

Briefing paper on priorities for Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy and Targets consultation

February 2025

Summary

Scotland urgently needs a just transition to a circular economy which reduces the social and environmental harm from overconsumption of resources, improves the lives of the people of Scotland and creates decent, green jobs here and our supply chains.

Soon, the Scottish Government will be consulting on a strategy and targets for developing a circular economy in Scotland, in line with the requirements of the new Circular Economy (Scotland) Act. The strategy must embed a just transition approach and include policies around human rights and environmental due diligence in supply chains and extended producer responsibility. The statutory targets must be carbon and material footprint based.

Scotland's approach to the circular economy has so far failed to achieve the transformational change required to meet Scotland's economic, social or environmental goals. People are trapped in a wasteful and expensive 'throw away society'. Recycling rates are now the lowest in the UK, having flatlined for a decade whilst incineration booms. Overconsumption of resources is causing human rights violations in supply chains and contributing to climate breakdown.

In June 2024, the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act was passed, with the aim of creating a circular economy in Scotland through new powers, such as banning the dumping of new products, and statutory targets to reduce our material use. The new law must now be implemented swiftly, balancing the need for meaningful change with that for urgent action. The first step will be to consult on a circular economy strategy and targets.

Top 3 priorities for the Circular Economy Strategy

1. Embed a just transition approach

A transition to a circular economy will have profound changes in the way we all live and work. To ensure these changes benefit people, they must be involved in the decision-making process. For example, waste workers have knowledge about the failings of the current system which should be incorporated into the strategy, which must also consider how waste workers can be supported as their roles change with the development of a circular economy.

Marginalised groups must be fairly included. The voice of business is often loud and powerful, but the Scottish Government's first duty is towards its citizens. **We urge the Scottish Government to engage directly with communities and workers before and during the circular economy consultation, to embed their voices throughout the process and plans.**

2. Include new policies on supply chain due diligence

The way products are made and used creates serious and extensive impacts, contributing to human rights violations, climate breakdown and pollution. Due diligence refers to the requirement

for corporations to be held accountable for the social and environmental harms of their international supply chains.

The Scottish Government must build due diligence into the circular economy strategy by including mandatory public procurement requirements and guidance for business on due diligence which keep pace with European regulation. Early and comprehensive consultation with the global south is vital.

3. Commit to a comprehensive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programme

EPR is a proven approach to make companies take responsibility for the end-of-life impacts of their products. The Scottish Government has the necessary powers through the UK Environment Act to develop a comprehensive programme of EPRs, similar to the approach taken in France and other countries. **The first Scottish Circular Economy Strategy should commit to EPR measures for textiles, toys, fishing gear, wind turbines and electric vehicle batteries within 5 years.**

Other priorities for the strategy consultation

The consultation on the circular economy strategy should also include:

- Commitments and plans on how to enforce key measures;
- Substantial increased support for reuse and repair;
- How to manage harmful chemicals; and
- A ban on disposal of wind turbine blades.

Priorities for the Circular Economy Targets

Ministers are required by the Act to set statutory targets for the circular economy. Experts agree that reducing the national carbon and material impact of consumption is the most effective way to reduce harm from overconsumption of resources, so these measures should be prioritised for circular economy targets. The 2022 consultation on the Circular Economy Bill found that 85% of responders supported consumption reduction targets and the Act requires a focus on 'whole-life carbon emissions'.

Key targets should be science based and statutory to be meaningful and effective. The Scottish Government must consult on clear and specific targets. The targets should be set as follows:

Carbon-based consumption reduction target

Scotland should adopt a target to reduce its global carbon footprint to net zero by 2045, with an interim target of 75% by 2030, based on 1998 levels, with annual targets towards these goals.

Material-based consumption reduction target

Scotland should adopt a target to reduce its material footprint to 8 tonnes per person by 2045 (57% reduction), with an interim target of 13 tonnes per person by 2030 (30% reduction), based on 2017 levels, with annual targets towards these goals.

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