

Transitioning to a circular economy - what we want to see in the updated Climate Change Plan

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As consumption around the world continues to increase, there is more pressure than ever on the earth's decreasing resources. The next logical step to transform the way we consume and manage resources in Scotland is to move to a circular economy with high levels of reuse, repair and recycling. Essentially, we need to keep materials circulating for as long as possible before becoming waste.

The waste sector of the Climate Change Plan covers use of resources, including maximising the reuse, recycling and recovery of resources and notes the importance of moving to a circular economy. However if we are to make that a reality, then we need concrete and ambitious commitments from the Scottish Government to get us there. Therefore our key asks under the waste section of the Climate Change Plan update are:

1. Introduction of a Circular Economy Bill with targets

The Scottish Government was due to introduce a Circular Economy Bill in spring 2020 but it was one of the Bills halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However as we look ahead to how we recover from the devastating impacts of coronavirus, there is an even greater need than before to move to a circular economy. An economy which helps us to reduce our reliance on the earth's decreasing resources and makes Scotland more resilient to future global crises.

In order to properly capture the impact of our consumption of resources, the Climate Change Plan must commit to introducing a Circular Economy Bill which includes targets that reduce the emissions produced in creating everything we consume:

- Carbon footprint - reduce to net zero by 2050. The carbon footprint covers greenhouse gas emissions from goods and services consumed in Scotland including those which are imported. (note: this is different to the 2045 net target which only captures emissions produced in Scotland)
- Material footprint - 50% reduction from 2020 to 2030 for metals, minerals and food fuel feedstock.
- Biomass - develop a strategy for sustainable use of biomass in materials.

2. Moratorium on building new incinerators

Under the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2021 a ban on sending biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) to landfill is due to be introduced in 2025 along with a ban on sending no more than 5% remaining waste to landfill. There is now a growing concern that local authorities will rush to incineration as the answer to their waste problem.

Scotland currently has five working incinerators for household waste, but a further six are due to start operating within the next three years which will give Scotland capacity to burn an extra 1 million tonnes of waste per year. Any new incinerator which is built now will lock Scotland into years of wasting resources by burning them, and the associated damage, at a time when we should be embracing opportunities to reuse and recycle raw materials.

Overall it is a conflict with our climate change ambitions and we are calling for a moratorium on building new incinerators in Scotland for three main reasons: incineration wastes valuable resources, incineration pollutes, and incineration is bad for climate change.

3. Meet current circular economy and waste targets

The Scottish Government has already announced some circular economy plans for Scotland but it's now vital that they are implemented as soon as possible. Scotland currently uses 200 million single-use disposable coffee cups a year, 300 million plastic straws, and 9.9 million drink stirrers.

Any further delays risks not only a rise in plastic pollution but the plans are a crucial step towards reducing our climate emissions and it will make it more difficult to meet the Government's 2030 target of reducing emissions by 75%. Therefore, we are asking the Scottish Government to commit to the following timescales:

- Introduce a ban on all the items in the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUP) priority list by July 2021. Member States have until July to implement market restrictions on SUP Directive items including cutlery, drink stirrers, balloon sticks and straws as well as well as oxo-degradable plastics.
- Implement the Deposit Return Scheme by July 2022. This date is already 15 months later than it was due to be introduced.
- Introduce charges on single-use disposable beverage cups by July 2021.