



## Scotland's new 2025–2040 Climate Change Plan: A background briefing from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland March 2024

### Summary

During 2024, the Scottish Government will publish a new Climate Change Plan (CCP) for the period 2025–2040. This briefing sets out what the CCP is; why it is important; the work undertaken already; the likely consultation and scrutiny periods; what it should achieve; and how Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, and our members, will judge whether it does achieve those aims.

In February, Environmental Standards Scotland published recommendations in relation to the next CCP based on their assessment of how the previous plan was produced and implemented. These recommendations have great merit and SCCS urges the Scottish Government to adopt them in preparing the next CCP.

In the light of this, SCCS believes:

- The Scottish Government should, as soon as possible, **confirm and clarify the timetable for CCP publication**. This must include details of planned scrutiny and public engagement, as well as a timescale for the consideration of representations and, as appropriate, revision of the plan.
- The UK and Scottish Governments (and/or the Climate Change Committee) should **publish their assessments of the contributions (actual and predicted) of reserved and devolved policies to emissions reductions**.
- The Scottish Parliament and all relevant stakeholders should **prepare to participate fully in the scrutiny and engagement process** – with a view to working to ensure that the new CCP, when adopted, ushers in an ambitious step change in actions to deliver fast and fair emissions reductions and ensures Scotland is “on track” to meet legal targets, as a minimum.

### Introduction

During 2024, the Scottish Government will publish a new Climate Change Plan (CCP). This will be followed by a period of Parliamentary scrutiny (at least 120 days) and public engagement, and recommendations and feedback from these processes will then be considered. The Scottish Government has stated [“the deadline for laying a final Plan in Parliament covering the period 2025 to 2040 is 23 March 2025”](#).

This briefing aims to set out what the CCP is; why it is important; the work undertaken already; the likely consultation and scrutiny periods; what it should achieve; and how the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition, and our members, will judge whether it does achieve those aims.



### **The Climate Change Plan: what is it?**

The CCP, previously known as the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP), is a statutory document required by the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#), as amended. The Scottish Government describes the plan as the “[strategic delivery plan for meeting our emissions reduction targets](#)”. The plan is required to include proposed measures related to issues devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and is organised by sector: for instance, electricity, transport, agriculture, etc. It also reports on UK Government policies on reserved matters so as to set out the overall emissions reduction efforts – as the targets apply to Scotland as a whole (rather than either of its governments).

The current version of the plan is the [third RPP](#), published in 2018, taken together with the [Climate Change Plan update](#) (CCPu), published in 2020 (the latter to take account of the new targets and some of the requirements introduced by the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)). This plan and its update covers the period 2018–2032, the next plan will ‘roll forward’ to cover the period from 2025 to 2040 – but also with an eye on the 2045 net zero target. As part of this ‘rolling forward’, the new plan will need to carry forward and/or revitalise/update, existing policies in the current CCP/CCPu that need to be continued or are, as yet, not completed or fully implemented.

### **Why is the Climate Change Plan important?**

Government policies – whether regulation, fiscal (grants, subsidies or taxes) or advice – are crucial for the changes necessary to deliver emissions reductions and meet, as a minimum, legal targets. The 2009 Act sets a comprehensive framework for how such policies should be developed, set out and implemented. A similar framework for UK/reserved matters has been established under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#).

The framework for Scotland’s actions on climate change, as set out in the 2009 Act, as amended, includes the requirement to seek advice from the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), as well as annual progress reports from that body, but also the requirement to report annually to Parliament on progress towards the targets. These annual reports usually happen around June of each year when emissions statistics are published. Recently, while considerable progress has been made, it is notable that, in eight of the past twelve years, annual targets have not been met – and, of the four years when targets were met, two were a result of travel being limited during the pandemic. This has led the CCC to advise that “[the integrity of the Scottish climate framework is now at risk](#)”.

Thus, the next CCP is really of huge significance – **it is the opportunity for the Scottish Government to reassert its climate leadership** – to set out a new framework that will meet future targets but also to demonstrate how that will happen, by clearly setting out the emissions reductions that each of its actions will deliver. The CCP must be credible – both for its own sake and the meeting of future targets, but also for the credibility of the Scottish Government. Often, the First Minister (and others) have made very welcome and positive statements about the need for action on climate change, and the CCP should turn that rhetoric into reality.



