to do this or, more fundamentally, not be sighted on what by definition will be an informal process, taking place in part behind closed doors. Some subordinate legislation considered by the Committee in this Session has run into difficulties and it is arguable that the absence of Parliamentary involvement during this phase of policy development did not help. Greater use of super-affirmative procedure for key subordinate legislation may offer a solution, albeit only a partial one.
128. Formal requirements in relation to accompanying documents to Bills- documents whose main purpose is to help Parliamentary committees and others understand the Bill better - are set out clearly in Standing Orders. While quality does vary (and has at times come to our attention^{xxi}), pre-publication vetting by Parliamentary officials- to ensure Standing Orders are met - provides a baseline standard of quality control. No such formal Parliamentary requirement exists for subordinate legislation. The Committee's experience is of a wide variance in their quality. The key document in most cases is the Policy Note, which is meant to give a clear explanation of what the instrument does, ideally demystifying any technical and difficult language used in the instrument itself. Some Notes have done an excellent job of this. Others have been poor, a few unacceptably so. The Business and Regulatory Assessment (BRIA) can also be important; not just for legislators considering the instrument but also for stakeholders in the relevant sector. There have been occasional issues with the accessibility and availability of BRIAs during the narrow window for Committee scrutiny.
129. Alongside framework Bills, there is the potentially emergent phenomenon of "framework subordinate legislation" whereby key detail is not set out in the instrument but is pushed further down the line: for instance in guidance (which may have legal weight) that the instrument gives the Scottish Ministers the power to issue, without further Parliamentary scrutiny. A recent example was of [an Order](#), the purpose of which was to create a mechanism to withdraw or suspend the right to free travel on buses on the basis of unacceptable behaviour. We were unhappy about being asked to agree to the instrument without sight of the code of conduct. In the end, the motion to approve the instrument was not moved and the instrument was relaid, along with the draft code a short while later.
130. Consideration of proposed UK subordinate legislation impacting devolved areas has

xx The wording of primary legislation can be amended during Parliamentary consideration. This is not the case for subordinate legislation.

xxi For instance in the Finance and Public Administration Committee's [report on the Financial Memorandum to the Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Bill](#). Many of the Committee's criticisms were, in part, linked to the fact of the Bill being largely a framework Bill.

also been a frequent feature of the Committee's work in this Session. This takes place under a [2020 protocol](#) agreed between the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. Brexit led to competence in some areas (for instance environmental protection) being repatriated to the Scottish Parliament and Government. However, it was always likely that there would be a high degree of cooperation and coordination between UK administrations on some repatriated matters, leading to the UK Government, by intergovernmental agreement, making subordinate legislation for Great Britain or the UK as a whole. The protocol was an effort to ensure Parliament, through the committee system, has an opportunity to express consent (or not) to this.

131. Our view is that the protocol works but in a limited way. It is successful as a notification system, and has allowed the Committee to have a quick appraisal of the relevant issue. But little time is available to consider the instrument - or in most cases, an indication of what the instrument will do, since it has not yet been published - and the Committee has found that in most cases the instrument is of a technical nature, often about regulating particular classes of chemical. On occasions, there may have been a public consultation but the Committee has found that responses, or an analysis of responses, are not available at the time when consent is sought. A lack of time means little opportunity for engagement with stakeholders or expert opinion. In the Committee's experience, only a small minority of informed and engaged stakeholders are ever likely to be aware of the proposal and proactively engage in the scrutiny process.
132. It is intrinsic to the protocol that proposed instruments referred under it have been agreed to in principle by the Scottish Government and it is the Committee's experience that consent is sometimes lukewarm, with the Scottish Government indicating that, while it may have some misgivings (for instance because the change may not keep pace with new European law, or even depart from existing EU law) it nevertheless appeals to the Committee to agree to the instrument because it considers it is the best or only realistic option available under the circumstances. This raises questions as to what the Committee's role is meant to be, as it is unlikely to be within the Committee's capacity to propose in the space of a few days a better technical solution. Where an instrument implements obligations under an international treaty, the Committee's role seems limited: to come to a view, as best it can, that the changes made reflect the treaty agreement and are being done in an acceptable way.

Legislative consent memorandums

133. In this Session, 11 UK Bills triggering the laying of a legislative consent memorandum (LCM) were referred to the Committee. The Committee found the scrutiny of LCMs to generally be unsatisfactory work, for a number of reasons.
134. There is first the issue of volume as 11 UK Bills is a significant number. UK Bills that trigger consent issues are by definition timetabled according to the dictates of another Parliament (and in most cases another government) and have often arrived with little warning. This is disruptive to a committee's forward planning. This is another example of the right to largely determine their own agenda being, by increment, taken away from Scottish Parliament committees.

135. Worse, in the majority of cases the Committee was left with not just one LCM to consider, but also a supplementary LCM, second supplementary LCM or even in one case a third supplementary LCM. In some cases, this additional documentation arrived so late as to make committee scrutiny a pointless case of literally going through the motions of laying a report in order to meet the formal requirements of Standing Orders, as there was no realistic prospect of gathering and reflecting on any evidence in the available time.¹⁹
136. In an effort to find a solution to the deeply unsatisfactory and recurring issue of very late supplementary LCMs, the Committee had toward the end of the Session engaged in correspondence with the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee,²⁰ the then Leader of the House of Commons²¹ and, finally, the Speaker of the House of Commons.²² There was also some dialogue with the Minister for Parliamentary Business. But none of this has produced a breakthrough. Our view is that a solution that respects the [Sewel Convention](#) would for Westminster to briefly hit the "pause" button whenever amendments triggering devolved consent are agreed late at Westminster; to allow the lead committee at Holyrood to very quickly take stock and express an informed view before a consent motion is taken. But this would require the UK Parliamentary and Governmental authorities to first recognise that this is a problem and take corrective action.
137. However, there are also things the Scottish Government could do better. Where amendments triggering new consent issues are agreed late on in a Bill's progress at Westminster, and the Scottish Government did not solicit or expect these, it can take no blame for the subsequent very late laying of a supplementary LCM. However, in this Session there seems to have been a growing trend of the Scottish Government lodging a "holding" LCM after a UK Bill is lodged that reserves its position on consent in relation to most or all of the triggering provisions, or on the question of whether certain provisions are consent-triggering in the first place.²³
138. It is understandable for the Scottish Government to not want to be rushed into expressing a view on what may be complex legal and policy issues. However, a holding LCM gives the lead committee very little to scrutinise. Problems are compounded where, rather than then providing a more substantive exposition in a supplementary LCM as soon as its position is clear, the Scottish Government refrains from doing so pending ongoing discussions with the UK Government about particular provisions with which the Scottish Government has concerns. It has been common for these discussions to conclude very late, with or without the laying of the requested amendments, with the supplementary LCM only then laid. Whether this emerging practice is within the spirit or even the letter of the Parliament's Standing Orders on LCMs is open to question.^{xxii}
139. Turning from the process to the substance of LCM scrutiny, at times the Committee has felt that its scrutiny has added value, assessing whether specific policies in the UK Bill look likely to be effective or shining a light on areas where the Scottish Government could play more of a role.^{xxiii} On other occasions, this has been less clear. In our first report of this Session on an LCM, we had cause to point out that it was not the Committee's role to adjudicate on disagreements between the UK and

xxii The Convener raised some of these issues in [this 3 December 2024 letter](#) to the Scottish Government. The Cabinet Secretary [replied](#) on 11 December 2024.

Scottish Government's legal advisers on whether or not particular provisions affected devolved matters.²⁴ In the case of UK Bills that do no more than implement new international treaty obligations that the UK has entered into, including at the margins of devolved law, the Committee's role, as we also commented in relation to UK statutory instruments doing the same thing, was limited.

140. In a clear majority of cases where the Committee was lead committee for an LCM, the Scottish Government was at some point recommending that the Parliament should not consent to at least some of the triggering provisions in the UK Bill, although in many cases that position changed following the lodging of amendments to address the Scottish Government's concern. In a very significant number of cases, the provisions causing concern were provisions giving the UK Government new powers to make orders or regulations where, in the Scottish Government's reading, these could be used to intrude into devolved matters and, in such cases, the Scottish Government felt it should have the right to consent (or at very least the right to be consulted) before any such orders or regulations were made. Since this is a objection of principle rather than of policy, it does raise questions as to what role a lead committee appointed because of its subject specialism is meant to play in that situation. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee has expressed a general view on this matter and we often found that we had little to add to it.^{xxiv}

141. The Committee would encourage successor committees to be assertive in ensuring they have enough time to consider Bills allocated to them, not only at the outset of scrutiny, but later on in response to developments (for instance, the emergence of a specific problem with the drafting of a key section or imminent publication of a relevant report or study).

