



This response to the Net Zero Nation Consultation is submitted by Scottish Rural Action and the Scottish Islands Federation on behalf of the 2021 virtual Scottish Rural Parliament (2021vSRP). 500 rural and island stakeholders participated. There was a specific session on Climate Change and the topic was also explored across the 2021vSRP including during sessions on the Rural & Island Economy, Transport, Land Use and Good Food.

1. Vision and Objectives

Our Vision:

Everyone in Scotland recognises the implications of the climate emergency, fully understands and contributes to Scotland's mitigation and adaptation response, and embraces their role in the transition to a net zero and climate ready nation.

Strategic Objectives:

1. People are aware of the action the Scottish Government is taking to tackle climate change and how it relates to their lives.
2. People actively participate in shaping fair and inclusive policies that promote adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.
3. Taking action on climate change is normalised and encouraged in communities and places across Scotland.

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

We welcome the overall Vision which is uncompromising – everyone in Scotland “fully understands and contributes to Scotland’s mitigation and adaptation response” and in doing so “embraces their role.”

Conversely, the Objectives’ language serves to water this vision down. Instead of “fully understand” we have “aware”. Instead of empowering and resourcing everyone to “fully contribute” we are merely “encouraging” communities to act.

Achieving the Objectives is therefore unlikely to achieve the Vision. This is demonstrated in the quality and ambition of the actions themselves. Under Objective 2, there is no mention of local democratic processes and community empowerment which will underpin participation in developing climate action policy. Under Objective 3, since we only aspire to “encourage” rather than actually support mobilisation, most of the actions relate to communications/marketing rather than capacity building and funding/investment.

We are a long way from achieving the Vision. 60% of participants at the 2021vSRP Climate Change Session strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement “rural and island communities are engaged in planning action to address climate change.”

To move us in the vision’s direction, we need Objectives that are specific and measurable rather than a watered-down reiteration of the vision’s key aspirations.

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

The Objectives should be demonstrably sufficient to deliver the Vision and must be linked to relevant indicators that will enable us measure progress.

Objective 1

- Increase the specificity to include businesses and communities, not just ‘people’ which is too generic a term.
- The Objective should be about everyone “fully understanding” the climate emergency not just increasing awareness of Scottish Government policy. Scottish Rural Parliament delegates acknowledged communities and rural businesses/enterprises were aware of Government headline messaging around climate change but lacked knowledge about the scale of the emergency, its immediate impacts and the options for personal and collective action to mitigate or address it.

NB – changing this Objective to a more general one on deepening public understanding could result in many of the marketing/comms actions under Objective 3 being moved to Objective 1 while Objective 3 could be re-focussed on building capacity – skills, resources/funding and network building.

Objective 2:

- Expand to include communities. This agenda cannot be seen as separate from community empowerment and local governance processes.
- Be specific on level of desired participation – e.g. consultation or co-production?

Objective 3:

- Reword. Especially reference to “encouraged” - change this to ‘actively supported’/‘fully resourced’ to transition.

On Objective 3, the vast majority of 2021vSRP delegates felt that though rural and island communities are motivated to take action on climate change, lack of capacity/resources/skills

prevents them from doing so. Further work to understand the specific resource, capacity and skills needs of communities, businesses, statutory agencies and other stakeholders would help develop a more appropriate suite of indicators linked to meaningful action.

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

See comments above.

2. Principles

The following principles will be embedded throughout public engagement activity included within this strategy.

1. Positive

Our green recovery from COVID-19 and our transition to a net zero nation bring numerous opportunities with potential benefits to our health, wellbeing, and local communities. It is important that our public engagement includes a renewed focus on these opportunities and benefits, people have the opportunity to make a real difference and our engagement must highlight this. The actions required to combat, and adapt to, climate change can create a better, and fairer, society for everyone. We are therefore committed to creating an uplifting vision which people can relate to, understand, and be motivated to achieve.

2. Putting People First

Decarbonising our nation will have a significant effect on people's lives, so it is crucial that we understand and respond to people's concerns, have an inclusive decision making process, and put people in Scotland at the forefront of everything that we do. A net zero nation is not possible without the support and contribution of our citizens. Communities are not bystanders in the transition but integral players in making it a success.