If, however, the plan is not adequate, this will be a huge missed opportunity and potentially an example of what the First Minister has called “[catastrophic negligence](#)”. It would also make meeting targets more difficult and undermine the credibility of the Scottish Government, especially when speaking on the international stage about the need to address climate change. An inadequate plan also risks, because of the need to comply with the framework set by the 2009 Act, being challenged and the Government being ordered to re-do it. Such a challenge, related to the similar Net Zero Strategy from the UK Government, [was recently successful](#). This led to the UK Government having to produce a new strategy – although the revised strategy is now also potentially subject to [a renewed challenge](#). Likewise, *ad hoc* changes to policies, previously set under the planning frameworks (as the UK Government has recently proposed) may be [subject to challenge](#).

### **Progress to date: work undertaken already**

Work to develop a new CCP has been underway for some time. SCCS has taken part in a series of meetings with relevant officials, starting in early 2022, when for instance we discussed and made a submission on [the scope of the new plan](#). Some, at least, of this proposal have been accepted and, it seems, the new CCP will address international climate justice and the issue of [blue carbon](#), which is welcome.

More recently, during the summer of 2023, and as part of the Scottish Government’s stakeholder engagement programme, SCCS and Scottish Environment LINK members have participated in a series of “NGO roundtables” on a range of sectors. Similarly, the Scottish Government will have been seeking advice from the CCC and undertaking analytical work to assess the emissions reduction potential of various policies and proposals. This will have also included an assessment of the contribution to Scotland’s emissions reduction of current and future UK Government policy in reserved areas.

In parallel with the above, SCCS made a [representation](#) to [Environmental Standards Scotland](#) (ESS) on the effectiveness of the previous CCP. This sought to subject the procedures for its development and adoption to scrutiny, with a view to securing recommendations that might improve the next CCP. ESS has now published its [initial findings and recommendations](#). In their summary report, ESS concludes “there is clear evidence that the CCPu failed to meet the requirements of Section 35(5) of the 2009 Act to quantify the emission reductions associated with all individual proposals and policies. ESS expects the next Climate Change Plan to address this failure.

“In addition, the next Climate Change Plan must:

- set out clear timelines for individual proposals and policies
- establish clear ownership and responsibility for individual proposals and policies
- incorporate all the new reporting requirements introduced in the 2019 Act
- address unresolved recommendations from previous parliamentary committee and CCC scrutiny of the CCPu
- allow sufficient time for scrutiny of the draft and incorporate feedback before finalisation”.

These conclusions and recommendations are extremely welcome, and the Scottish Government should follow them in preparing the next CCP.



### **The timetable for consultation and scrutiny**

The Bute House Agreement promised [\*"to deliver a draft of the next Climate Change Plan, that demonstrates a credible pathway to achieving the 2030 target, for consideration in the first half of this parliamentary session"\*](#). This commitment was repeated in the [2023-24 Programme for Government](#), which states that the Scottish Government will *"set out how we will continue to drive down emissions in a draft Climate Change Plan, with bold action across transport, heat, our natural environment, and other areas, demonstrating how our ambition will be realised while maximising opportunities for the economy, job creation, and health"*. It is then further underlined, including reference to the 2040 target, in the ["mandate letter"](#) to the Cabinet Secretary, which indicates that a priority is to *"publish our new draft Climate Change Plan which will extend Scotland's emissions reduction planning pathway for our statutory targets out to 2040 and include estimates of the costs and benefits of the policies to achieve this"*.

Thus, the original expected date for the publication of the draft CCP was around 'late November 2023'. Publication then could have provided, if it was genuinely ambitious and set out a clear and credible path to meeting targets (as a minimum), the Scottish Government with a proposal to be proud of at COP28. November 2023 would also (just) be around the halfway point of this Parliamentary session – and thus meet the Bute House Agreement commitment. However, [publication has been delayed](#) – with the Cabinet Secretary citing the need to analyse and take account of recent changes to UK Government policies and the economic situation as causes. [SCCS described this delay as "worrying"](#) but also indicated that "the delay must be fully utilised to ensure the Plan drives rapid delivery of meaningful new climate action".

Whenever the draft is published, the process that follows will be the same. The draft is laid before Parliament, and there follows a period of 120 days (of which no fewer than 60 must be outwith of recesses), for Parliamentary scrutiny. At the conclusion of this scrutiny, Parliament will publish its recommendations – which the Government has to consider before finalising and adopting a final plan.