142. In relation to Bills containing framework provisions, we would urge successor committees to press the Scottish Government for reasons as to why important detail is not being set out on the face of the Bill and then to reflect on whether these are satisfactory. Committees should also consider whether especially important and widely-drawn powers in Bills should be made subject to a super-affirmative procedure. Overall, the increased use of framework provisions creates a risk of a "missing middle" in Parliamentary scrutiny: the period between the Bill being passed and subordinate legislation then emerging sometime later as the "finished product" in a policy development process in which the Parliament and its committees may have played little part. We recommend early reflection in the next Parliament on how to respond to this at an institutional level. Committees should also be vigilant in relation to subordinate legislation which itself delegates key detail about its operation to guidance or codes without drafts of these being made available for scrutiny with the instrument. In relation to subordinate legislation generally, committees should, whenever necessary, press the Scottish Government for a consistently good standard of accompanying documentation.

xxiii An example of the former would in our report on the [UK Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#). An example of the latter would be in our report on the [UK Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill](#).

xxiv The DPLR Committee's consistent views on this matter are, for instance, set out in paragraph 12 of its [report on the UK Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill](#)

143. We suggest that in the next Parliamentary Session the Parliamentary authorities, led by the Bureau, reflect on whether the deadline on lodging Member's Bills currently set out in Standing Orders guarantees committees sufficient scrutiny time. Whether or not there is any formal change to Standing Orders, we suggest that the Non-Government Bills Unit work with Members with the aim of lodging Members' Bills as early as possible, consistent with producing a well worked-up Bill.
144. There are serious defects to the process around legislative consent memorandums and motions that, at times, call into question the worth of committee engagement in the process. The most fundamental issue is of amendments triggering the need for consent being lodged so late in the UK Bill process that the lead committee has no time to come to a considered view. This is largely an issue for Westminster and Whitehall to solve and, if this is to happen, it will likely require the Scottish Government and Parliament campaigning together in a non-partisan manner. However, the Scottish Government could do more to help committees by setting out its views earlier, by way of a substantive and reasoned LCM, rather than sitting on the matter until late in the process when its dialogue with the UK Government concludes. If the situation does not improve in the next Session, we would encourage successor committees to continue to take this issue up with the Scottish Government, possibly through the Conveners Group.

Annexe A: suggested key priorities for future committees

Note: the Committee has ordered these thematically and not in suggested order of prioritisation

Environment, nature and water

Biodiversity - halting nature loss by 2030: This Session the Scottish Government put in place a strategic framework for tackling the nature crisis in Scotland including the ambitious goal to halt nature loss by 2030, reflecting the new Global Biodiversity Framework agreed at COP15. The Committee scrutinised the new [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan](#) and urged the Scottish Government to focus on delivery and concrete actions for the rest of the Session, alongside introducing the necessary supporting legislation. The Scottish Parliament subsequently passed the milestone [Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Act 2026](#), requiring Scottish Ministers to set the (first ever) statutory biodiversity targets in secondary legislation. The Committee recommends that scrutinising implementation of the strategic framework on biodiversity – including continued scrutiny of the Biodiversity Delivery Plan - could be a priority for a future Committee, recognising the challenge facing the Scottish Government of ensuring the delivery of plans, at pace, across all levels of Government, in partnership with land managers, marine users, stakeholders and the wider public.

Air quality - a new Clean Air for Scotland Strategy: Air pollution, and its harmful effects, represents one of the biggest threats to public health in Scotland. The Committee reviewed evidence on air quality this Session, both through scrutinising the Scottish Government's '[Improvement Plan](#)' on air quality and consideration of a petition asking the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to adopt more stringent air quality standards, following World Health Organisation guidelines. The [Committee agreed](#) that air quality should be considered a key priority for the Scottish Government and urged the Government to work with local authorities and others to map out pathways to achieving more ambitious targets, to enshrine a 'continuous improvement' approach to air quality policy in its next clean air strategy, and to mainstream air quality considerations across all policy areas including climate change, health, transport and planning. The next Session will see the introduction of a new, third Clean Air for Scotland Strategy (CAFS3). A future Committee could build on this Committee's work in this area and in particular could consider how air quality considerations could be 'mainstreamed' across Parliamentary scrutiny.

National Marine Plan: Scotland's seas are becoming increasingly crowded from a range of competing uses e.g. offshore energy, marine conservation measures, aquaculture and fisheries. Marine planning is how these competing pressures are managed. Under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, Scottish Ministers are required to publish a National Marine Plan and may also delegate functions to 11 marine regions to develop regional marine plans, taking into account regional contexts. The first [National Marine Plan \(NMP\)](#) was published in March 2015. Statutory reviews undertaken in 2018 and 2021 found that the plan did not adequately reflect current policy and legislation evolution, or emerging issues, including increased competition for space or the twin climate and biodiversity crises. The Scottish Government has begun developing its second National Marine Plan (NMP2) to address the global climate and nature crises. However, [the anticipated consultation on a](#)

[draft NMP2 has been postponed](#) and only two statutory regional marine plans have been adopted ([Shetland Islands](#) and [Orkney Islands](#)) to-date. The successor committee could examine the status and effectiveness of the marine planning system at both the national and regional level, and its ability to manage the balance between marine exploitation and marine protection.

Safeguarding Scotland’s water resources: Scotland’s water environment is under accelerating pressure from climate change, and there is a likelihood of major legislation early next session relating to how Scotland’s water resources are managed and safeguarded, both in response to pressures on water availability and in relation to the quality of our freshwater environment. The next Session will also include the important milestone of a new River Basin Management Plan,^{xxv} a strategic framework for protecting our rivers, lochs, groundwater and coastal waters which requires strong partnership working. Whilst the Committee has done some groundwork in this area, we recognise that a stronger focus on safeguarding Scotland’s water resources is likely to be needed in future. A future Committee could consider how Parliamentary scrutiny could best support progress in this area, and seek an early update from the Scottish Government about plans to legislate following the consultation this Session.

Investment and affordability for water customers: plans for water and wastewater services, and the costs involved, are set out in six-year regulatory cycles. In January 2026, the Scottish Government [launched its consultation](#) on the Ministerial objectives and the Principles of Charging Statement for the next regulatory cycle from 2027 and 2033. This is the key process which determines how Scottish Ministers set objectives for Scottish Water to balance several priorities – high-quality water, a safe and reliable water supply and wastewater treatment, and reducing environmental impact – all while keeping services affordable. It also determines the maximum amount of borrowing available to Scottish Water to pay for investment. Scottish Water has submitted its [final Business Plan](#) for 2027-33 to Water Industry Commission for Scotland, setting out how it proposes to invest in Scotland’s water and wastewater services over the next six years. The submission marks the start of [WICS’ formal assessment of charges for the 2027-33 period](#) . The plan includes a proposed investment programme of £8.1bn and average annual charge increases to customers of 3.3% above inflation (up from 2% for the 2021-27 regulatory period). The final level of charges will be determined by WICS following its review.

Environmental Governance

Environmental Justice: During the current Session the Scottish Government undertook a review of environmental governance as required by the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, which [the Committee scrutinised](#), but several strands of that may be seen as “unfinished business”. One conclusion of the Scottish Government’s review was that the establishment of an environmental court was not an appropriate step but further consideration of environmental jurisdiction is expected next Session. There is continuing concern that the current position on access to justice is unsatisfactory. The Compliance Committee established under the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters has held that Scotland is not in compliance with the Convention, but limited progress has been made to rectify the position. The main focus has been on costs (of seeking environmental justice through the courts), including limited access to legal aid (the UK’s initial remedial steps have been regarded as inadequate but no formal

xxv Current (2021-2027) Plan [via this link](#)

timescale for further action was adopted at last year's Meeting of the Parties to the Convention). A further outstanding complaint to the Committee concerns public participation in environmental decision-making, in respect of which the UK has been asked for its response in April 2026. The search for redress by those opposed to major development projects, e.g. renewable energy projects and transmission lines, means that access to environmental justice is likely to remain a live issue during the next session.

Environmental Principles: Under the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, Ministers and other public bodies are required to have due regard to a number of environmental principles when making policy in all areas. These include the precautionary and polluter pays principles and that protecting the environment should be integrated into the making of policies. [Statutory guidance](#) on this has been published, calling for there to be an appropriate record of the consideration of the duties, either as part of a Strategic Environmental Assessment or independently. The extent to which consideration of these principles is visible and making a difference, especially in areas that are not seen as “environmental”, may be something a future committee wishes to look at.

Circular economy and waste management

The circular economy – a focus on implementation: implementation or use of delegated powers in the [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) may lead to some significant regulatory changes in Session 7 – including the first ever statutory circular economy targets, regulation of how unsold goods are disposed of, how businesses report on waste, new statutory code for household recycling. Beyond implementation of that Act, a range of other milestones are expected in the circular economy and waste management between now and 2030, including the expected implementation of a Deposit Return Scheme in 2027 aligned with other UK schemes, a Residual Waste Plan in 2027 (expected to set limits to avoid ‘lock-in’ to an over-capacity of Energy from Waste), and enforcement of the delayed ‘[landfill ban](#)’ in 2028. Progress with the Scottish Government’s commitment to ‘Product Stewardship’ – making the products we use more circular and more sustainable - is likely to require strong intergovernmental working to make interventions workable in the context of the UK internal market and mixture of devolved and reserved competence for product standards, as well as strong engagement across businesses, communities and the Scottish public. A successor Committee may wish to monitor implementation of these milestones.

Land Reform

The [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) (and forthcoming secondary legislation under it) makes changes in relation to land reform, land management tenancies, and agricultural and small land holdings. Regulations are expected to be brought forward in Session 7 which require landowners to produce Land Management Plans and to engage with local communities, and to support compliance with the principles of the [Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#). In addition, as much of the 2025 Act is not yet in force, commencement and implementation of tenancy reforms in Part 2 of the Act may be expected. We recommend that the successor committee write to the Scottish Government early in Session 7 to ask for a timetable for implementation of the 2025 Act, and consider future action monitoring implementation in light of the response.

Net zero progress

Net zero by 2045: see key recommendations on future Climate Change Plan scrutiny in

main body of report. It is likely the Parliament will again scrutinise the next draft Plan close to the end Session 7. The latest draft CCP includes commitments to various sectoral plans and strategies where progress is crucial to net zero delivery: e.g. on heat in buildings (by end 2026), land use (in 2026). Alongside our other CCP recommendations, we recommend successor committee(s) closely monitor Scottish Government progress on these from early in the next Session.