3. Dialogue

Conversations around climate change are essential to encourage positive social norms and dispel negative misconceptions. We are reassured by discussing these issues with those around us, knowing that climate change is a shared concern and that our combined actions are making a difference. This engagement is required for all of society, including those that will be most affected by the transition to net zero.

4. Just

Climate justice and a commitment to a just transition approach are integral to the Scottish Government's response to both mitigating and adapting to climate change. It is important to understand which communities and sectors are most likely to be affected by the transition and actively engage with these groups. Those most impacted by our changing climate have often contributed least to the problem, both domestically and internationally. Working with affected communities to design and deliver our transition to net zero will ensure we address climate change in a way which is fair, and that reflects their circumstances and experiences.

5. Inclusive

Scotland is a nation of incredible diversity. It is important that this diversity is reflected in our transition to a net zero society and that we reach all sections of Scottish society and give them an equal say in their future. Our engagement approach will therefore be inclusive and accessible to all.

6. Evidence-Based

We will ensure that we engage with research, encouraging collaboration between experts and policy makers. An evidence-based approach will result in real and lasting social transformation. To that end, we will communicate research findings so that all members of the public can engage with the latest developments. By working in collaboration with experts, duplication can be avoided, gaps in research identified, and the evidence base expanded.

7. Open & Transparent

The Scottish Government is committed to being an Open Government with these values placed at the heart of our National Performance Framework. Regarding our approach to climate change, we will be open and transparent to make sure people can see and understand our actions.

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

We welcome and agree with them subject to minor amendments below.

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

Under Just we would suggest changing “actively engage with these groups” to “actively supporting them through the transition”. To illustrate - those thousands of rural homes that burn fossil fuels or wood and have no carbon neutral alternative – ‘active engagement’ is not going to help them transition but practical and financial support in moving to alternative fuels may well do so.

Also under Just, we would suggest there is recognition included of the fact that any mandatory actions will inevitably disadvantage some people and some communities and that those disadvantaged will need to be included in designing mitigating action that serves to minimise the disadvantage.

Under ‘Inclusive’ we would recommend that there is explicit commitment made to ensure ‘seldom heard voices’ actively shape policy.

c) Are there any principles of good public engagement on climate change that you think are missing?

You specifically mention the “Place Principle” on page 30 of the consultation document, yet it is not elevated to a Principle in the list.

We would invite you to include “place-based” engagement, either as a stand-alone principle or by making explicit reference to it within the “Putting People First” principle. This message was strongly communicated by delegates attending the Scottish Rural Parliament.

3. Other Comments

a) Do you have any other comments on our overall approach?

- All climate change policy, including this strategy should be rural & island proofed prior to being implemented and resourced. From a specific comms perspective, 2021vSRP delegates highlighted for example, that campaigns such as NatureScot's Make Space for Nature promote an urban-centric view of people's relationship to the outdoors. Rural and island-proofing would ensure the specific assets and strengths of rural & island Scotland may be correctly identified and supported, leading to an acceleration in action to tackle climate change.
- Linked to above, in its next iteration this strategy should acknowledge the fact that the success of proposed activities will be contingent on volunteers. Currently, the consultation document does not mention the word 'volunteer' once.

4. Green Recovery

a) What are your views on the opportunities and challenges for public engagement in the Green Recovery?

- Rural and island Scotland has the assets which place it at the global forefront of tackling climate change. This is a good news story and one which can unite rural and island residents in pursuing a positive vision for their communities and for nature. As highlighted by the consultation document, a Green Recovery agenda offers opportunities for better economic, social justice/wellbeing and environmental outcomes however it needs to be modelled on a systems approach that mirrors the reality of rural & island Scotland. To date, many of the policies that support economic and social development in our country remain urban-centric. Furthermore, and despite the rhetoric around a wellbeing economy, these still place disproportionate emphasis on 'economic growth' rather than on social or environmental wellbeing being the desirable outcome of policy-making.
- The national Covid-19 pandemic response demonstrated what can be achieved when the Scottish Government shows clear leadership on an issue, maintains an informed and trustworthy community strategy and flexibly resources local communities to take action according to local priorities. Green community priorities, as per a poll conducted during the 2021 Scottish Rural Parliament, include establishing renewable energy schemes, reducing food miles/grow local, decarbonising transport, and land management activities including rewilding, forestry and peatland restoration. Incentivising and supporting rural & island communities to take action means incentivising and supporting all local sectoral organisations – community bodies, schools, businesses, statutory providers, crofters etc. – to work together towards shared goals.
- Two further points were raised by 2021VSRP delegates that require focused attention when it comes to public engagement around a Green Recovery. First, and drawing on learning from the

