

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee  
Wednesday 30 April 2025  
14<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

### Introduction

1. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was introduced by the Scottish Government on 19 February 2025. The Parliamentary Bureau has referred the Bill to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee for consideration at Stage 1.
  - [Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Bill – as introduced](#)
  - [Policy Memorandum](#)
  - [Explanatory Notes](#)
  - [Delegated Powers Memorandum](#)
  - [Financial Memorandum](#)
  - [Statement on Legislative Competence](#)

### The Bill

2. The Bill aims to support the protection and restoration of Scotland’s natural environment, and to assist the delivery of the Scottish Government’s net zero and biodiversity objectives.
3. The policy memorandum defines the ‘natural environment’ as:

“all naturally occurring living things, which we call biodiversity. Biodiversity is the web of life. It is the variety of all living things and the ecosystems where they live (on land or in water). It comprises the living organisms in a particular space, whether in a window-box, garden, park, meadow, peatland, river, loch, estuary, ocean, beach or mountain top.”
4. A summary of the provisions within the Bill are as follows:
5. **Part 1 (Nature targets)** – makes provisions regarding the creation of nature targets, as well as imposes duties on Scottish Ministers regarding the conditions, objectives and process through which targets must be developed, and process by which progress towards targets should be monitored and reviewed.
6. **Part 2 (EIA/HR powers)** – confers regulation-making powers to Scottish Ministers to modify or restate environmental impact assessment legislation and habitats regulations for certain purposes, including the purpose of achieving statutory targets around climate change and biodiversity, as well as to improve and simplify the operation of the law.

7. **Part 3 (National parks)** – introduces a number of amendments to current national parks legislation to amend the statutory aims of national parks, creates duties for public bodies to facilitate the implementation of national park plans, as well as confers new regulation-making powers to Scottish Ministers to develop a fixed-penalty notice regime for in relation to national park bye-laws.
8. **Part 4 (Deer management)** – makes amendments to the aims and purposes of deer management in Scotland. There are provisions that make changes to the current regime of deer management plans, control agreements and control schemes. The Bill also makes amendments to NatureScot's investigatory powers, authorisations for a number of activities regarding deer management, liability in relation to stray farmed deer and licensing of dealing in venison.
9. **Part 5 (General)** – definition of public authorities, auxiliary and commencement provisions.

## RAI Committee scrutiny of the Bill

### Written evidence

10. The Committee launched a call for views on the Bill on 14 March. The consultation will be open until 9 May. [Written responses will be published in due course on the call for views webpage.](#)

### Evidence sessions

11. On 5 March, the Committee began its oral evidence gathering by hearing from the Scottish Government Bill Team. [Read the Official Report from the meeting.](#)
12. On 2 April, the Committee continued its evidence taking on the Bill by holding an evidence session with representatives of national park authorities and local authorities. [Read the Official Report from the meeting.](#)
13. At its meeting on 30 April, the Committee will examine Part 4 of the Bill on deer management by hearing from a panel of public bodies and then host a roundtable discussion with deer management advocacy groups.

### Next steps

14. Over the coming months, the Committee will progress its scrutiny of the Bill at Stage 1 by taking oral evidence from a range of stakeholder including academics, environmental non-governmental organisations, businesses, public bodies and then from the Scottish Government.
15. In addition, the Committee will undertake a fact-finding visit to Cairngorms National Park and host an online event with local deer practitioners as part of its engagement activities on the Bill.
16. Following the conclusion of evidence taking, the Committee will consider and agree a Stage 1 report on the Bill later in the year.