



# THE CLIMATE RESET



**A DISCUSSION PAPER BY THE  
SCOTTISH GREEN MSPS**

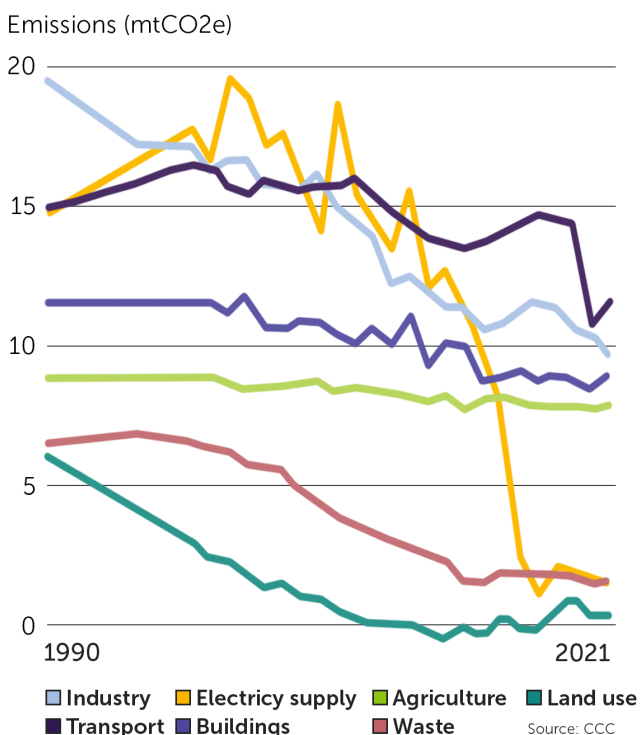


2024 marks five years since the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency, and 15 years since Scotland set its first legally binding climate targets. Yet progress on reducing emissions has stalled, and the opportunity to prevent catastrophic climate breakdown is quickly slipping away.

With global temperatures continuing to soar well beyond the records of the last century and with increasing threats from extreme weather events, the time for rolling out incremental shifts in policy to change our emissions trajectory has passed. Our focus - across government, business and civil society - must now be on delivering the policies that will secure the net zero transition. With that transition will come major opportunities for new jobs, increased wellbeing and a healthier environment, we cannot afford to wait.

**We need a Climate Reset**, with renewed political ambition to implement the difficult, but crucial, policies that have been discussed for many years.

## Scotland's historical emissions by sector (1990-2021)







## WHERE WE ARE AND HOW WE GOT HERE

The Scottish Greens have consistently fought for climate action to be at the heart of government policy and decision making. But decades of political inaction have led us to the point where our first major milestone - achieving a 75% reduction in emissions by 2030 - is now deemed to be unachievable.

In April 2024, the Scottish Government announced their intention to introduce legislation to amend the way we track progress against our climate targets, whilst reaffirming its commitment to achieving net zero by 2045. Under the terms of the Bute House Agreement, Scottish Green MSPs were involved in the early stages of considering the government's options for the new legislation, and made clear that any changes to the targets must be tied to a renewed focus on policy delivery.

The proposals included some pragmatic, technical changes to the way Scotland's emission cuts are set out, such as a move to multi-year carbon budgets. However most of the reaction understandably focused on the deep disappointment and anger felt at the recognition that the 2030 target is now out of reach.

Scottish Green MSPs share the dismay that many have felt following this announcement. At this juncture there are no simple choices left to make to deliver for Scotland's people and the planet. **It's time for radical honesty on the climate.**

This paper lays out the Scottish Green MSPs' position on that legislation and what actions must accompany it to deliver a credible Climate Reset.





## IT'S TIME FOR RADICAL HONESTY ON THE CLIMATE

Scotland is not a world leader on climate. It aimed to be one, but it has not yet succeeded. For too long, politicians have been distracted by the ease of setting targets, whilst recoiling from the work that needs to be done to actually achieve them.

We have passed two Climate Acts, and have had legally binding targets for 15 years. They have failed to deliver meaningful policy change.

So far, Scotland has managed to halve its emissions since the 1990 baseline but almost all of those reductions have been in the electricity sector, due to the turning off of coal-fired power stations and the widespread switch to renewables. That change was already underway prior to the first Climate Change Act in 2009. Setting annual targets did not accelerate this trend, and nor did they achieve any significant emission cuts in other sectors. Notably, barely any reductions have been made in transport, agricultural and buildings since the 1990 baseline.