This 120 day scrutiny period will be a crucial opportunity for stakeholders and the public to comment on the draft plan. It is likely that various Parliamentary Committees will issue 'calls for evidence' to which SCCS, its members and others will respond. There may also be parallel public engagement opportunities co-ordinated by the Parliament and/or Government. This engagement will be supported by ["a deliberative democracy exercise involving a citizens' panel"](#).

To allow for this scrutiny before the March 2025 deadline, a draft will need to be laid in Parliament [by 22 November 2024](#). However, this date would allow little or no time for the consideration of representations and any recommendations made by Parliament – and any appropriate revisions to the draft before final adoption. To maximise opportunities for scrutiny/discussion, before the summer recess would be preferable. It is notable that in ESS's recommendations (see above) on procedure for the next CCP, they specifically recommend that sufficient time be allowed to "incorporate feedback [from scrutiny] before finalisation".



## **What the CCP should achieve: a plan for action and delivery**

The Scottish Government has rightly called the current decade (the 2020s) the 'decade of delivery' on climate change. This is correct – without real emissions reductions leading up to 2030, the task of reaching net zero by 2045 will be considerably more difficult. After regularly failing to meet annual targets over the past few years, it is vital that targets over the next few years are met, as a minimum, or exceeded.

To inform the debate about the policies and measures needed to meet our targets, SCCS has developed a [Climate Manifesto](#). As set out in [the summary](#) of the published form of the manifesto, this is a collection of proposals that could help us get back on track to meeting our targets, and it is “a wealth of content for those revising Scotland climate plans” and we hope the new CCP will adopt many of them.

As set out above, the CCP has to describe the Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals “[for meeting the emissions reduction targets](#)” (that is, net zero by 2045, and a 75% reduction by 2030). These relate, however, to all emissions from Scotland – whether or not the policies that influence them are reserved or devolved or, in many cases, a mix of both. This means that the plan has to take account of the international and UK context – and still meet the targets. Scottish Ministers [have indicated](#) that one issue contributing to the delay was changes to and uncertainty in regard to the UK Government's policies. This is, indeed, a concern – however, SCCS is unclear as to why a draft, for scrutiny, can not set out various scenarios for these issues: the current UK Government's policy, the proposed UK Labour policies and policies that the Scottish Government consider should be adopted. This was the approach taken in the [draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#), and could be adopted in the next CCP.

There is, therefore, an understandable dilemma and there is a need to fully understand that context, especially at a time when recent changes in UK policy have been disappointing and subject to challenge by UK NGOs. However, it remains clear that there is considerable scope for more ambitious action in devolved areas (see the gap between actions in the current CCP/CCPu and those in SCCS's Climate manifesto). [SCCS is clear that both the UK and Scottish Governments can, and should, be more ambitious](#) – and that both governments (and/or the CCC) should be more transparent as to what each of their policies mean for emissions, and how they interact.

## **How will SCCS judge its content?**

SCCS' assessment (and any recommendations we make for its improvement) will take two forms:

1. An overall assessment of its ambition and credibility – using the MATCH criteria (see box); and
2. An assessment of individual policies, sector by sector, based on a comparison with the relevant policy proposals set out in SCCS' Climate Manifesto, previously shared with officials at the roundtables.



### **The MATCH criteria**

In order for Scotland to meet its climate ambitions and to realise the benefits of a low carbon transition, we believe that the Scottish Government's new Climate Action Plan must MATCH all of the following criteria:

- **Measurable**

Every policy in the CCP should have specific, measurable outputs, expected climate outcomes and a timeframe for implementation.

- **Ambitious**

The CCP should front load ambitious new policies to secure the biggest possible impact, particularly for transport, land use, heat and energy efficiency

- **Transparent**

The CCP should provide clarity on how each expected policy outcome has been calculated and which body is responsible for implementing each policy.

- **Credible**

The CCP must show how all annual targets between now and 2032 will be met and should prioritise policies over proposals and regulation over voluntary action.

- **Holistic**

The CCP should take account of the wider benefits of policies (e.g., social, economic and health), as well as detailing their climate and financial impacts.

Of course, a similar approach will also be used to assess the final version – and, if in the view of experts, it is substandard and/or appears not to meet the requirements of the 2008 Act in setting out a route to meet the 2030 or 2045 targets, SCCS and its members will need to consider what, if any, action needs to be taken.

### **Conclusions**

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In the light of this, SCCS believes:

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