



SCCS Briefing for Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: COP26 - Outcomes & Implications for Scotland's Climate Policies

Summary

This briefing has been prepared for MSPs in advance of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate, on Thursday 24th February, on “COP26 - Outcomes and Implications for Scotland's Climate Change Policies”.

The COP26 outcomes were [inadequate](#) with no detailed and time-bound commitments to emissions' reductions or to increasing climate finance. [The First Minister rightly observed](#) that she “absolutely understands why many are angry and frustrated that more progress was not made in Glasgow.” Nevertheless, “the Glasgow Climate Pact does provide a basis for further action.” However, that **action is needed now, and it needs to be both global and domestic.**

This briefing sets out SCCS' views on the positives and negatives flowing from COP26, the implications for climate action in Scotland and the Scottish Government's climate policies. After missing three annual targets for emissions' reduction in a row, it suggests some questions that might be asked of the Scottish Government.

Introduction

[Stop Climate Chaos Scotland](#) (“SCCS”) is a diverse coalition of over 60 civil society organisations in Scotland who campaign together on climate change. Our members include environment, faith and belief groups, international development organisations, trade and student unions and community groups. We believe that the Scottish Government should take bold action to tackle climate change, with Scotland delivering our [fair share](#) of action in response to the Paris Agreement and supporting climate justice around the world.

The debate on 24th February is an important opportunity to consider the results of COP26, held in Glasgow, as well as the actions needed by both the UK and Scottish Governments to meet their respective net-zero commitments and to provide leadership to the international community. To assist you to prepare for this debate, this briefing seeks to describe the external and policy context as well as potential issues that might be raised with Ministers. As a coalition of NGOs working in Scotland and for a Scottish Parliament debate, it is focused on matters that are the responsibility of the Scottish Government.

Context

The primary context is, of course, the ongoing climate crisis. The planet is already over 1°C warmer and on track for a devastating 3°C or more - there is no more time to waste. Climate change is affecting the world's poorest people now and fuelling a linked nature crisis.

In August 2021, hundreds of [scientists from the IPCC issued the starkest warning yet](#) about human impact on the planet amid unprecedented changes, including more intense heatwaves and more extreme weather events, with some changes now inevitable and irreversible. The UN Secretary General branded the findings a “[code red for humanity](#)”. The science is now overwhelming: our planet is on fire and without concerted action we're headed towards climate catastrophe; with the poorest communities – wherever they live – and future generations suffering the most.



In April 2019, the First Minister ‘formally’ declared a [climate emergency](#). This language was subsequently central to Scottish Government policy and statements; for instance, the [2019-20 Programme for Government](#). Its profile has risen in Government rhetoric, with the (promised) creation of a [Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Climate Emergency](#) “to provide cross-Government leadership and coordination of efforts to tackle climate change”, and an even greater profile in the [2021-22 Programme for Government](#).

COP26

In advance of COP26, held in Glasgow, SCCS published a briefing on “[Delivering climate justice at COP26 in Glasgow](#)”. This set out the steps we believe needed to be taken by the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as all rich developed nations, to seize Scotland’s unique opportunity to shape global action. This suggested that: -

“The Scottish Government must implement the transformational policy and spending actions needed to deliver Scotland’s legal emission targets, without international offsets, and ensure a just transition. It should also use its relatively strong record, and Glasgow’s status as COP26 host city, to push other historical polluters towards actions consistent with limiting global temperature rises to 1.5°C, including using its prominent role within the Under2 Coalition to show international leadership.”

It is now just over [100 days since COP26 ended](#). Despite the efforts of many, the [outcomes were disappointing](#). While a plethora of announcements were made during the talks, the negotiated text did not include detailed and time-bound commitments to emissions’ reductions and to increasing climate finance. The Glasgow Climate Pact fails to meet the urgency of the crisis, which is already destroying lives and livelihoods. Yet, the outcome was not so poor that all hope was lost.