Delivery of new five-year carbon budgets: The first carbon budget will conclude by end 2030 but a lag in official emissions data reporting means we won't know whether the budget was met until Session 8. In the main body of this report, we set out suggestions for successor committee(s) on developing an effective general monitoring system over the next Session complemented by sectoral or thematic inquiries on decarbonisation.

Energy and the Just Transition

Expansion in renewable energy: renewable energy capacity in Scotland is 18 times greater than in 1999 and Scotland has been a net electricity exporter for years. The UK and Scottish Government both have ambitious plans for further expansion, with the Scottish Government aiming by 2030 to roughly double onshore wind capacity and almost treble offshore capacity. The UK Government plans to expand nuclear: the Scottish Government does not. Choices about future energy systems impact on the general economy: the viability of existing energy sectors or new ones, like hydrogen; electricity costs for consumers and businesses; jobs; and communities. The Scottish Government published a [draft Energy Strategy in January 2023](#), but did not finalise it this Session. [NESO's Strategic Spatial Energy Plan is due in Autumn 2027](#), with a consultation planned for earlier that year. We recommend a future committee set aside time to consider what choices the Scottish Government can make and should make.

Network expansion and growing demand for electricity: switching to low carbon energy in large part means moving from large, centralised electricity generation (like coal or gas plants) to smaller and more dispersed renewable energy sources (wind, solar etc.). It also means using more electricity. Alongside the expansion of electricity-generating infrastructure, this requires major network upgrade and expansion. Network operating companies significantly increased their capital investment during this Session. Development can be locally controversial. As with electricity generation, there are a mix of devolved and reserved responsibilities in this area. A [short inquiry in 2023](#) touched on these issues but there is scope in Session 7 to assess how operators' plans are progressing and their impacts on electricity users and producers and impacted communities. NESO is also due to publish a [Centralised Strategic Network Plan](#) (for gas and electricity transmission to 2050) by end of 2027.

Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) and the Acorn project: proposals for a possible Scottish carbon capture project have gone on for over two decades, currently embodied in the [Acorn project](#) – which plans to transport captured carbon from around Scotland via pipeline to St Fergus in Aberdeenshire for storage in the North Sea. We took evidence on several occasions in this Session on the inter-related topics of Acorn, Project Willow and prospects for hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel in Scotland. The Scottish Government's new Climate Change Plan assumes Acorn is online in 2032. But UK Government support is required and Acorn currently sits below other CCS developments (in England) in its [priority list](#). There has however, been a promise of £200m for development funding to allow a final investment decision on the project to be reached by 2029. Recently a project partner has put their stake up for sale. Declining industrial carbon emissions mean increasing concerns about whether the project remains viable. We

suggest a future committee continue to assess progress towards a decision and monitor how the development funding is being spent.

Economic and social implications of the changing energy system: the expansion of renewable energy in Scotland has been partly motivated by the belief that there will be economic benefit from the transition, in terms of job creation, tax revenue and beyond. But jobs and tax revenue have reduced heavily in the fossil fuel sector, both directly and through second order impacts (e.g. chemical manufacture), raising questions of how well we are achieving a just transition. As emission reduction options become if anything more challenging, it will become even more important to consider in advance the social and economic impacts – positive and negative- of proposed changes. A committee with a joint remit into both energy and the just transition would be well-placed to investigate this, whether as a general survey of the just transition or by reference to specific sectors.

Climate adaptation

Continued climate change and the impacts on Scotland: as explained in the main body of the report, we lacked capacity for in-depth work this Session on the impacts of climate change in Scotland, but recommend this take place in the coming Session, in the run-up to a new Scottish National Adaptation Plan in 2029, with a consultation likely before then. Climate Change Risk Assessments are due from the Climate Change Committee in 2026 and the UK Government in 2027.

Transport

Car use reduction: Transport academics advised the Committee throughout Session 6 that the success of any car use reduction policy is reliant on making alternatives to car travel more attractive, e.g. creating continuous, high-quality cycling and walking networks, and making driving less attractive, e.g. through the introduction of congestion charging. Both approaches must be used in tandem, simply focusing on improving alternatives to driving does not reduce car use.²⁵ The Scottish Government has committed to developing a new car use reduction policy, following the abandonment of its previous commitment to reduce car mileage by 20% between 2019 and 2030, with local/regional car use reduction plans to be produced by Councils and Regional Transport Partnerships over the next two years. The future Committee may wish to consider national, regional, and local approaches to car use reduction, particularly the use of policies aimed at making driving less attractive – something which has been lacking from Scottish transport plans at all levels to date.

Bus elements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019: The [Transport \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) introduced a broad package of measures aimed at improving bus service provision, and the passenger experience, across Scotland. These include bus service franchising, bus service improvement partnerships, powers for local authorities to establish municipal bus companies, and powers to create smart and integrated ticketing schemes. The Committee has heard from bus operators, passenger groups, transport authorities, and sustainable transport campaigners that the use of these powers could significantly improve bus service provision and increase bus use. However, the powers have not been used in any meaningful way to date, reasons given for this include delays in enacting secondary legislation and producing guidance, limited staff and financial resources at transport authorities, and concerns about legal challenges to franchising schemes. A future Committee may wish to monitor the use of these powers, and their impact on bus use, now that the relevant legislation and guidance is in place alongside the Scottish Government's policy focus on car use reduction. Improving bus service provision could also help

maximise the user benefits from the significant ongoing investment in national concessionary fares schemes.

Road haulage decarbonisation: The Scottish Government has ambitious plans for the decarbonisation of road freight, principally through the replacement of existing diesel vehicles with electric vans and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). The Committee has heard significant concerns from the road haulage industry about the technical, financial, and structural barriers to the delivery of this policy, with the industry favouring the use of low-emission fuels as an interim measure – until the widespread adoption of electric goods vehicles becomes a viable option.²⁶ The future Committee may wish to monitor the success of the Scottish Government's approach, with a view to establishing whether a change in course is necessary – as suggested by the industry.

Electric car uptake: Scottish Government climate change plans are heavily reliant on the speedy replacement of petrol and diesel powered cars with electric equivalents. The Committee has heard from academics, manufacturers, and the electric vehicle charging industry that this will be reliant on the roll-out of a comprehensive public vehicle charging network, which will require public support in areas where chargers may not be commercially viable, and on consumer incentives to drive the switch to electric cars.²⁷ The future committee may wish to monitor trends in electric car uptake and the development of the public charging network, to establish whether the Scottish Government's approach is delivering expected levels of electric car uptake across urban and rural areas and all socio-economic groups.

Annexe B: SPICe sectoral overview of environmental priorities- biodiversity, environmental safety and regulation, water and marine

Biodiversity (reversing nature loss by 2030)

There were significant milestones for biodiversity policy during this Session, globally and nationally, in response to the nature emergency.

A new strategic framework for tackling the nature crisis

At a global level, the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) led to the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The GBF sets out an ambitious overarching global target to halt biodiversity loss by 2030, and [23 individual 2030 targets](#) including the “30 x 30” target to have 30% of the land and sea covered by some protective measures by 2030.

The Scottish Government has sought to respond to the global nature crisis, tackle ongoing [biodiversity decline in Scotland](#), and implement its international obligations under the GBF by establishing a new ‘strategic framework’ for biodiversity this Session, made up of three elements:

- A [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) (published 2024) with a vision to halt biodiversity loss and be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across Scotland by 2045.
- Six-year Delivery Plans – the first [Biodiversity Delivery Plan](#) published under the Strategy, for 2024-2030, includes actions aimed at delivering the Strategy, setting out timeframes and which public bodies are leading on work.
- The Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 (passed by the Parliament on 29th January 2026 and received Royal Assent on 12th March 2026) which sets out the legislative framework for setting biodiversity targets for Scotland.

The draft Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan, and the COP15 outcomes, [were scrutinised in the NZET Committee](#) at various points in 2022-2024. The Committee [wrote to the Scottish Government in 2022](#) to set out its findings on the draft Strategy, calling for a robust approach to delivery and supporting the principle of the Natural Environment Bill providing legal back-up for commitments in the strategy.

The Committee later held evidence sessions on the draft Delivery Plan and [wrote to the Scottish Government in 2024](#) setting out views and recommendations including that ambitious rhetoric about tackling biodiversity loss has too often not produced real change and a focus on delivery and concrete action is needed. The Committee agreed that its “priority in its biodiversity scrutiny over the rest of this Session will be on outcomes: asking which interventions have made a positive difference and which have not, and what we can learn from this.”

Whilst the Committee's capacity to scrutinise delivery in this area was constrained throughout the Session, the Committee has [scrutinised progress with milestones in the Delivery Plan with NatureScot \(17 February 2026\)](#), and discussed challenges in halting nature loss by 2030, including progress towards meeting the '30 by 30' target to protect, manage, and conserve at least 30% of Scotland's land and sea by 2030. NatureScot said this work was one of its key priorities for the coming four years.

The NZET Committee did not lead on scrutiny of the [Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Bill](#) (which was scrutinised at Stage 1 in the RAI Committee), which set out the framework for statutory biodiversity targets, however, as noted above, had recommended that the Scottish Government put the necessary legal backstops in place for delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. A successor Committee with strategic responsibility for biodiversity may wish to consider its approach to continued scrutiny in this area, noting that the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 requires Scottish Ministers to introduce statutory nature targets within 12 months of commencement of the relevant section of the Act.

