



CIEEM Manifesto for the Scottish Election 2026

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About CIEEM

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) is the leading professional body for over 9,000 ecologists and environmental managers across the UK and Ireland, including more than 880 working in Scotland. Our members provide expert, evidence-based and impartial advice grounded in frontline experience of restoring habitats, assessing developments and advising on sustainable land use. We regularly support governments on environmental law and policy, helping to design robust, workable regulations. Our presence in Scotland and professional standards mean decision-makers can trust our guidance on delivering nature's recovery and a resilient, prosperous Scotland.

Introduction

Scotland is in a nature and climate emergency. In recent assessments, 11% of Scottish species were at risk of extinction¹ and only 65% of natural features on protected sites were in favourable condition². As nature declines, climate hazards such as record wildfires³ and severe storms like Storm Babet⁴ are intensifying, with growing impacts on homes, infrastructure and communities.

These changes affect every aspect of daily life: health and wellbeing, food production, water and energy security, transport resilience, and the rural and coastal economies that support jobs and identities. Nature is now among the public's top concerns, alongside the cost of living, the NHS, the economy and climate change⁵, and is likely to be a key factor for voters in the 2026 election⁶.

This document sets out five priorities and achievable actions for climate, nature, and communities. These envisage the resourcing of evidence-based actions to meet nature targets, protection and enhancement of environmental safeguards, embedding nature-inclusive development, securing the capacity of LPAs and SNCBs to fulfill their environmental responsibilities, and establishing the foundations for effective blended nature finance.



Building a resilient Scotland: actions for the Scottish Government

Vision 1: Introduce and deliver nature recovery targets supported by expert input, a clear implementation framework and adequate resourcing

1. Continue to involve ecological experts in the development of nature recovery targets

Ongoing involvement of ecological experts is essential to ensure Scotland's nature recovery targets are informed by sound science and best practice, making statutory goals robust, measurable, credible, and responsive to Scotland's ecological priorities.

2. Nature recovery targets are supported by an implementation plan

A robust implementation plan translates nature recovery targets into action by setting out clear steps, roles, milestones, resource needs, and progress tracking, and must involve collaboration across government and different sectors, going beyond the environment sector, for effective and integrated delivery.

3. Commit to providing the resources identified in the nature recovery targets implementation plan

Adequate funding, staffing, and resources must be committed to fully deliver the actions in the nature recovery targets implementation plan, ensuring tangible progress and stakeholder confidence in Scotland's biodiversity recovery.

Vision 2: Protect and enhance environmental safeguards through robust legislation, expert engagement, and planning for resilience

1. Ensure that the implementation of the Natural Environment Bill does not lead to any weakening of existing environmental protections

The Natural Environment Bill should ensure no regression in the effectiveness of the Habitats Regulations

Appraisal and Environmental Impact Assessment regimes, maintaining robust, evidence-based protections fully aligned with Scotland's climate and biodiversity commitments. Scotland must lead with ambition for, not erosion, of its environmental standards.

2. Consult with professionals to ascertain where improvements in existing protections are needed and which aspects must remain

Recent proposals to change environmental policy in the UK highlight the risk of amending or repealing established and effective protections without sufficient engagement with relevant professionals or thorough scrutiny of substantive issues. If there are areas where protections could be strengthened, these should be identified in consultation with key stakeholders.

3. Develop a plan to take account of the impacts on climate change on protected features

Climate change poses a pervasive threat to Scotland's natural environment and society, while ecological restoration has a crucial role in both mitigating and adapting to its impacts. Future land use strategies and planning should integrate monitoring data on protected sites. These should ensure that climate-related pressures on protected features are fully considered and adaptation measures are embedded to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem resilience at both regional and national levels.

Vision 3: Embed nature-inclusive development at the heart of planning and land use decisions

1. Strategic land use planning for nature and people

Scotland's Land Use Strategy must become a practical driver of nature-positive, climate-resilient, and integrated land management. It should guide decisions using high-quality spatial data on current and potential land use, and be delivered through: (1) stronger, better-resourced Regional Land Use Partnerships; (2) reformed funding for land-based sectors (e.g. agriculture and forestry) to reward nature-positive action; and, (3) cross-sector collaboration to manage land use conflicts and synergies transparently and fairly.

2. Ensure that planning applications which demonstrate nature-inclusivity are prioritised

Planning applications that clearly demonstrate nature-inclusivity—through biodiversity enhancement, nature networks, and green-blue infrastructure—should be prioritised. This approach ensures that new development actively contributes to national nature and climate goals while supporting good placemaking and environmental resilience.