In terms of overall global ambition, it was encouraging to see widespread support to ‘keep 1.5 alive’ and the positive engagement from Parties on this issue. However, this was not matched by firm commitments, with parties instead asked to revisit and strengthen their climate plans for 2030 (their ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’), by COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in November 2022. **The need for an urgent acceleration in climate action is clear:** one assessment suggests that, if agreed targets were met, the rise in global temperature might be limited to 1.8°C; but this relies on the delivery of very vague commitments. More realistic assessments suggest that, based on firm policy commitments, [we are on track for a rise of 2.7°C or more](#). **There is therefore a substantial climate action gap to be filled;** a [fair shares analysis of pledges under the Paris Agreement](#) shows that this ambition gap is the responsibility of rich historical polluters who have done most to cause the crisis. The Pact also called upon nations, for the first time, to “phase down” unabated coal power and inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels. However, the text was weakened on coal “phase out” and devoid of any mention of oil and gas phase down or out, once again putting the onus on developing countries who are more reliant on coal.

On climate finance (money to support countries impacted by the climate crisis to adapt their lives and livelihoods while reducing their own emissions), the outcomes were also disappointing, with rich countries suggesting the soonest the inadequate US\$100bn goal would be met is 2023. This was mixed with small areas of progress, such as commitments to increase the proportion of funding to support communities to adapt. Rich countries also resisted Global South calls for a process to determine a new long-term goal for climate finance based on what is needed and what is owed.



There was formal recognition that Loss and Damage finance (money to help people and communities after extreme weather events linked to climate change as well as slow onset impacts like sea level rise) must be addressed. However, rich countries blocked a proposal put forward by developing countries, a group representing over 6 billion people, for a loss and damage finance facility instead only agreeing to limited funding for technical assistance and a [‘dialogue’](#). Despite this, the Scottish Government’s commitment of £2 million pounds for loss and damage was hailed for having broken the global [“taboo”](#) on this issue, with the First Minister rightly describing this [“not as an act of charity but as an act of reparation”](#).

This COP also failed, to a large extent, to meet the challenges of [access](#), [participation and giving a voice to the Global South](#) and key non-state actors (such as youth, [disabled people](#)), especially when compared with that for [corporate interests](#).

Implications for Scotland

In the light of the context and COP26 outcomes, described above, there are obvious implications for Scotland. First, the Scottish Government (and other stakeholders) must redouble efforts to ensure our emissions’ reduction targets are met: each year, at the interim 2030 stage, and at the net-zero target date of 2045. Secondly, the Scottish Government can play its role both to address climate justice internationally, and to encourage more positive progress in the run-up to and at COP27.

While Scotland’s production emissions have halved since 1990, and they continue to fall, Scotland’s credibility is now in significant jeopardy due to it missing three annual targets, and further undermined by the very limited progress on consumption emissions. In June, [the Cabinet Secretary confirmed](#) that the annual target for 2019 was missed; this was the third of three successive annual targets missed. He also said, *“the next full climate change plan should also be brought forward as soon as possible”*. This is reflected in the [Programme for Government](#) which states *“we will set out the process to deliver a draft of the next Climate Change Plan for consideration in the first half of this parliamentary session.”*

The UK [Committee on Climate Change has warned](#) that the risks of Scotland missing future climate targets are increasing and it has urged a focus on “the need for rapid progress by 2030”. It makes clear that the Scottish Government’s existing plans rely on a substantial contribution from uncertain greenhouse gas removals and has urged the Government to develop a Plan B to ensure the targets are still met.

To achieve Scotland’s 75% emissions’ reduction target by 2030 and to net zero by 2045, it is clear that **Scotland must accelerate climate action while delivering a just transition for those impacted**. This will need an ambitious and detailed long-term strategy to meet these targets, without the use of international offsets and with an emphasis on emissions’ reduction at source. This is critical to meet our targets and to provide credibility to the Scottish Government’s advocacy to others.

Before and during COP26, Scotland contributed to the global discussions, and amplified the voices of the Global South, through the [Glasgow Climate Dialogues](#), co-hosted by SCCS and the Scottish Government. The [final communiqué](#) summarised the outputs of the four Dialogues, which amplified the voices of the Global South and covered: Access, Participation and Voice; Adaptation and



Resilience; Loss and Damage; and Just Transition. SCCS was pleased that these Dialogues were recognised in [a Parliamentary motion](#) from Fiona Hyslop MSP, and received cross-party support in [debate](#). The Scottish Government must place the priorities of climate-impacted communities in the Global South at the core of its climate justice work, and in the run-up to COP27.

Within the limits of devolved competencies, the Scottish Government has shown strong leadership by increasing the Climate Justice Fund and by ensuring this remains additional to wider international development funding. However, it should now bolster this leadership further by identifying innovative and additional sources of finance, such as high-emitter taxes. As outlined above, the Scottish Government's championing of the global need for a new finance mechanism on Loss and Damage, as well as pledging of £2m for this purpose, was a highly welcome intervention which helped elevate the importance of this.