Marine environment and planning

Scotland's seas are subject to a range of (sometimes competing) uses such as the expansion of offshore energy, marine conservation measures, aquaculture and fisheries. Marine planning is a key policy lever for managing competing pressures. Under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, Scottish Ministers are required to publish a National Marine Plan and may also delegate functions to 11 marine regions to develop regional marine plans, taking into account regional contexts.

Scotland's first [National Marine Plan \(NMP\)](#) was adopted in 2015. Statutory reviews in 2018 and 2021 found that the plan did not adequately reflect emerging issues, including increased competition for space or the twin climate and biodiversity crises. The Scottish Government has begun developing a second National Marine Plan (NMP2), however, [the anticipated consultation on a draft NMP2 has been postponed](#) and only two statutory regional marine plans have been adopted (Shetland Islands and Orkney Islands) to-date.

Whilst the NZET Committee has not undertaken extensive work on marine planning, it discussed the role of spatial planning in its scrutiny of the draft Biodiversity Delivery Plan with marine stakeholders, which a successor Committee could refer to if considering NMP2. In [the Committee's 2024 letter on biodiversity](#), the Committee supported calls for "urgent progress with spatial approaches to restore and protect biodiversity and of protected areas, on a nationwide basis (including marine mapping)", but also that spatial planning approaches should not be "a determinative decision-making process, but rather a process of setting parameters and priorities, and showing what this is likely to mean in spatial terms. The aim should be to create far greater certainty but to leave space for consultation, discussion and co-design at a local level so that communities feel part of the process."

The Committee also noted that there have been delays in implementing the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, in particular citing progress with Regional Marine Planning as a "gap between ambition and delivery in relation to biodiversity policy" and significant delays in agreeing management measures in Marine Protected Areas.

In more recent work relating to marine biodiversity and marine planning, the Committee scrutinised changes being made to how offshore wind is consented under the UK Energy Act 2023, including the [new strategic compensation approach to offshore wind](#), which

allows for a new approach to how biodiversity impacts of offshore wind projects are compensated for in the marine environment, through a UK-wide system of potential conservation measures in Marine Protected Areas. In the next session, the Scottish Government is expected to publish guidance on how this system will work, and a 'compensation hierarchy' for how measures will be prioritised. These may be of interest to a successor Committee, as significant developments in relation to marine planning and biodiversity.

Natural capital finance

The Committee has scrutinised the topic of natural capital finance, including [with stakeholders](#) and in scrutiny sessions with NatureScot. The [Scottish Government describes natural capital as](#) "the environmental resources (e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils) that combine to yield a flow of benefits to people". The Scottish Government is "committed to developing a values-led, high-integrity market for responsible investment in natural capital". There are a number of ongoing strands of work around this, including:

- Publication of a [Natural Capital Market Framework](#) in 2024
- Various NatureScot projects and funding streams including the [Facility for Investment-Ready Nature in Scotland](#) (FIRNS) Programme, piloting '[Carbon contracts](#)' alongside Peatland ACTION funding, and a '[private finance investment pilot](#)' where NatureScot has partnered with private investors.

The Committee has heard evidence of both the opportunities and risks of natural capital finance approaches, including most recently with NatureScot ([17 February 2026](#)), who said they were seeking to put forward "investable opportunities" in natural capital in Scotland for the private sector to invest in, and that "the public sector will seek to de-risk the early development in order to make it market ready".

A successor Committee may wish to reflect on this work in considering its future work programme, as a cross-cutting area that relates to biodiversity, climate change, land and sea management (with links into land reform and rural development policy).

Air quality

The Scottish Government [has a vision for Scotland to have the cleanest air in Europe](#). A notable milestone in the next Session is expected to be the introduction of a third Clean Air for Scotland Strategy (CAFS3) [early in the Parliamentary Session](#).

The NZET Committee has undertaken two pieces of work on air quality this session, where a successor Committee could refer back to evidence and recommendations:

- First, the Committee considered ESS's Air Quality Investigation Improvement Report, an investigation into compliance with legal limits on nitrogen dioxide levels, and the Scottish Government's subsequent Improvement Plan, and took the opportunity to take wider evidence on air quality issues in Scotland from stakeholders. The Committee [reported on the Plan in May 2023](#) and made a number of recommendations for how air quality policy should seek to evolve. For example, the Committee noted that the introduction of Low Emission Zones in Scotland's four biggest cities is a significant development in tackling air pollution but said their introduction must go hand in hand with a wider package of interventions to combat air pollution. It also urged the Scottish Government to work with local authorities and others to map out pathways for meeting World Health Organisation (WHO) revised air

quality standards, which are not currently reflected in Scotland's legal air quality standards (further considered in respect of a subsequent petition, see below), and asked the Scottish Government to consider enshrining a continuous improvement approach into quality policy, as part of its upcoming review of CAFS.

This inquiry was also the first consideration of an ESS Improvement Report by the Scottish Parliament, a new feature of post EU exit environmental governance established by the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021.

- Secondly, the Committee considered (and closed) [PE2123: Air Quality Standards](#) which called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Air Quality Standards (Scotland) Regulations 2010 by setting new limit values for nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter which align with the (above-mentioned) WHO air quality guidelines published in 2021. The Committee wrote to stakeholders it had engaged with in its air quality inquiry in May 2025, to seek views on progress in this area since its inquiry in 2023. The Committee [wrote to the Cabinet Secretary on 8 October 2025](#) setting out its view that, based on evidence it received, there was a strong case for strengthening Scotland's legal air quality framework as part of the CAFS review. It said: "Although the petition is now formally closed, the Committee remains interested in this matter and in monitoring progress in strengthening air quality standards, as we expect our successor Committee will be in the next Parliamentary session."

The Committee also briefly scrutinised progress with tackling ammonia emissions [during consideration of the Environmental Authorisations \(Scotland\) Regulations 2025](#), and whether the Scottish Government planned to align with revised standards for ammonia in the EU Industrial Emissions Directive, relating to how large-scale livestock farms are regulated. The Scottish Government said it was undertaking analysis of the implications of aligning with those standards. A successor Committee could follow up on this issue as part of any future work on air quality.

Water policy (water environment, water services and resilience)

The Committee's engagement in water policy during Session 6 was primarily focussed on scrutiny of Scottish Water's performance during annual evidence sessions, as well as consideration of regulation of the water environment in scrutiny sessions with SEPA and Environmental Standards Scotland, and scrutinising the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2025 which relate to how SEPA regulates activities that impact on the water environment.

There are a range of issues related to water which a successor Committee may wish to scrutinise.

Managing water resources and environmental quality

[River Basin Management Plans](#) (RBMPs) are produced by SEPA and set out actions to address pressures on the water environment impacting on water quality, water resources, and the migration of wild fish. The RBMP is reviewed and updated every six years. The first plan was published in 2009, the second in 2015, and third in 2021. The next RBMP (RBMP4) is due to be published in December 2027, with a draft expected by the end of 2026.

The [RBMP for Scotland 2021-27](#) includes a central target to ensure that 81% of all Scotland's waterbodies achieve a 'good' or better classification by 2027. Despite a long-

term upward trend in performance, there are still problems affecting water quality, water resources, and fish migration.

The Committee [discussed progress with RBMP targets with SEPA on 25 February 2025](#). SEPA set out key challenges in meeting the targets, particularly highlighting the complexity of tackling diffuse pollution.

Later in 2025, SEPA published a report, [Safeguarding Scotland's Water Environment](#) to inform RBMP4, setting out the biggest challenges. It sets out that Scotland's water environment is experiencing unprecedented and accelerating pressure from climate change with increased temperatures, droughts and flooding. The water environment is also under continued and evolving threats from pollution, loss of habitat and invasive species.

In relation to other significant regulatory changes this Session, the Committee also [scrutinised the Environmental Authorisations \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2025](#) – a consolidation and streamlining of how environmental permitting by SEPA works across water, waste management, and industrial emissions. A successor Committee may particularly wish to [note recommendations in the Committee's report relating to new areas of regulation](#), including on sewage sludge, where the Committee considered issues including the presence of 'emerging contaminants' in sewage sludge (such as 'forever chemicals' and microplastics').

Climate change adaption and resilience

The cost of maintaining water and wastewater service levels is increasing due to the pressures of climate change impacts on the water system. Scottish Water's climate change adaptation plan identifies the following key risks with climate change:

- Warmer, drier summers that can lead to drought and deteriorating water quality.
- Wetter winters that cause flooding.
- Variable rainfall patterns that impact environmental performance.
- More frequent storms that disrupt assets and services.
- Sea level rise and coastal erosion that floods or damages assets.

[Water scarcity conditions in 2024 into 2025 are a case in point](#). Scottish Water responded to higher demand by increasing the amount of water into the public water network by 150 million litres of water per day, which led to reservoir levels being much lower than average. By 2050, [Scottish Water projects a national deficit of 240 million litres of water per day](#) during drought conditions if services are not adapted. Actions may be required to improve water efficiency and reduce consumption.

The Scottish Government's 2023-24 programme for government committed to "review of water industry policy, and continue to assess how water, sewerage and drainage services can adapt to the impacts of climate change to avoid water scarcity through future legislation". In 2023 and 2024 the Scottish Government consulted on policy proposals. Primary legislation was not introduced in Session 6 but it is anticipated that legislation may be introduced in Session 7, which a successor Committee may wish to consider in its early work planning.