In short, annual targets were intended to achieve a step-change in Scotland's emissions, and this did not happen. The framework of targets, reporting and plans did not overcome the political reluctance of successive governments to do what's needed, and far too many people treated the targets as a substitute for delivering action.

Achieving Net Zero by 2045, at the latest, remains possible. But if we see the same pattern in 2024-2045 as we saw in 2009-2024, we will fail again.

Scottish Green MSPs have always stated that climate policies must be informed by the latest scientific evidence. We must therefore accept the scientific advice from the Climate Change Committee that the interim target of 75% reductions by 2030



is now out of reach, and that therefore a new legal framework is needed. But the recognition that Scotland is years behind where we should be on emission cuts also requires an immediate acceleration of the work which has been put off for too long.

A new framework must succeed where the old one failed, locking in actions for the government rather than only setting targets and permitting inadequate action, and we make recommendations below for how this can be achieved. Five-year carbon budgets, which are used by governments across the rest of the UK, are a pragmatic option which should focus attention on achieving systemic change over time, rather than continuing to rely on market forces to deliver annual savings.

However, we can only support changes to legislation if it is accompanied by a significant acceleration of climate action, and a clear demonstration from the Scottish Government that its response to the climate emergency will show the courage and determination which has been lacking.

The significant changes in the Scottish Government we have seen in 2024, including the ending of the Bute House Agreement and the appointment of a new First Minister and Deputy First Minister, have raised questions over its future commitment to climate action. Whilst the Scottish Government has confirmed its intention to bring forward a new climate targets bill in September, it urgently needs to provide an update on the accompanying climate policies which will get us back on track to net zero, including the actions that were previously underway.





## A NEW CLIMATE BILL MUST CONTINUE TO SET AN AMBITIOUS TRAJECTORY TO NET ZERO

The entire climate movement was disappointed and angry at the confirmation by the CCC earlier this year that 75% by 2030 is no longer achievable. However, the same report also confirmed net zero by 2045 at the latest is within reach if we accelerate action now. We must redouble our efforts to achieve this long term goal, and use the opportunity of a new Climate Bill to continue to set a clear trajectory.

The new Bill should set dates by which Scotland can still achieve the landmark 75% and 90% targets, and the Scottish Government should only be able to review this if there is specific CCC advice.

The current Climate Act requires the Scottish Government to produce a climate change plan (CCP) every five years, detailing a strategic route map to deliver the annual targets set out in the Act. The last full CCP was published in 2018, with a limited update made in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the Scottish Government has indicated that the scientific advice on which a new Plan could be based will not be available until 2025. A timeline for the subsequent production of a new CCP has not been given.

Whilst we recognise that it will take time to receive advice on our first five year carbon budget from the Climate Change Committee, and to produce the accompanying plan, this is time we do not have to spare in this escalating global crisis. Therefore, the Scottish Government should produce an interim climate plan within six months of the passing of the new climate bill, detailing what accelerated climate measures will be taken immediately to get Scotland back on track to net-zero.

The new Bill must also require future Climate Change Plans to stipulate what emissions reductions must be delivered by each policy in each sector, ensuring that there is a comprehensive package of action across all areas. We can no longer rely on exceptional changes in one particular sector to achieve our targets, as has been the case up to now with the decarbonisation of electricity.







## THERE MUST BE A RAPID ACCELERATION OF CLIMATE ACTION, WITHOUT DELAY

Any changes to targets, how we monitor progress, and how we deliver climate plans will be meaningless without concrete action. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero announced a package of measures to Parliament in April, which the Scottish Green MSPs have welcomed as a starting point. These now must be progressed urgently, with additional detail confirmed as soon as possible. This includes;

- ▶ **Confirm a timescale for the rollout of integrated ticketing** across Scotland's public transport network, and **reverse the decision to reintroduce peak fares.**
- ▶ Progress the rollout of demand management on Scotland's roads, such as **congestion charges in Scotland's biggest cities**, to begin during the current parliamentary term, with money raised reinvested in local public transport alternatives to car use
- ▶ Commit to **legislating for a Carbon Land Tax** before the end of this parliamentary session
- ▶ Publish the details of **an Air Departure Tax which drives down emissions from aviation**, with discussions with the new UK Government on implementation being taken forward as soon as possible.
- ▶ **Confirm plans for the future split of agriculture funding between basic payment and environmental measures**, with no less than a 50 / 50 split as a starting point
- ▶ Complete the delivery of the **Just Transition Plan for Mossmorran and Peterhead** before the end of this parliamentary term
- ▶ Reconvene **Scotland's Climate Assembly** as a matter of urgency

In addition to these policies already in the pipeline, there must be an exhaustive review of all policy areas across the Scottish Government to identify further areas where climate action can be accelerated.



