



**Friends of
the Earth
Scotland**

The Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy: The Work Starts Here

1. Introduction

Friends of the Earth Scotland welcomes the first Scottish sustainability strategy, especially its acknowledgement of the challenges that the nation faces in balancing and harmonising social, economic and environmental priorities. The strategy not only acknowledges the scale of the problem but also begins to identify requirements for co-ordinated action across government via both existing and emerging policies.

2. Key Commitments: The right rhetoric

The strategy makes a number of useful acknowledgements of the challenges and issues that Scotland faces setting the context and driver for greater action.

It acknowledges the urgency and scale of the challenge: *“The world [is] facing up to the global threat of unsustainable development, causing damage to such an extent that the planet cannot sustain human life, leading to a world where future generations would no longer have the resources to meet their needs. ... This is no longer a distant threat: it is happening now.”* (p.11, paras 2.1-2.2)

It recognises Scotland’s role in causing the problem: *“Scotland, like other developed countries, is using an unfair and unsustainable share of the world’s resources. The actions and commitments in this strategy will help us to reduce the size of that footprint.”* (p.55)

It recognises the need for Environmental Justice in Scotland as well as globally: *“This strategy will also give priority to improving the quality of life of individuals and communities in Scotland, securing environmental justice for those who suffer the worst local environments.”* (p.41, para 8.2)

And it makes clear that conventional approaches putting economic growth above all else are no longer valid: *“Economic growth is our top priority – but not any cost”* (p.15) *“The focus of conventional income measures such as GDP is such that they do not aim to reflect the broad view of progress, the importance of capturing well being and quality of life issues, and the need to account for environmental issues.”* (p.76 para 14.17)

It also acknowledges that delivering sustainable development *“...requires us to make changes to the processes of Government, mainstreaming sustainable development into the core functions of the Executive.”* (p.73, para 14.2)

Action by Parliament

MSPs should help ensure that future decisions in every area of government do not contradict these commitments, but reflect them fully, so Scotland lives up its promises.

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3. Measures and mechanisms for delivery: Turning aspirations into reality

Much of the strategy focuses on existing actions and strategies, relying on current and already planned expenditure. This action is accompanied by new measures setting the basis for more sustainable successors.

3.1 Eight programmes are highlighted as key vehicles for delivery of the Strategy:

- climate change programme (expected January/February 2006)
- national transport strategy (expected mid-2006)
- 2020 renewables target (established)
- energy efficiency strategy (due spring 2006)
- green jobs strategy (published 2005)
- national waste plan (published 2003)
- marine and coastal strategy (published 2005)
- biodiversity strategy (published 2004)

Action by Parliament

MSPs should examine these strategies in light of the vision set out in the sustainable development strategy and ensure that the new and revised strategies are sufficiently ambitious and have the necessary targets and resources to secure the aspirations set out in the Sustainable Development Strategy.

3.2 The Strategy promises much by way of new measures to promote sustainable decision-making:

“The Scottish Executive will ... set out how its spending plans contribute to sustainable development objectives.” (p.73 para 14.3)

“Each significant capital investment to illustrate in a business case that it has considered sustainable design in incorporating green procurement strategies, resource efficiency and waste minimisation.” (p.74 para 14.4)

“A new system of continuous reporting against these indicators on the Scottish Executive website will be introduced (p.76. para 14.16)

“Departmental contributions [to high level commitments in this strategy] will be set out in published annual business plans from 2006-7 (p.75 para 14.8)

“The Scottish Executive ... will introduce a Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan by the end of 2006.” (p.83 para 15.8)

“Agencies and public bodies have been requested to complete a gap analysis of their existing policies to enable them to put in place by March 2006 environmental policies, procedures and realistic targets for reducing their environmental impact. (p.83 para 15.11)

Action by Parliament

MSPs should ensure that the Scottish Executive actually takes these steps when decisions are made, targets set and resources allocated, and closely monitor their effectiveness.

See also para 14.22, *“The Partnership Agreement stresses the importance of robust Parliamentary arrangements to hold the Executive to account. ... The Executive will work with the Parliament to explore new and effective ways of achieving these aims.”*

4. Risks, uncertainties and future tests of commitment

The strategy acknowledges the Executive's past failings and the challenges of taking meaningful steps to improve Scotland's performance:

"Sustainable development is a concept easy to subscribe to, harder to put into practice. What matters is the change to culture, policy and action..." (Jack McConnell & Nicol Steven, foreword, p5)

Whether the strategy makes a real difference will become clearer as and when critical decisions are made. Remaining areas of concern are:

4.1 Roads

Aspiration: *"One of the key challenges ... will be how to support Scotland's long-term economic growth while taking full account of, and reducing wherever possible, environmental impacts."* (p20 para 4.6)

"[The Executive's strategies will] ... place increased emphasis on development of locally based solutions able to support those furthest from the jobs market, those closest to the job market and those in low-paid, low skilled jobs..." (p.25 para 5.9)

Current Reality: A commitment to spend £500m on Europe's largest urban motorway project, which the enquiry reporter recommended should not be built because – amongst other reasons, *"Most of the jobs that the new motorway would be expected to attract ... would be drawn away from other locations in Scotland, at the expense of those areas. ... The new road would be of little assistance to those suffering exclusion, and would be likely to worsen [their] travel opportunities ... by undermining progress towards major public transport improvement. ... Policies for environmental protection and improvement would be breached along various sections of the route ... by increased noise, visual intrusion, and airborne emissions."*¹

Planning

Aspiration: *"Individuals and communities should be able to influence the decisions that affect their environment."* (p33. para 7.4)

Reality: The demands of communities for new rights via a limited third party right of appeal in planning matters have been ignored despite 86% of respondents to a public consultation favouring this option. Existing rights to challenge and ensure proper scrutiny of major developments are threatened, through the centralisation of decisions in the national planning framework.

Waste

Aspiration: *"The Executive will ... continue to invest substantially in recycling, waste treatment and prevention in order to achieve our targets on recycling and diverting waste from landfill."* (p.53 para 10.10)

Future risk: The door is being left open for the construction of incinerators ("energy from waste" plants) to tackle Scotland's waste, undermining more efficient measures aimed at reduction and recycling. (New area waste plans to consulted on this year)

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¹ "ROADS (SCOTLAND) ACT 1984; ACQUISITION OF LAND (AUTHORISATION PROCEDURE)(SCOTLAND) ACT 1947 M74 SPECIAL ROAD (FULLARTON ROAD TO WEST OF KINGSTON BRIDGE) ORDERS REPORT OF PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY INTO OBJECTIONS VOLUME 1 : MAIN REPORT"; R M Hickman CBE MA BA(Hons) Dip TP MRTPI Donald Watt LLB NP