Investment and affordability for water customers

The Committee has scrutinised Scottish Water charges and investment in annual sessions focused on Scottish Water's annual report and accounts. [Scottish Water forecasts that the funding needed to deliver sustainable services over the next 25 years could be approximately double what it is today](#) (to around £50 billion).

Over 90% of Scotland's population get their water and wastewater services from Scottish Water, a publicly owned provider. Scottish Water is funded by two main sources – customer charges and borrowing from the Scottish Government for capital investment. How we pay for and invest in public water and wastewater services is managed through six-year regulatory periods, at the start of which the Scottish Government and the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS) set objectives and funding parameters for Scottish Water. This process also determines the amount of borrowing available to Scottish Water for investment in infrastructure.

[In January 2026, the Scottish Government launched its consultation on the Ministerial objectives and the Principles of Charging Statement](#) for the next cycle. Scottish Water has submitted its [final Business Plan](#) to WICS, setting out how it proposes to invest over 2027-33. Scottish Water has moderated customer charge increases in recent years in response to cost-of-living pressures. However, annual charge increases are likely to see increases in the coming years. The successor Committee may wish to seek an update early in Session 7 from the Scottish Government, Scottish Water and WICS on key milestones in the next regulatory period.

Keeping pace with developments in the UK and EU

Early on in Session 6, the Committee considered secondary legislation to strengthen drinking water quality standards through the Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022.

The EU is moving at pace to implement requirements of the [recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive](#) and [Drinking Water Directive](#) which introduce a range of measures to modernise the water sector across the EU. In January 2026, the [UK Government published 'A new vision for water: white paper'](#) setting out plans to reform the water sector and wider water system. [In February 2026, the Welsh Government also published a Green Paper setting out proposals for fundamental reform of the water system in Wales](#). Although water policy is devolved, commitments to reform water sectors in other parts of the UK may risk Scotland falling behind in modernising the regulatory framework for water services. A successor Committee may wish to monitor progress on developments in water policy and legislation in the EU and the rest of the UK to consider whether the Scottish Government is keeping pace with developments.

Resilience of water services in rural and islands communities

While most people in Scotland are served by public services provided by Scottish Water, [a significant minority depend on private systems, which face distinct challenges](#). Scotland's private water supply users may be more vulnerable to water scarcity, and [private water supply users typically register lower compliance rates with legal water quality standards compared to Scottish Water supplies](#). Rural and island dwellings are also usually served by private sewage treatment. A successor Committee may wish to consider specific issues of water resilience in rural and islands communities as part of future scrutiny of regulatory reform of water services.

Chemicals regulation

Chemicals regulation engages a mixture of reserved and devolved competence. Post EU-exit chemicals regulation systems are generally managed on a GB-wide basis by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and interact with reserved areas such as product safety and workplace health and safety. Chemicals regulation for the purposes of protection of the environment and public health is a devolved area.

Although there hasn't been an inquiry or Bill on chemicals regulation in the NZET Committee, scrutinising the development of, and changes to these post EU-exit systems of chemical regulation has been a strong 'theme' of UKSI scrutiny, with a plethora of instruments, a number of which have sought to delay regulatory milestones and more recently, implement reforms from a 2025 HSE Chemicals Legislative Reform Consultation across a number of regimes (relating for example to how biocidal products are regulated and how chemical hazards of products are classified and labelled).

These complex areas of GB-wide regulation present challenges for scrutiny in a devolved context, and the Committee has expressed concerns to the Scottish Government in response to a number of instruments, for example relating to delays in implementation of post EU exit systems, the cumulative nature of changes to the regulatory framework, the importance of maintaining high standards of environmental and health protection, and the fact that the window of opportunity for the Committee to give proper consideration to proposals under the Protocol on UK SIs is limited.²⁸

Issues of chemical regulation, in particular concerns about 'forever chemicals'²⁹, and the need to increase understanding about the prevalence and impacts of these in our environment, have also been raised in the Committee in a range of contexts, including in scrutiny of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill and in scrutiny sessions with public bodies (for example the challenge of managing forever chemicals at the point of waste management was [discussed with Zero Waste Scotland](#)).

Environmental governance and environmental justice

Environmental governance review

During the current Session the Scottish Government undertook a review of environmental governance as required by the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 ('Continuity Act'), which was [scrutinised by the Committee](#). The review looked at the effectiveness of post EU-exit environmental governance arrangements, including the functioning of Environmental Standards Scotland, and the broader question of the sufficiency of 'access to justice' in environmental matters, including the question of whether there should be a Scottish environmental court.

A significant backdrop to this review is the question of whether there is sufficient 'access to environmental justice' in Scotland, which is a pillar of the UN Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the 'Aarhus Convention'). The Compliance Committee of that Convention has found that Scotland is in breach of access to justice requirements.

Environmental stakeholders and Environmental Standards Scotland were generally critical of the scope and outcome of the governance review in relation to wider questions about access to environmental justice, including the rationale for the Scottish Government's conclusion that the establishment of an environmental court was not an appropriate step at

the time.

In more recent developments however, amendments proposed to the Crofting and Scottish Land Court Bill may require Scottish Ministers to further review this issue in the next Session, in relation to the scope of the jurisdiction of the Scottish Land Court to consider environmental matters.

Environmental Principles

Under the Continuity Act, the Scottish Government and other public bodies are required to have regard to five 'guiding principles' on the environment when making most policy or operational decisions. These principles are:

- the principle of integration
- the precautionary principle
- the preventative principle
- the rectification at source principle
- the polluter pays principle.

The Scottish Government has also produced statutory guidance on the guiding principles, with a view to ensuring they are sufficiently embedded in decision-making and policy development across all policy areas, which came into effect in 2023. The Committee scrutinised the draft guidance and asked the Scottish Government how it would embed and monitor the implementation of the principles. There has been limited scope to review the extent to which the guiding principles have become embedded in decision-making this Session, given they have only been in effect for a short time. A future Committee could monitor this or may wish to scrutinise how the guiding principles have been applied to the development of specific policies or legislation.

Environmental Standards Scotland

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) was created to fill 'governance gaps' in enforcing and monitoring compliance with environmental law as a result of EU exit. It was established by the Continuity Act. It is a non-ministerial office, accountable to the Parliament, and the Committee has played a role in approving appointments to its board and in considering its Strategy, as well as hearing from ESS as a witness a number of times in relation to wider work.

The NZET Committee was the first Committee to consider ESS 'Improvement Reports' and subsequent Scottish Government 'Improvement Plans', a new feature of post-EU exit environmental governance. ESS may issue an improvement report where it finds a systematic failure to comply with environmental law, recommending measures that Scottish Ministers and public authorities should take. In response to a report, Scottish Ministers must present an improvement plan within certain timeframes, and the report must be laid before and approved by Parliament. The Committee considered two Improvement Reports and Plans this Session; one on air quality and one relating to local climate change duties. In addition to the role of a successor Committee in overseeing ESS, a successor committee may wish to note the potential for scrutiny of Improvement Reports to be significant pieces of work.

A successor Committee may also wish to note that ESS is currently in the process of having its functions expanded in two ways: to act as Independent Review Body in respect of future statutory biodiversity targets, and to scrutinise local authorities' delivery and reporting of their statutory climate change duties.

Ecocide

The Committee considered the Ecocide (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1, a Members Bill which would have introduced a 'higher tier' environmental crime of ecocide, punishable by an unlimited fine or up to twenty years imprisonment. Ecocide was defined in the Bill as causing severe environmental harm in such a way that is either reckless or intentional, where "severe", means environmental harm that has serious adverse effects, and is either "widespread" or "long-term".

Whilst the Committee (by a majority) did not consider there was time in the Session to fully deal with Stages 2 and 3, and the Bill will not pass by the end of this Session, the Committee did support the overall principle of ensuring that the most egregious forms of environmental harm, carried out with intent or recklessness, are treated with the seriousness they warrant under the criminal law, and felt there was a strong case for changing the law to more clearly embody this principle.

The Committee also made some recommendations which it said "exist independently of whether this Bill proceeds", [stating in its Stage 1](#) report that " While the Committee recognises that a parliament or government cannot bind its successor, the Committee hopes that these recommendations are commenced as soon as possible and taken forward into the next Session with a view to possible legislation to create a robust penalty for serious environmental crime at the apex of Scotland's environmental regulation. In this context, the Committee also note the current government's commitment to keep pace with EU law which may require amendment to existing laws in this area". The latter comments relate to questions around alignment with the revised EU Environmental Crime Directive.

A successor Committee may wish to consider these recommendations and explore early in the Session whether the Scottish Government plans to take action in this area, the current Scottish Government having supported the Member's Bill in this Session.

Annexe C: SPICe sectoral overview on circular economy and waste management priorities

The Committee scrutinised the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill during this Session (now the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024) which could be described as ‘framework legislation’ in that it:

- Put a duty on Scottish Ministers to set statutory targets in regulations relating to developing a circular economy and an associated monitoring and reporting framework. The current Scottish Government has a policy commitment to introduce target-setting regulations in 2027. It also required Scottish Ministers to publish a Circular Economy Strategy (currently published in draft, which the Committee briefly considered alongside the draft Climate Change Plan).
- Introduced a range of other regulation-making powers including powers to put restrictions on how unsold goods can be disposed of by businesses, requiring businesses to report on certain waste streams (with initial regulations expected to target food waste and surplus reporting), and introducing charges on single-use goods. The Scottish Government [consulted on using this power to introduce a charge on single-use drinks cups in 2024](#), but has not announced if this will be taken forward.
- Put a duty on Scottish Ministers to produce a statutory code of practice on household waste recycling, which will seek to increase consistency across local authorities.