Beyond the initial climate package announced in April 2024, the Scottish Green MSPs are calling on the following actions to be progressed:

- 1 DECARBONISING TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**
- 2 A REAL JUST TRANSITION FOR THE ENERGY SECTOR**
- 3 CONTINUE TO RAPIDLY PROGRESS DECARBONISING HOME HEATING**
- 4 SUPPORT NATURE'S RECOVERY AND ITS CAPACITY TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES**
- 5 PUTTING CLIMATE AT THE TOP OF THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC AGENDA**



## **1 DECARBONISING TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

There is no justification for continued road expansion in a climate emergency. The Scottish Government must **publish the climate compatibility assessment of the proposed full dualling of the A96** and agree not to progress investment, which cannot be justified in climate terms. They should also commission a **similar climate compatibility assessment for all remaining sections of the A9** which have not yet gone out to tender and major road infrastructure projects within the City Region Deals. Historic political commitments cannot trump our obligations to future generations.

We need to reduce the number of flights taking off and landing in Scotland. **The Scottish Government must oppose the expansion of Scotland's airports and non-lifeline flights.**

Following these specific actions, the Scottish Parliament should legislate to place a **statutory requirement on the Scottish Government, local government and agencies to apply a net zero test** to major expenditure, including capital projects.





## 2 A REAL JUST TRANSITION FOR THE ENERGY SECTOR

The Scottish Government must urgently publish its final Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, presenting it to Parliament as soon as possible after returning from summer recess. The strategy must **retain the clear presumption against new licensing for oil and gas** which was contained in the draft strategy consulted on in 2023.

Given the success of decarbonising Scotland's electricity supply, there can be no justification for new electricity generation from fossil fuels. **The proposed new gas power plant at Peterhead must be rejected by the Scottish Government.** There can also be no long term role for fossil-fuel based hydrogen in Scotland's energy mix beyond the hardest-to-decarbonise sectors as a transitional tool only, and this must be ruled out in the upcoming energy strategy.

As an oil-possessing nation, Scotland has the opportunity to show real global leadership by mapping out a future without oil and gas. With this in mind, **Scotland should join the international Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance**, and join fellow states and sub-states which are planning a managed phasing out of fossil fuel production.



## 3 CONTINUE TO RAPIDLY PROGRESS DECARBONISING HOME HEATING

Scotland's Heat in Buildings strategy, developed by the Scottish Greens during our time in Government, has been hailed by the Climate Change Committee as a blueprint for the rest of the UK in how to decarbonise home heating. This must not be watered down or the timescale allowed to slip, and **the Heat in Buildings bill must be introduced to parliament in Autumn 2024.**

We must also accelerate the positive work underway by local authorities to map out and develop the role of heat networks, particularly in decarbonising urban homes in Scotland. The Scottish Government should support the development of large scale heat networks by accelerating the work of the Heat Network Support Unit and **aiming for Scotland's cities to have heat network plans in place and ready for development within three years.**

