

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
Tuesday 17 February 2026
7th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

Evidence session - NatureScot

Introduction

1. The Committee has agreed to take evidence from NatureScot to take stock of its most recent Annual Report and Accounts, and to discuss its strategic priorities and operational performance. NatureScot [published its 2023/24 Annual Report and Accounts in 2025](#).
2. The Committee [previously held a general scrutiny session of this nature with NatureScot on 3 October 2023](#), alongside SEPA. It has taken evidence from NatureScot on specific matters within its remit in NatureScot's capacity as a relevant expert stakeholder/ regulator since then.

About NatureScot

3. NatureScot is non-departmental Public Body accountable to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament, as was established by [the Natural Heritage \(Scotland\) Act 1991](#). It formerly used the title Scottish Natural Heritage and this remains its legal name. NatureScot's statutory purposes are to:
 - Secure the conservation and enhancement of nature and landscapes
 - Foster understanding and facilitate enjoyment of nature and landscapes
 - Advise on the sustainable use and management of nature and landscapes
 - Further the conservation, control and sustainable management of deer in Scotland
4. Nick Halfhide [was appointed as Chief Executive of NatureScot on 1 September 2025](#), having served as interim chief executive since January 2025.
5. NatureScot has various statutory functions including in relation to species licensing (with significant new and forthcoming licensing functions under the Wildlife and Muirburn Management (Scotland) Act 2024, as well as already administering [over 90 different types of species licences](#)). It monitors the condition of protected areas and oversees their management, provides planning advice as a statutory consultee, and has various other advisory functions.
6. [NatureScot's 2026-2030 Corporate Plan](#) sets out that its "purpose is to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and to restore and regenerate biodiversity across our

land, freshwaters and seas by 2045.” This is aligned with the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#).

Other Committee work on nature conservation and biodiversity

7. The Committee scrutinised development of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and associated Delivery Plan at [various meetings from 2022 to 2024](#).
8. The Committee has maintained a watching brief in this session on [Natural capital finance](#): investment, including private investment, to conserve or restore the natural environment (peatland, wetlands, coastal saltmarsh, native forest, etc.) and NatureScot’s role in this area. It has also sought to mainstream consideration of biodiversity and conservation into its scrutiny work in areas such as:
 - [Scotland’s Fourth National Planning Framework](#);
 - [Post-Brexit environmental regulation and governance](#).

Meeting on 17 February

9. At the meeting, the Committee will take evidence from:
 - Professor Colin Galbraith, Chair;
 - Nick Halfhide, Chief Executive Officer; and
 - Alan Aitken, Public Affairs Manager
10. This will be a wide-ranging session covering issues within NatureScot’s remit relevant to the Committee’s portfolio responsibilities. The Committee will also take the opportunity to discuss matters arising from NatureScot’s most recent Annual Report and Corporate Plan and its new statutory responsibilities.

Clerks to the Committee
February 2026