A successor Committee leading on waste management and the circular economy may wish to note the potential for significant secondary legislation in this area, alongside a range of other non-statutory policy commitments in the Circular Economy and Waste Routemap to 2030.

Other significant work by the Committee in this area this Session which may be useful for ongoing scrutiny by a successor committee has included:

- Scrutinising progress towards implementing a Scottish Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), including the decision of the Scottish Government in 2023 to delay the scheme and align it with the DRS being developed for England and Northern Ireland. This was in response to the scope of the UK Government’s policy position on granting an exclusion from UK Internal Market Act (UKIMA) market access principles (which included at the time, that it would not agree an exclusion allowing the Scottish DRS to include glass, as had been originally legislated for). The DRS is currently expected to launch on a Scotland, England and Northern Ireland basis in 2027. Recently, [the UK Government agreed an exclusion from UKIMA for the Welsh Government to progress with a DRS including glass](#) (under certain conditions), which may lead to further questions next Session about the scope of the scheme. More broadly, the introduction of DRS will be a significant milestone in waste management.
- Scrutinising the establishment of Zero Waste Scotland as a public body. Zero Waste Scotland was classified as a public body in April 2023 (having operated previously as a limited company since 2014). It is responsible for providing expert analysis, advice and advocacy to support the development of the circular economy in Scotland.

- Recommendations made in the Committee's report on the draft Climate Change Plan in relation to the forthcoming (delayed) ban on landfilling Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) and need to control increases in emissions from Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities. The Committee also recognised the need to tackle consumption emissions i.e. emissions associated with the products and services consumed in Scotland, which may be produced elsewhere. Significant policy milestones in this area which a successor Committee may wish to note include the planned full enforcement of the ban on landfilling BMW from 2028, and current Scottish Government commitment to produce a Residual Waste Plan, indicating how over-capacity of EfW will be avoided, in 2027.

Annexe D: SPICe sectoral overview on land reform priorities

The Committee scrutinised the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill between March 2024 and June 2025. The bill received Royal Assent on 16 December 2025, and became the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. The Act is in two parts:

- Part 1 of the Act, when implemented through secondary legislation, will require large land holdings (>1,000ha) to consult on and publish Land Management Plans. In the event of a transfer of all or part of a large land holding, a modified pre-emptive right to buy for a local community and/or lotting is also possible. This part also makes changes to the Scottish Land Commission by introducing a new Land and Communities Commissioner, who will have a key role in the development and implementation of this part.
- Part 2 of the Act concerns leasing land. The Act makes changes to the law governing agricultural tenancies to update the rights and responsibilities of tenant farmers and landlords, and for some provisions, to place a stronger emphasis on environmental outcomes. It makes changes of varying significance to the laws around tenant's right to buy, assignation and succession, resumption, compensation, diversification, rent reviews and the rules of good husbandry and estate management. Several of the provisions include powers for Scottish Ministers to set out further detail or make changes by regulations. The Act also requires Scottish Ministers to publish model leases for using land for environmental purposes and for hutting, and reforms the law governing 'small landholdings' by aligning it more closely with agricultural holdings legislation.

Much of the Act is not yet in force, and a successor committee may wish to monitor its implementation.

Land reform does not just relate to rural Scotland (which is the focus of the 2025 Act) but covers a wide spectrum of topics concerning the ownership and control of land and buildings and how that interacts with communities, people and the public interest across the whole country. A successor committee may wish to consider its strategic approach to land reform, with reference to the outcomes of the Scottish Land Commission's recent [ScotLand Futures work](#).

Annex E: SPICe sectoral overview for priorities on net zero oversight, energy and the just transition

Energy overview

In Session 6 the Committee addressed a wide variety of subjects related to the Energy sector. The Committee's work that has most related to the subject of Energy include:

- [Fuel Poverty Strategy](#): November 2021
- [Carbon capture, utilisation and storage \(CCUS\)](#): December 2021 – March 2022
- [Energy price rises](#): April – June 2022
- [Legislative Consent Memorandum Energy Bill](#): September 2022 – October 2023
- [‘Scotland's electricity infrastructure: inhibitor or enabler of our energy ambitions?’](#): March 2023 – May 2023
- [Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Great British Energy Bill](#): January – February 2025
- Project Willow, Grangemouth and hydrogen or Plans for future of Grangemouth (Project Willow study): May 2025
- [Legislative Consent Memorandums on the UK Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill](#): July 2025 – December 2025
- [The Draft Climate Change Plan](#): November 2025 – March 2026

The Committee has paid frequent attention to the prospects of CCUS and the delivery of the Acorn Project. Very early in the Session (October 2021), the Acorn project missed out on a place [as a ‘Track-1’ cluster](#) with the UK Government placing two projects in England in this class and leaving the Scottish project as a reserve. Immediately after this the Committee arranged to take evidence from the industry and academics and sent their views [in a letter](#) to the Scottish Government. In July 2023, Acorn was confirmed [as a ‘Track-2’ project](#) with the expectation that it would come online by 2030, some years behind the projects in Track-1 (expected online in 2028). In June 2025, [£200m in development funding](#) was announced from the UK Government to ‘prepare Acorn for delivery’, with a final investment decision (FID) expected ‘later this parliament’ (UK parliament).

Scrutiny of CCUS and Acorn, has been a part of much of the Committee's work on Energy, in particular the work on Project Willow and Grangemouth, and the draft CCP. In this work, they heard of the potential need for CCUS but also of some of the emerging challenges the Acorn project has faced this Session. These include the closure of some major industrial sites like the refinery at Grangemouth and the Mossmorran ethylene plant, that mean that the overall CO₂ resource available to Acorn is reduced. Alongside this, in December 2025, the [lead stakeholder in the project](#), Storegga, put its share up for sale.

While there has been discussion around a Scottish carbon capture, transport and storage project for at least two decades there has been some progress made this Session on the status of the Acorn project. If current pledges are met, there will be an FID on Acorn in Session 7 and questions may turn to the deliverability, scale and necessity of CCS technology.

The ongoing upgrade and expansion of the electricity network attracted significant attention in Session 6. The Committee held a 'snapshot' inquiry into Scotland's electricity infrastructure in 2023, investigating the planned upgrades and the interactions the network has with the changing sources of electricity generation. The upgrades are, to a large extent, required because sources of electricity generation are changing from a limited number of large power plants, typically using coal or gas, to a much larger number of widely dispersed, smaller renewable sources e.g. wind, solar etc. Scrutiny of the subject is complicated by the nature of devolved and reserved powers in this area, with the speed of delivery driven by the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 target. Energy networks are generally thought of as reserved with the bodies in charge of regulation and planning – OfGEM and the NESO – having a GB-wide remit. Scottish Ministers are, however, responsible for planning consents for all generation, storage and network projects. The Scottish Government has stated that [is 'working closely'](#) with the UK Government on the delivery and it ['welcomes the measures'](#) in the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan.

With many years of work ahead, the subject will be no less keenly felt in the forthcoming Session, with planning taking place this Session for what the system will look like in the coming decades. The National Energy System Operator (NESO; newly formed in the last Session) is due to publish a Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP), a gas and electricity transmission network plan out to 2050, by the end of 2027. In the previous Session [transitional versions \(tCSNP\)](#) have provided guidance on the development of the electricity system so far, including TCSNP2 (otherwise known as [Beyond 2030](#)) published in 2024.

Network developments are taking place alongside, and largely because of, the deployment of renewable energy sources. The Scottish Government has 2030 targets for onshore wind (20GW, up from 10.4GW currently), offshore wind (8-11GW up from 4.2GW) and solar (4-6GW up from 0.8GW). As a result, this Session may see more renewable energy deployment than any previous Session (possibly more than all other Sessions combined). While much of this will take place offshore or via the 're-powering' of existing onshore wind sites (larger turbines replacing smaller ones on existing sites) the scale, technical challenges and community buy-in may be a consideration for successor committees. There is also potential for the expansion of hydro power in Scotland via large projects at Cruachan and Coire-Glas and various other largely Highland based projects. Unlike other parts of the UK, there are no plans for new nuclear power. The changing energy system is driven by the plan to decarbonise the overall system, but wider plans for decarbonisation in transport and heating buildings also mean that a major increase in overall electricity demand is anticipated. Some estimates put this increase as a [doubling in electricity consumption](#) by 2050.

While the changes to electricity generation sources and to the network are intended to decarbonise and increase electricity provision they are potentially of huge economic significance as well. These matters are to an extent framed as related to the concept of a just transition. In Session 6, matters relating to the just transition were within the remit of the Economy and Fair Work Committee but in NZET many of the subjects that the Committee chose to address involved questions relevant to the economy. Potential new industries were addressed in the work on Grangemouth and hydrogen and on Sustainable

Aviation Fuel. The importance of the cost of energy was addressed in the work on fuel poverty and energy price rises. NZET's annual budget scrutiny also perennially involved questions around the level of funding support going to offshore wind and to the prospective hydrogen and CCS industries.

The legislative consent memorandums on the wide-ranging Energy Bill, the GB Energy Bill and the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill, revealed the complex nature of devolved and reserved responsibilities in this area, and the connection to economic development issues.

Overall, the extent of the changes required in the pursuit of net zero, mean that there are critical economic questions to much of what is involved with decarbonisation. Regardless of the remit of future committees the economic consideration around net zero will likely be brought to the fore.