Covid-19 response, there needs to be specific consideration regarding what the 'new normal' means for volunteering both in terms of opportunities and in terms of challenges. Second, and cross-cutting multiple priority areas, engagement with Planners and Planning Departments must be prioritised on the back of NPF4 to ensure that their approach fully aligns with a Green recovery agenda.

5. Communicating Climate Change Policy

a) What are your views on our approach to communicating climate change policy?

- We would reiterate our comments on Objective 1. The focus should be on deepening public understanding of the climate emergency in general not just increasing awareness of government policy.
- We would also draw attention to the fact that public engagement around climate change must have a practical dimension and must be seen as an opportunity to create tangible outputs for communities and the environment. Passive campaign messaging and tokenistic consultations will have little impact. The Scottish Rural Parliament delegates recommend that a significant proportion of what is likely to be a significant advertising/media/comms budget is earmarked in the final strategy for community-led action research or awareness raising activities (see Climate Café ideas below). Doing so will help address the challenge of tailoring messages to specific geographic communities and communities of interest.
- Furthermore, and again drawing on feedback from the Scottish Rural Parliament, any planned national comms and engagement initiatives around climate change and the Green Recovery agenda must be tested/piloted in a rural and island setting before being rolled out. If something works in an urban setting, it cannot be assumed to work in a rural setting.
- From a messaging perspective, many of the most pressing issues facing rural and island communities have a climate dimension. 30% of Shetland residents, for example, live in fuel poverty. There is a year on year increase in wildfires and flooding affecting farmers, land managers and residents across much of rural and island Scotland. Awareness raising around climate change needs to make the links between what rural and island people 'wake up worrying about' and the medium and long term benefits of a particular course of action.
- Finally, the Scottish Rural Parliament heard SCCAN's suggestion to re-draft the Scottish Government's National Purpose, moving it entirely away from a focus on 'economic growth.' While the suggested wording was not specifically considered by 2021VSRP delegates, there was broad agreement of the need for a fundamental systems change within the Scottish Government that would enable all departments to fully align with its stated leadership position on climate change. This, in turn, would enable more consistency in delivering public engagement and communications on climate change policy.

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?

At the Scottish Rural Parliament, we heard from Jess Pepper, founder of the Climate Café movement whose description of the purpose and activities of Climate Cafés were particularly resonant with rural and island delegates. It was acknowledged to be an approach that could work in rural and island Scotland serving to raise awareness of the climate emergency, acting as a community ideas hub and also tackling social isolation and loneliness.

5. Enabling Participation in Policy Design

a) What are your views on our approach to enabling participation in policy design?

- The term ‘participation’ was explored at length during the Scottish Rural Parliament. It was raised during diverse sessions from Democracy & Local Governance and Advancing Equalities to Transport and Tourism. Arnstein’s ladder of participation describes different ‘rungs’ to participation, ranging from “not engaged at all” to the highest, “devolving” power. According to an 2021VSRP poll, the majority of geographic communities felt “consulted” on policy while communities of interest with protected characteristics felt either “informed” or “not engaged at all”. A tiny minority of respondents felt they “collaborated” on policy or that power was fully “devolved” to them.
- Every single participation action, with exception of the Citizen’s Assembly, outlined in the draft strategy is a form of ‘consultation.’ Using the word ‘co-designing’ in the opening paragraph on page 22 is therefore a bit misleading. There is no consistent co-designing going on here, just a few examples of how the Scottish Government will gather people’s views and then use them to shape policy.
- As mentioned under the question on the Strategy Objectives, citizen co-design of policy around climate change is likely to take place at the regional/local level rather than the national level. It will build on the local governance and community empowerment agendas. As such, it is of vital importance that the final draft of this strategy details how local democratic deliberation will be supported and its outputs – community decisions about local priorities – resourced.

b) 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?