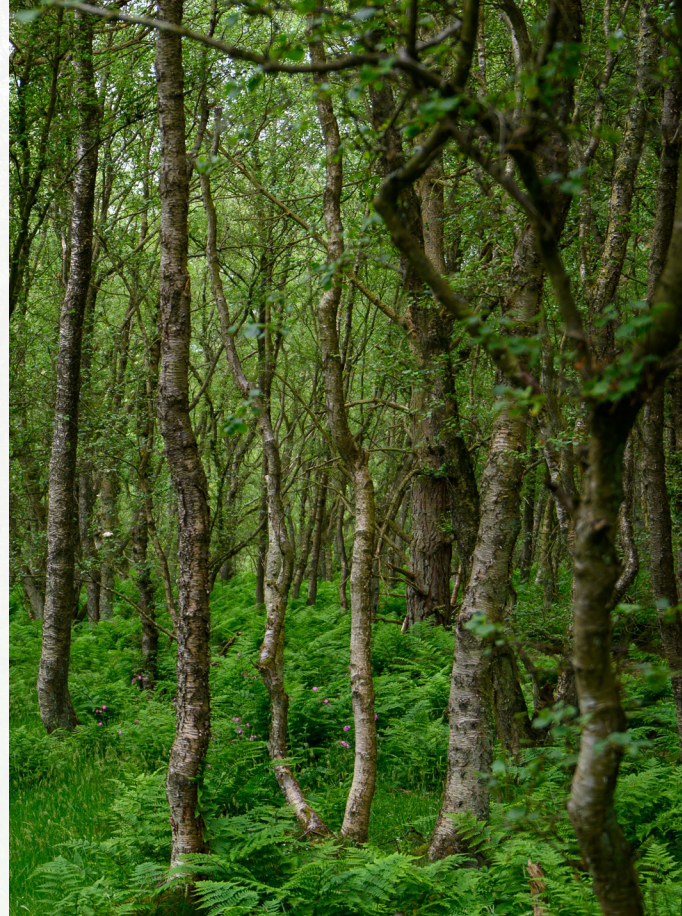




## 4 SUPPORT NATURE'S RECOVERY AND ITS CAPACITY TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES

Scotland's biodiversity and range of habitats are some of the greatest assets that support our health and wellbeing. Ecosystems can also play a vital role in tackling climate change by naturally absorbing carbon emissions, particularly Scotland's peatlands, woodlands and seabed.

The government must not backtrack on its commitment to deliver record investment to restore nature, including through the Nature Recovery Fund, and biodiversity funding must not be subject to short-sighted cuts to balance budgets.



## 5 PUTTING CLIMATE AT THE TOP OF THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC AGENDA

Real climate leadership is not about setting targets, but bringing society on the journey as we make some of the biggest shifts in policy and public life in generations.

Building on the work of the climate assembly, which the Scottish Government has committed to reconvening, **the government should fund a national climate information campaign**, which engages the public in a wider conversation about climate and which must go beyond the simplistic campaigns of recent years, setting out the changes we need to make in the coming years to how we travel, heat our homes, and fuel our industries. This should also be honest about the consequences of failure, and challenge the misinformation that has been growing in recent years over climate action, and which has stalled progress in Parliament and local councils.

It is essential that communities are at the forefront of the climate response delivering social benefit and supporting behaviour change. Scotland's Climate Hubs and Networks are building on the success of hundreds of communities who benefited from the Climate Challenge Fund originally spearheaded by the Scottish Greens. The Climate Hub network must be rapidly expanded to cover the whole of Scotland.







## THE LIMITS OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT

As much as the Scottish Government can talk of its desire to be a world leader on climate, it is fundamentally constrained by the limits of a devolved government.

The Scottish Government, unlike independent nations across Europe and beyond, does not have the full range of financial and regulatory powers at its disposal. Many powers over taxation remain reserved to Westminster, as do the critical powers to borrow money on international markets to invest in green infrastructure. Without the ability to borrow and the requirement to set a balanced budget annually, Scottish Ministers face a very real limit on their ability to plan and adopt long-term plans for net zero infrastructure investment.

Additionally, the imposition of the UK Internal Market Act - which requires similar internal trade rules across all four nations in the UK - prevents Scottish Ministers moving further, faster on some of the less complex policy changes that are needed, from Deposit Return Schemes for food and drinks packages to a ban on peat in compost.

The new UK Labour Government has signalled a welcome shift in reserved policy on new oil and gas developments in the North Sea, but questions remain over its commitment to leverage Green New Deal investment, after its flagship £28bn per year investment pledge was dropped in early 2024. Details on its GB Energy scheme and associated impacts on Scotland's energy sector continues to be thin on the ground. With this uncertainty, the Scottish Government cannot rely on UK action for its climate plans and future budgets.

The urgency of the climate crisis requires an immediate acceleration of climate action at all levels of Government, and meaningful co-operation between Holyrood and Westminster if we are to get back on track to prevent catastrophic climate change.