Net Zero overview

A very large amount of the Committee's work related to the delivery of net zero emissions in some way. Below is a summary of the work the Committee carried out that was most relevant to the delivery of net zero emission in Scotland:

- [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#): October 2021 – May 2023
- [Climate Change People's Panel](#): February 2024 – April 2024
- [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#): July 2024 – November 2024
- [Carbon Budget regulations](#): June 2025 – September 2025
- The Draft Climate Change Plan: November 2025 – March 2026

As suggested, many more pieces of the Committee's work related to the delivery of net zero emissions in some way, and the above are just those that are most specifically connected.

Session 6 began in the wake of the setting of the net zero by 2045 target via the Climate Change Act of 2019, and the Climate Change Plan update (CCPu) which followed this and set out the route to net zero. The CCPu was finalised in the closing days on the previous Session.

With an ambitious new target and a Plan published on how to meet it, the interest in climate policy was further bolstered by the arrival of the global climate negotiations in Scotland. Roughly six months into Session 6, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP26, took place in Glasgow. In [late November 2021](#), the Committee took evidence from a panel on the COP26 Outcomes.

Around the same time the Committee began, what ultimately turned into a lengthy inquiry into the role of local government in delivering net zero. There was nearly 18 months between the Committee agreeing to hold the inquiry and the debate in the chamber.

A novel aspect of the Committees scrutiny this Session was the commissioning of a People's Panel to consider how effective the Scottish Government had been at engaging the public on climate change and the Scottish emission targets. This was post-legislative

scrutiny related to the requirements of Section 91 of the 2009 Climate Act. It was delivered by the Participation and Communities Team (PACT) and involved 23 participants closely representative of Scottish demographics meeting over two weekends to consider the topic. The outputs have fed into much of the Committees subsequent work including on the 2024 Climate Act and the draft Climate Change Plan.

Around the same time that the People's Panel was taking place significant developments were taking place on Scotland climate ambitions. The delayed Climate Change Committee (CCC) [Scottish Progress report](#) asserted that a 2030 interim target was no longer credible. The Scottish Government agreed with this verdict and pledged to bring forward legislation to repeal the target move to a system of five-year carbon budgets (as opposed to annual targets), and redraw the timeframe for the next climate change plan (CCP).

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill arrived in September 2024 (after being delayed by the UK General Election) and due to the existing requirement for a CCP to come soon, it was expediated through committee scrutiny and the Scottish Parliament. It set up the requirement for carbon budget levels to be set by secondary legislation but only once advice on these levels had been received from the CCC.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) have played a critical role in some of the key net zero developments in this Session. Throughout the Session, the NZET Committee engaged with the CCC on multiple occasions, including evidence sessions focused on emission reductions in April 2024, September 2025 and March 2026.

The Carbon Budget regulations arrived in June 2025, a draft CCP in November 2025, with the final version presented to parliament on the 24 March 2026 (two days before the end of parliamentary business for this Session).

There is a lag in the reporting of emissions data, with the Scottish greenhouse gas (GHG) data arriving in June each year and reporting the data from 18 months previously; the latest data [published in June 2025](#) is for 2023. There is not, therefore, a full record of what has happened to emissions in this Session. Various other reasons mean that it is hard to compare the emission reduction policies from a period with the actual level of emissions. Firstly, there is often a lag between the arrival of policy and the impact on emissions e.g. uptake of a low carbon technology may take time to pick up after the introduction of a financial incentive. Secondly, there are many external factors affecting emissions some of which are recurring economic conditions, temperatures in winter, etc. and some of which are less typical, globally driven energy price spikes and pandemics.

The first carbon budget runs from 2026-30 roughly aligning with the period of Session 7 but the delay in emission reporting means that it will not be known whether it has been achieved until 2032. There are a wide variety of other indicators that can be used to assess progress toward net-zero, for example, the uptake of low carbon technologies like electric vehicles and heat pumps, and the rate of tree-planting and peatland restoration. The Scottish Government have pledged to bring forward a set of emissions-reduction early-warning indicators for each sector. This may complement the existing CCP Monitoring Reports which are published every May. A future Committee may want to consider the presentation of these indicators and what they say during the course of Session 7, as the means of assessing progress, or otherwise, to net zero.

Annexe F: SPICe sectoral overview on transport priorities

Role of local government in transport

The Committee's first major inquiry of Session 6, into [the role of local government and cross-sectoral partners in delivering Net Zero](#), considered the part that councils and Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) play in the provision and maintenance of transport infrastructure, and in supporting public transport services, walking, and cycling. The inquiry report recommended the strengthening of RTPs to facilitate cross boundary travel, that the Scottish Government should increase support for the development of municipal bus companies, and that the public sector should lead on the development of a comprehensive network of public electric vehicle (EV) charging points.

Electric vehicles

The development of public EV charging infrastructure became a recurring theme throughout the Session, with the delivery of the Scottish Government's [Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund](#) and [further plans for 24,000 new EV chargers by 2030](#) featuring in annual scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft budgets throughout the Session. Committee scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan also considered EV charging, as it is a vital element of the rapid replacement of petrol and diesel vehicles with electric equivalents, which is central to meeting statutory climate goals.

As part of the draft CCP scrutiny the Committee heard from academics, manufacturers, and the electric vehicle charging industry that EV uptake will be reliant on the roll-out of a comprehensive public vehicle charging network, which will require public support in areas where chargers may not be commercially viable. The successor committee could monitor trends in electric car uptake and the roll-out of the public charging network, to establish whether the Scottish Government's approach is delivering expected levels of uptake across urban and rural areas and socio-economic groups.

Buses

In addition to looking at the role of Councils and RTPs in bus service provision, the Committee also considered the regulations giving young people access to free bus travel, plus annual regulations setting out the financial arrangements for this and the scheme giving free bus travel to older and disabled people. The Committee also considered regulations required to allow transport authorities to establish bus service improvement partnerships and local service franchising. The Committee heard from bus operators, passenger groups, transport authorities, and sustainable transport campaigners that the use of these powers could significantly improve bus service provision and increase bus use. However, the powers have not been used in any meaningful way to date. Reasons given for this include delays in enacting secondary legislation and producing guidance, limited staff and financial resources at transport authorities, and concerns about legal challenges to franchising schemes. A future Committee may wish to monitor the use of these powers, and their impact on bus use, now that the relevant legislation and guidance is in place and the Scottish Government's policy focus on car use reduction. Improving bus service provision could also help maximise the user benefits from the significant ongoing investment in national concessionary fares schemes.

Ferries

The Committee also undertook one significant transport focused inquiry into what was required to create a [Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland](#), which built on the recommendations of the Session 5 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee inquiry into the [Construction and Procurement of Ferry Vessels in Scotland](#), that considered the award of the contracts to build two dual fuel ferries (MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa) to the Ferguson Marine shipyard in port Glasgow. The [Session 6 report](#) recommended changes to the institutional arrangements for ferry service provision, data collection, vessel replacement and design, the direct award of the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service contract to CalMac Ferries Ltd, harbour improvements, innovation, island community involvement, and the development of fixed links. Since its publication, the Scottish Government has embarked on a significant vessel replacement programme, directly awarded the Clyde and Hebrides contract to CalMac, and instigated change to CalMac management structures to better involve ferry users. The Committee continued to receive quarterly updates from Ferguson Marine on progress towards the completion of MV Glen Rosa, which is now five times over budget and around seven years late. The Committee also receives updates from vessel owners Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) on four large vessels being built at the Cemre shipyard in Turkey, the first of which (MV Isle of Islay) is about to enter service. The successor committee may wish to continue to receive these updates, on a significant aspect of capital expenditure on projects which has experienced delays and cost over-runs.

Railways

During Session 6, there were significant changes to the operation of the Scottish railway system, with the Scottish Government nationalising train operators ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper in 2022 and 2023 respectively. The Scottish Government also ran a pilot abolition of peak fares on ScotRail services, which was made permanent in September 2025.

In addition, the UK Parliament passed the [Passenger Railway Services \(Public Ownership\) Act 2024](#), which will see all franchised British passenger railway services nationalised by late 2027, and introduced a [Railways Bill](#) which will establish a new publicly owned body, Great British Railways (GBR), which will act as a 'guiding mind' for the rail industry. GBR will run the passenger train services currently managed by the UK Secretary of State for Transport alongside the national railway infrastructure, currently owned by Network Rail – which is already an arms-length body of the UK Department for Transport. Scottish Ministers will continue to own and operate ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services, and specify and fund GBR infrastructure management, maintenance, and enhancement in Scotland – as currently happens with Network Rail. The UK and Scottish Governments will be required to agree a Memorandum of Understanding setting out how they will work together. Scottish and UK Ministers will have powers to issue directions to GBR in relation to the exercise of its statutory functions, with a requirement to consult or obtain consent from the other prior to issuing such directions,

Despite these significant changes, the Committee only had capacity to question rail stakeholders on a couple of occasions during Session 6. These sessions covered a broad range of issues in limited detail. The Committee also considered a legislative consent memorandum (LCM) on the Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, and two LCMs on the UK Railways Bill. The successor Committee may, once GBR has been established, to consider the provision of rails services in Scotland and how this is meeting Scottish Government goals and current, and future, passenger needs.

Reducing car use

Another significant transport policy which the Committee had little capacity to consider was the Scottish Government's commitment, first set out in the [draft Climate Change Plan update](#) - published in December 2020, to “reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030”, from the level recorded in 2019. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport announced the abandonment of this target at the Public Audit Committee [meeting of 23 April 2025](#), arguing that the target could not be met. However, the Scottish Government still aims to reducing car use, as set out in [Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland: A Renewed Policy Statement](#) published in June 2025, and reiterated in the draft Climate Change Plan – which aims for a 4% reduction in car use between now and 2030 (which for reasons explored in the [SPICe Spotlight post on car use reduction policy in the draft CCP](#), is actually an increase).

