



SCOTTISH POLICY GROUP

BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Climate Change - Net Zero Nation: Draft Public Engagement Strategy

A response from the British Ecological Society Scottish Policy Group to the Scottish Government's consultation.

The British Ecological Society: 'A world inspired, informed and influenced by ecology' Founded in 1913, we are the world's oldest ecological society, with over 6,400 members worldwide. As the voice of the UK's ecological community, we communicate the value of ecological knowledge to policymakers and promote evidence-informed solutions.

The Scottish Policy Group (SPG) is a group of British Ecological Society (BES) members promoting the use of ecological knowledge in Scotland. We act as a focal point to provide robust ecological evidence to the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and wider society.

The BES Scottish Policy Group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's consultation. Our approach to the consultation is in line with the BES position: to make the best scientific evidence accessible to decision-makers, which is based on the expertise of our membership. As such, we have responded to a select number of questions where our answers can be supported by evidence. This response has been signed off by the BES Scottish Policy Group Committee.

Based on the evidence we have received we have answered questions 1 and 2 with regards to the objectives and principles. We recommend the answers to these questions are considered together, as much of the evidence provided is relevant to both. We have also provided answers for questions 6, 8 and 9.

1(a) - What are your views on the three objectives underpinning our approach to engagement on climate change?

Key points:

- It is noted that objective two is going to be evidence based, and this approach is encouraged.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding what exactly will be communicated to the public. This clarity is vital for long term public support, as it will have an effect on public perception and on the efficacy of any actions decided upon.

For example, strategies by many governments to tackle climate change propose a largely 'business as usual' economic model, with greater investment in technological solutions and 'nudges' to change human behaviour. Many academic experts and NGOs investigating Green New Deal Scenarios have suggested the need for large-scale economic reform and 'degrowth' strategies to truly combat the scale of the problem. A semi-quantified review of how successful strategies may be is given in Stafford *et al.* (2020; written prior to the coronavirus pandemic), illustrating that effective action on climate and biodiversity crises is likely to need

more in the way of carbon taxation and removal of fossil fuel subsidies than is often considered in mainstream government policy.

With respect to communication, scenarios are required as part of the communication strategy. Scenarios need to cover a wide spectrum of different approaches, with an evaluation of how effective they will be. If not, those strategies based on a 'business as usual' model likely to be favoured by many sectors of society, including members of the general public, and this could be counterproductive if stronger approaches are necessary in the future.¹

1(b) - Do you think that any of these objectives should be removed or changed?

Key points:

- The objectives should include how members of the public can take action and there should be examples highlighted in the strategy that encourages diverse engagement.

1(c) - Are there any objectives that you think should be included that are currently missing?

Key points:

- All the objectives are around engaging with the public and encouraging the public to take action, which we fully support. Details relating to engagement with business and industry should also be included.
- Details regarding integrating net zero policy throughout all government policies is currently missing. Including such information is important as in order to achieve net zero, it needs to be part of all government policies in all departments, with this being clearly communicated to the general public.
- The Strategy Document has a large section on empowering communities and the specific initiatives to do this, but the objectives don't seem to detail the actual empowerment aspect, only 'encouragement'.
- There is a lack of detail about the level of financial support for households and communities to make changes and take action, which is important for promoting engagement and behaviour change.

2. Principles

2(a) - What are your views on our seven principles for public engagement set out in Box 1?

Key point:

- We strongly encourage an evidence-informed approach underpinning the strategy.
- The principles refer to actions that can be taken. The specific actions need to be clearly stated and details of how people can take those actions are needed. For example, if an action is that a household needs to install better insulation, detail of where the financial means come from to take that action is needed, which also links to equity and ensuring inclusive policies.

¹ Stafford, R., Croker, A.R., Rivers, E.M., Cantarello, E., Costelloe, B., Ginige, T., Sokolnicki, J., Kang, K., Jones, P.J.S., McKinley, E. and Shiel, C. 2020. Evaluating optimal solutions to environmental breakdown. *Environmental Science and Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2020.07.008>

2 (b). Do you think that any of these principles should be removed or changed?

Key point:

- Putting the people first: this principle should not only be about Scottish communities but make clear any impact actions taken in Scotland may have on communities, production and carbon emissions overseas.
- **2(c) - Are there any principles of good public engagement on climate change that you think are missing?**

Key point:

- Some of the principles highlight that citizens will contribute to shaping and understanding the actions that the government will take. The details of how these communities will be equipped and empowered to take actions themselves in an open/inclusive/accessible way, or how these actions are based on the 'people first' principle is lacking and should be more clearly indicated.

6. Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for communicating on climate change that could be useful for informing our approach?

Examples:

- The Climate Communication Project²
- Climate Stories³
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement⁴

8. Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for enabling participation in decision-making that could be useful for informing our approach?

Example:

- Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Aarhus, Denmark, 1998.⁵

9. What are your views on our approach to encouraging action?

Key points:

- There is a need to ensure that the public have information available about the most effective ways to mitigate climate change. For example tree planting is often cited as a way to lock up carbon and mitigate climate change. The assumption is that this is true in all circumstances

² The Climate Communication Project, Project Overview

[<https://theclimatcommsproject.org/category/project-overview/>], [accessed 29th March 2021].

³ Climate Stories [<https://www.climatestories.org.uk/>], [accessed 29th March 2021].

⁴ National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, Engaging Environments

[<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/completed-projects/engaging-environments>], [accessed 29th March 2021].

⁵ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Aarhus, Denmark, 1998 [<https://unece.org/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf>], [accessed 29th March 2021].

but recent research has shown this not to be the case.⁶ Tree planting that releases the large amount of carbon stored in the soil may be a net emitter of carbon at least in the early decades following tree establishment. The public need to be made aware of how best to be most effective in any action they take.

- There is a need for better signposting to resources and documents that outline what people can do to take action.

⁶ Friggens, N.L., Hester, A.J., Mitchell, R.J., Parker, T.C., Subke, J.A., Wookey, P.A., 2020. Tree planting in organic soils does not result in net carbon sequestration on decadal timescales. *Global Change Biology*, 26, pp.5178-5188.