Going forward

SCCS believes that the climate action priorities for the Scottish Government, now and in the near future, should include:

- Ensuring delivery of domestic commitments, especially in relation to land use, blue carbon, transport, and buildings, through faster and stronger activity under the existing Climate Change Plan and the new plan for which work is now starting. This new plan should link the Government's work on domestic and international issues, providing a comprehensive policy platform on climate change, as well as addressing the climate impacts of imports and exports.
- Create a 'plan B' for emissions' reductions that does not rely on negative emissions technologies (NETs). NETs are unproven at the scale needed and are unlikely to be up and running in any significant capacity before 2030. The Scottish Government must create a plan for meeting its long-term climate goals that does not rely on NETs, as recommended by the previous sessions ECCLR committee and by the UK Committee on Climate Change.
- Building on the Scottish Government's statements about Cambo, this year's new Energy Strategy must underline the move away from 'maximum economic recovery' of oil and gas and [chart an equitable and rapid path](#) towards a fossil fuel-free future. Indeed, in line with International Energy Agency analysis, it should make clear that, for the transition to be sufficiently rapid, there is no scope for any further new oil and gas developments.
- Speedily progressing Scotland's membership of the [Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance](#). California, for example, is part of the Alliance as an oil producing state, wishing to signal its intention to transition away from fossil fuels, while Wales has joined as a full member.
- Ensuring the full delivery of all the Just Transition Commission's recommendations and ensuring the new Commission enables the full integration of just transition principles into all policy.
- Harnessing Scotland's international recognition as the first developed country to commit finance to Loss and Damage, to develop an effective model for Scotland's Loss and Damage programme with international experts and ensure that the whole of the Climate Justice Fund is spent in a locally led, transparent and transformative way. It should bolster Scotland's leadership in this area by identifying sources of additional finance in a climate just way, thereby demonstrating how new finance could be sourced globally.



- Building on momentum on Loss and Damage at COP26, by championing the approach Scotland has taken, to encourage other countries and sub-state actors to follow suit ahead of COP27 and provide monies that can help add pressure on UNFCCC signatories to agree a Loss and Damage finance mechanism. It must ensure that the mechanisms used to distribute the Funds are consistent with the need for Loss and Damage finance to be additional to wider climate finance requirements. Recognising the need for new finance to be sourced, Scotland should explore innovative financial mechanisms, including taxes on high emitters.
- Working with the UK Government and the Under2 Coalition to improve the access and participation of the Global South at COP27 (noting that the UK still has a leading role until COP27 opens).

Looking ahead to COP27, SCCS would be pleased to work with the Scottish Government in 2022, to harness the enthusiasm of the Scottish public displayed at COP26 and to seek to influence the UK Government and other Parties to achieve outcomes which are consistent with the scale and urgency of the climate crisis.

Conclusion

Given the COP26 outcomes, [the First Minister observed](#) that she “absolutely understands why many are angry and frustrated that more progress was not made in Glasgow.” Nevertheless, “the Glasgow Climate Pact does provide a basis for further action.” That **action is, however, needed now and it needs to be both global and domestic**. In Scotland, the Scottish Government has adopted a welcome approach – with clear and ambitious targets for emissions’ reductions, positive language related to a just transition as well as action to promote climate justice. However, **delivery has not matched ambitions and Scotland’s climate credibility is now in significant jeopardy following three annual targets for emissions’ reduction missed in a row; this damaging trend cannot continue**.

In the light of this, this debate might be used to ask:

- What steps are the Scottish Government taking to ensure that its emissions’ reductions policies, in the current Climate Change plan, as updated, deliver on the targets in the coming years, including making up for missed targets over the past three years?
- When will the Scottish Government formally outline the process that will result in an updated “*Climate Change Plan for consideration in the first half of this parliamentary session*” and what nature of stakeholder engagement will this involve?
- What steps are the Scottish Government taking to work with the UK and other governments, as well as other sub-state actors, to prepare the ground for more positive outcomes at COP27? Will this work seek to secure more robust emissions’ reductions targets and clear commitments to deliver actions to meet those targets? Will this work include more work to press for an improved, and properly financed, Loss & Damage process?