Transport experts advised the Committee during Session 6 that the success of any car use reduction policy is reliant on making alternatives to car travel more attractive, e.g. creating continuous, high-quality cycling and walking networks, and making driving less attractive, e.g. through the introduction of congestion charging. They said both approaches must be used in tandem, simply focusing on improving alternatives to driving does not reduce car use. Given that the Scottish Government remains committed to car use reduction, the successor Committee could consider the national, regional, and local approaches to car use reduction currently slated for development by 2027, with a particular focus on policies to make driving less attractive, a missing element in transport plans at all levels to date.

Similarly, the Committee had little capacity to consider freight transport issues. The Scottish Government set out ambitious plans for the decarbonisation of road freight in the draft CCP, principally through the replacement of existing diesel vehicles with electric vans and HGVs. During scrutiny of the draft CCP, the Committee heard significant concerns from logistics industry representatives about the technical, financial, and structural barriers to the delivery of this policy, with the industry favouring the use of low-emission fuels as an interim measure – until the widespread adoption of electric goods vehicles becomes a viable option. The successor Committee could monitor the success of the Scottish Government's approach, with a view to establishing whether a change in course is necessary – as suggested by the industry.

Active travel

Finally, the Committee did not have the opportunity to consider walking, wheeling, and cycling ('active travel') – despite these modes being a significant feature of the [National Transport Strategy 2](#), [Strategic Transport Projects Review 2](#), and policy approaches to dealing with [inactivity](#), [obesity](#), and the [development of 20-minute neighbourhoods](#). The successor Committee may wish to consider the Scottish Government's policy approach to increasing active travel, the level of financial support and how this is distributed, and the legislative processes used to deliver active travel schemes, which date from the 1980's and were recommended for review in [the final report](#) of the Scottish Government's Active Travel Taskforce, published in 2018.

Annexe G: SPICe briefing on Delivering the Conveners Group strategic priority on net zero in Session 6

In Session 6, the Conveners Group (CG) identified climate change and net zero as a strategic, crosscutting priority. The CG's legacy report highlights two key benefits from this approach: it kept climate change high on the parliamentary agenda throughout the Session, encouraging committees to apply a "climate lens" to their scrutiny, and it enabled innovation and new approaches to net zero scrutiny, giving Members access to external resources, new scrutiny approaches and tools. This helped embed climate considerations as a routine part of parliamentary work across committees.

Designating net zero as a CG strategic priority also enabled the Parliament to access additional expertise and support to help committees with this work. Internally, additional specialist research and analyst capacity and a shared Adviser on net zero supported multiple committees. Externally, a partnership with UKRI ESRC and four universities funded a dedicated parliamentary post to strengthen academic engagement and improve access to climate relevant research evidence. Although much of this capacity building takes place behind the scenes, it directly shaped the support, advice and briefing that Members received.

Overall, Members had improved institutional support to access internal and external expertise and more diverse evidence and perspectives, and more tools for effective oversight of climate and environmental issues, as summarised below. These are benefits successor committees could continue and build upon in Session 7.

Coordination and cross-committee working

The CG priority enabled a more joined-up approach to climate scrutiny by committees. The NZET Committee had a leadership and coordination role, encouraging and supporting other committees to embed climate scrutiny in their own work, alongside providing cross-cutting oversight of how the Scottish Government and its agencies were responding to climate change. It also coordinated scrutiny of the draft Climate Change Plan (CCP) by nine committees. This included sharing background materials, suggested lines of inquiry and structured frameworks to support cohesive scrutiny. With a record nine committees involved in scrutiny, there was regular contact between Conveners to agree on lines of scrutiny focus, identify gaps, avoid duplication and align timings.

Expertise and support available to Members

The shared Adviser on climate change and net zero supported several committees by helping identify relevant issues, contributing to business planning discussions and supporting evidence session preparation. Additional specialist, analytical and knowledge exchange capacity in SPICe meant that Members could receive more timely and tailored briefings.

SPICe hub: Cross cutting blogs on committee remits and climate research

To support Members in understanding how climate change related to different committee remits, [SPICe prepared a public hub of research on the relevance of climate change to](#)

[committee portfolios](#). This brought together committee specific briefings, cross-cutting work on devolved/reserved levers and a narrative explanation of climate relevance across policy areas. This resource made it easier for Members to identify where climate issues were likely to arise in Bills, inquiries or budget scrutiny, and provided a consistent reference point across committees. Several blogs drew on responses that followed requests to the Scottish Parliament Academic Network and another was drafted by a SPICe academic fellow.

Academic engagement mechanisms

The [Areas of Research Interest pilot](#) created an open invitation to academics to share relevant research and insights, generating new connections and widening the pool of expert voices contributing to scrutiny. Targeted engagement events with universities allowed Members and parliamentary staff to hear directly from subject specialists, including first-time contributors. These activities made committee evidence broader, more diverse and more responsive to complex issues in the CCP and other climate work.

Engagement with independent scrutiny bodies

In this Session the committee has had strategic engagement with independent scrutiny bodies, beyond traditional evidence taking. This has included with Audit Scotland, Environmental Standards Scotland, the Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Climate Change Committee. These organisations provided Members with independent assessments and expert advice, and in particular, their input on [what would constitute a “good” CCP](#) helped guide questioning and set expectations for transparency and delivery. Alongside evidence to NZET, annual sessions for CG with the CCC, also offered an opportunity for Members from across committees to explore major risks and challenges in the net zero transition.

Scrutiny tools and consideration of procedural changes

There was work during Session 6 to explore improvements to the quality of information provided in Policy Memorandums, including consideration of whether Standing Orders should require them to give clearer explanations of how Bills affect net zero targets. Though not taken forward this Session, this work clarified options for future Parliaments. Committee staff also undertook a pilot of the Sustainable Development Impact Assessment (SDIA) tool to support more rounded scrutiny of legislation and policy. Although limited in reach to four workshops, this informed Calls for Views and SPICe committee briefings, helping build understanding on how the tool could be used to support Members to explore environmental, economic and social impacts in a more structured way.

Public participation and deliberative scrutiny

The [Climate Change People’s Panel](#) provided a direct route for the public to inform parliamentary scrutiny. Its themes - accessible policy, community-led action, transparency and household support - shaped NZET’s questioning of Ministers, legislative scrutiny and CCP scrutiny. This work also informed the Scottish Government’s review of its Public Engagement Strategy and contributed to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee’s blueprint for deliberative work in Session 7. For Members, it offered a clear and structured way of incorporating lived experience and public perspectives into formal scrutiny.

Capacity building and Continuing Professional Development

Members and staff were additionally supported through SPICe seminars, SPICe Snippets and themed workshops on climate topics including carbon budgets, sectoral pathways and the role of environmental regulators. Cross-legislature exchanges with other UK Parliaments added further opportunities for shared learning. These activities, both directly and indirectly through enhanced staff capacity, helped strengthen support to Members' in approaching climate-related scrutiny.

- 1 Official Report, 9 June 2021, cols 15-18. See also the then Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee discussing its initial priorities at its first meeting, when Members discussed the relevance of ferries to their remit. (Official Report, 22 June 2021, cols 5, 7 and 10.
- 2 [Stage 1 report on the Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill \(see especially pages 25 and 34\)](#)
- 3 [Citizens' assemblies | Institute for Government](#)
- 4 [Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, 1 May 2025 letter to Committee](#)
- 5 Official notes of the three visits to Reykjavik, can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- 6 NZET Committee, Official Report, 23 April 2024, col 3 (Chris Stark, Chief Executive)
- 7 See paragraph 124 of the report and the recommendations from paragraph 126 onwards, especially paragraph 130
- 8 Paragraph 79
- 9 Paragraph 80
- 10 In the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)
- 11 NZET Committee, Official Report, 23 April 2024, cols 3, 5-6 (Chris Stark, Chief Executive)
- 12 Paragraph 207
- 13 NZET Committee, Official Report, 3 March 2026 col 16
- 14 NZET Committee, Official Report, 3 February 2026, col 64
- 15 [Stage 1 Report on the Bill](#), paragraph 306
- 16 [Inquiry into Framework Legislation and Henry VIII powers](#), Executive Summary
- 17 [Inquiry into Framework Legislation and Henry VIII powers](#), Executive Summary
- 18 Paragraphs 4 and 5
- 19 Some discussion with examples here: [Letter from Convener to Conveners Group regarding Committee scrutiny of supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandums](#)
- 20 [Convener's letter to CEEAC Committee Convener](#)
- 21 [Convener's letter to Leader of the House; Leader of House's reply](#)
- 22 [Convener's letter to House of Commons Speaker](#); as of end Session no reply has been received.
- 23 E.g. [Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill](#)
- 24 [Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum \(LCM\) on the UK Environment Bill](#)

- 25 Discussed for instance in paras 301-313 of the Committee's [report on the draft CCP](#)
- 26 Discussed for instance in paras 314-320 of the Committee's [report on the draft CCP](#)
- 27 Discussed for instance in paras 291-300 of the Committee's [report on the draft CCP](#)
- 28 See for example [the Committee's letter to the Scottish Government on 12 February 2026](#) in response to the Chemicals (Health and Safety) (Amendment, Consequential and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2026, and the REACH (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2026.
- 29 Including PFAS (per-and poly fluoroalkyl substances) and POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants)