3. A metric to support biodiversity enhancement that is accompanied by good guidance and case studies

Scotland's biodiversity metric must be tailored to Scottish habitats, supported by clear and practical guidance, and implemented alongside robust monitoring, resourcing, and enforcement measures. Our recent paper on implementation of a metric emphasises the importance of stakeholder consultation during development via technical and implementation advisory groups, the importance of both on-site and off-site biodiversity enhancement, and integration with broader nature recovery strategies⁷.

Vision 4: Equip Local Planning Authorities and Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies with the capacity, skills, and resources needed to fulfil their environmental responsibilities

1. An assessment of the impacts of shortfall in ecological capacity across LPAs and SNCBs, on delivery of policy, and the barriers and potential pathways to improvement

There is clear evidence that lack of ecological and enforcement capacity within Scottish Local Planning Authorities is undermining their ability to deliver NPF4⁸⁹. An assessment of the impacts of under-resourcing, including planning delays, reduced enforcement, and missed opportunities for nature and communities should be made. To address these impacts, barriers to improvement must be identified and clear pathways established for capacity-building, including investment, training, and recruitment.

2. Independent ECoWs and EnvCoWs to secure on-site delivery of climate and nature commitments

Government should promote the routine use of independent Ecological Clerks of Works (ECoWs), preferably CIEEM-accredited, and Environmental Clerks of Works (EnvCoWs) to secure high ecological and environmental compliance on construction sites. ECoWs / EnvCoWs provide impartial, specialist monitoring and transparent reporting so that planning conditions for ecological and environmental mitigation and enhancement are implemented as intended. To support delivery of climate and nature objectives, government should issue clear policy and guidance on appointing and managing ECoWs / EnvCoWs, including a standard model planning condition proportionate to development scale, and ensure authorities have the resources to require their use on relevant projects. This will strengthen compliance, build public trust and ensure environmental investments are delivered on the ground.

3. Promote ecological careers and build a skilled nature workforce

To meet Scotland's ambitious climate and nature targets, we need a workforce with the ecological knowledge, practical skills, and environmental leadership to deliver change on the ground. Yet skills shortages are a growing barrier to scaling up nature restoration, sustainable land management, and green infrastructure.

- Actively promote ecological and nature-related careers to young people and career-changers.
- Support the development of new vocational pathways into nature-based jobs — including apprenticeships, paid internships, skills bootcamps, and accredited technical qualifications.
- Ensure that career pathways are accessible and inclusive, with targeted support for underrepresented groups, rural communities, and people with barriers to employment.
- Invest in upskilling for professionals already working in adjacent sectors (e.g. farming, construction, planning, and tourism) to embed nature-positive practices across the economy.

By investing in ecological careers and skills, we can support a thriving green economy, empower the next generation of environmental professionals, and ensure that Scotland has the capacity it needs to restore nature at scale.

Vision 5: Create the conditions and frameworks to drive high-integrity private investment in nature

1. The Scottish Government should identify, in consultation with ecologists, what exactly it wants to achieve using blended nature finance

For private investment in nature to grow, there needs to be clarity on the ecological and other outcomes it is expected to achieve. The Scottish Government should work with ecologists to define these objectives, providing the certainty and transparency investors and land managers (including NGOs) need while ensuring that funding genuinely supports biodiversity recovery and climate resilience, and coordinated delivery across related policy areas.

2. Establish governance and accountability frameworks

The Scottish Government should establish robust governance and accountability frameworks to build trust in nature finance and prevent greenwashing. Clear rules, standards, and oversight mechanisms must define who is responsible for decision-making, monitoring, and reporting, ensuring that investments are credible, transparent, and deliver genuine, measurable benefits for nature and communities.

3. Consider the potential pathways to achieve strategic outcomes and what role Scottish Government could play to create an enabling environment

The Scottish Government should explore a range of pathways to create an enabling environment for management of Scotland's Natural Capital, including regulatory approaches, targeted incentives, and fiscal measures. Such approaches can enable both behaviour change and generate funding for nature and climate. Regional Land Use Partnerships could play a role in directing and supporting high-integrity private investment.



CIEEM supports governments and decision-makers with the creation and implementation of policy by providing independent, evidence-based advice and insights from ecological practitioners. We are ready to support the design of practical, workable solutions, based on best practice, that help secure long-term benefits for the people of Scotland and our natural environment.

Acknowledgements

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References

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