There are few practical examples of citizens co-designing policy at national level and even fewer of citizens co-implementing policy at national level. Since the will is clearly there, however, we should be regarding this as an opportunity for Scotland to demonstrate how it can be done. Technological innovations in democracy may support this agenda going forward. The 2021 virtual Scottish Rural

Parliament was delivered online and learning from the methodology could be used to develop an ongoing (and relatively inexpensive) forum on rural-related climate change policy.

At regional level there may be opportunities for participation in climate change policy formulation created by the Regional Land Use Partnerships.

6. Encouraging Action

a) What are your views on our approach to encouraging action?

- We would reiterate our comments on Objective 3. The focus should be on supporting/resourcing action rather than encouraging action. The vast majority of Scottish Rural Parliament delegates felt that rural and island communities are motivated to take action on climate change, yet lack of capacity/resources/skills prevents them from doing so effectively.
- The final draft of the strategy should therefore offer clear commitments around supporting communities - both communities of interest and of geography - giving them the skills and resources to build on their motivation. Further work to understand the specific resource, capacity and skills needs of communities, businesses, statutory agencies and other stakeholders is necessary. 2021VSRP delegates noted that younger people tend to be more 'climate literate' and more likely to support action to address the climate emergency. It was therefore suggested that investment strategies in building human capital (skills, leadership etc.) should be co-designed with young people to ensure maximum impact and buy in from this constituency.
- The proposed Regional Climate Hubs may play a role in supporting community action, especially 'bridging the gap' between Council level activities and the grassroots. A missed opportunity, as the consultation document from July 2020 suggested, is the fact that Hubs are unlikely to have decision making powers over funding. 2021VSRP delegates noted that small investments can make a big difference, especially at the project initiation stage. Delegates also noted that a 'one centralised Hub per local authority area' model is unlikely to serve remote rural populations on islands or the mainland.
- The final draft of the strategy should include a clear commitment to resourcing 'seldom heard voices' and breaking down barriers to addressing climate change.
- As previously highlighted, actions under this Objective should be rural & island proofed. At the Scottish Rural Parliament, it was highlighted for example, that campaigns such as NatureScot's Make Space for Nature promote an urban-centric view of people's relationship to the outdoors.

b) Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for encouraging climate change action that could be useful for informing our approach?

See SCCAN membership and Keep Scotland Beautiful selection of case studies of Climate Challenge Fund projects. The Scottish Rural Parliament showcased the following projects:

- [Community Energy Scotland](#)
- [Raasay Community Renewables Ltd.](#)
- [Climate Café](#)
- [Fyne Futures Ltd.](#)
- [Aquatera](#)

COP26

a) How do you think COP26 can help deliver a positive legacy for people of Scotland and climate action?

We wish to see a strong message about rural and island communities' potential to be at the forefront of tackling climate change and how this potential may be realised.

We would like to see 'seldom heard voices' elevated including the voice of the global south.

b) How can we work with stakeholders and actors across Scotland to deliver our “people” theme for COP26.

The Scottish Government could work with rural stakeholders to showcase exemplars of rural and island Scottish action on climate change at COP26.

c) Are there other initiatives that the Scottish Government should consider joining or supporting ahead of COP26?

No comments on this question.

Monitoring and Evaluation

a) What are your views on how our progress towards our objectives could be most effectively monitored and evaluated?

Re-drafting the current objectives in line with a SMART model, including a suite of indicators, will better enable the strategy to be monitored and evaluated.

It will ensure that we have realistic targets to aim for in the short term and that these short term targets do, indeed, ultimately contribute to our long term vision. Scottish Rural Parliament delegates were clear that headline-grabbing targets regarding Scotland's commitment to net zero emissions by 2045 means little to your average person on the street.

We would suggest an Implementation Group with real powers to put in place changes if actions are not reaching targets. This Group should have representation from both government and wider civil society.

There is an opportunity to develop an interactive virtual platform for the general public to engage with the strategy M & E in real time, rating progress in their area and submitting examples of good practice or challenges.

b) How regularly – and in what format – should we report on progress on the strategy?

This strategy should adopt learning from reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic response. Frequent, consistent and easily digested information through the bespoke website, social media and mainstream media will help keep momentum and focus.

As mentioned above, developing an interactive platform for people, businesses and communities to engage with the strategy will help with M & E and securing ongoing public ownership of the vision.