

Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change: Debate

A briefing from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland 23rd June 2026

The climate crisis is not a future threat. **As MSPs debate this motion, parts of the UK are under a Met Office red warning for extreme heat.** Temperatures are likely to break June records at 40C. WHO estimates that 200,000 Europeans have died in the last four years from heat-related causes. **In Scotland, all ten of our hottest years on record have occurred since 1997; stronger storms are causing millions of pounds of damage; 2025 saw record-breaking wildfires and increasingly severe droughts for the country's farmers.** The cost of unmitigated climate change is up to 7% of our GDP by 2030, with the costs falling hardest on those least responsible for causing the issue.

Scotland's emissions fell by just 0.4 million tonnes in 2024, according to the most recent disappointing statistics, less than the 2 million tonne average reduction needed to meet the agreed carbon budgets. The pace of change must increase dramatically across transport, building heat and agriculture if Scotland is to meet its legal climate commitments. On 9th June, **in [her Ministerial Statement](#) on those statistics, the Cabinet Secretary said "we need to go faster and further", and SCCS agrees. She also said "we must accelerate the transition", and again we would agree.** Transport and buildings continue to show emissions increases, and those are amongst the areas where SCCS urges Parliament to go further.

- The Climate Change Plan (CCP) relies on removing 3 million tonnes of CO₂ per year via negative emissions technologies (NETs) that do not yet exist at the scale required. **The Government must urgently publish its promised NETS route-map and set out a credible "Plan B"** if these technologies fail to materialise. We need real and practical emissions reductions, not reliance on measures which may or may not work in practice to make the numbers add up.
- The **Scottish Government's Energy Strategy remains unfinished**, meaning there is no framework to assess any new major energy intensive



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developments. This includes the concerns over new AI data centres which, just looking at those already in planning, would alone demand 50% more electricity than Scotland's entire winter peak.

- **Scotland should take an unequivocal stance against new North Sea oil and gas exploration licenses and consents for catastrophic projects**, such as Rosebank and Jackdaw, which are incompatible with climate targets and will do nothing to reduce household energy bills or improve energy security. Analysis has found that the UK will no longer be able to meet its heating demand using only domestically extracted gas by 2027.
- Following their re-election, the Scottish Government must immediately **deliver on its [commitment](#) to formally introduce legislation to decarbonise our homes and buildings** in a way that makes them warmer and cheaper to heat. With around 90% of homes still reliant on fossil fuels, and 1 in 3 households in Scotland struggling to afford to heat their homes, installing clean heating systems powered by Scotland's abundant homegrown renewables in combination with better insulation is a matter of urgency. Delivering on affordable warmth can cut hundreds off of annual energy bills while curbing emissions; tens of thousands jobs could be created in the clean heat and energy efficiency sector; and healthier / warmer homes can reduce health-related public spending and deliver improved public health outcomes.
- Domestic transport is currently Scotland's largest source of carbon emissions, yet the active travel budget was cut by 11% in real terms in 2025-26 and the route map for achieving a 20% reduction in car miles by 2030 remains unpublished. **The £2 bus fare cap should be extended across Scotland and the Private Jet Tax should be brought in at the same time** as the Air Departure Tax is to be introduced.
- Agriculture has reduced emissions by just 13% since 1990 compared to over 50% across the rest of the economy. The rural support plan, described by environmental groups as a "lost decade", leaves £677m per year in farming subsidies without meaningful environmental conditions. **SCCS is calling for**

a Parliament-led review of the Agriculture Reform Programme and investment in agroforestry and organic farming this parliamentary term.

- Scotland was the first country in the world to establish a Climate Justice Fund, and the first in the Global North to allocate funding for climate-induced Loss and Damage. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, agreed at COP27 in 2022, has still not spent a single penny, and total global pledges amount to just 0.2% of the annual costs of Loss and Damage worldwide. **MSPs should press the Government to maintain real-terms funding for Scotland's Climate Justice Fund, join the "Fill the Fund" campaign, support the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and fund a centre of excellence on Loss and Damage** to back Scotland's role as a genuine global leader on climate justice.

Background

[Stop Climate Chaos Scotland \(SCCS\)](#) is Scotland's climate coalition, bringing together over 70 diverse civil society organisations campaigning together on climate change. Our membership includes environment and nature groups, faith and belief organisations, international development organisations, trade unions, student unions, and community groups. Together, we represent over one million people across Scotland.

This debate comes at a really important time. With the new Climate Change Plan published in March 2026 and agreed carbon budgets in law, the test now is whether Scotland can deliver on these promises. Parliament and Government also need to make sure we are ready for new challenges that weren't as clear before, like the massive energy demand from hyperscale AI data centres.

The case for urgent action

[Official emissions statistics published on 9 June 2026](#) confirm that Scotland's emissions fell by just 0.4 million tonnes (Mt) of CO₂ equivalent in 2024. This is confirmation that Scotland remains far off track the government's own planned decreases.

Under the carbon budget agreed by Parliament last year, Scotland must average no more than 35 Mt per year over the 2036–40 period. That requires annual reductions of around 2 Mt, more than five times the rate currently being achieved.

Progress has stalled across key sectors despite real achievements in renewable electricity generation:

- Transport is currently Scotland's single largest source of carbon emissions, with car traffic alone accounting for more than 60% of road transport emissions.
- Buildings account for around 15% of annual emissions; around 90% of Scottish homes still rely on oil or gas for heating.

- Agriculture and land use is a significant source of emissions, and set to grow to the largest gross source over the lifetime of the Climate Change Plan (CCP) greater than the transport sector. Positive land use which has negative net emissions (woodland planting and peatland restoration) often helps mask the large output side of land use.
- Aviation continues to grow, with 26 million air passengers using Scottish airports in 2024, up from 9.9 million in 1990.

Climate impacts are already here

The climate crisis is not a future threat, it is already causing harm to communities across Scotland and globally.

- This debate takes place as the Met Office has issued a rare Red Extreme Heat warning for parts of the UK, with temperatures forecast to reach up to 40C and humidity levels described as “oppressive”. [The Met Office Chief Scientist has said](#), “human induced climate change has made events like this more likely and more intense. To see temperatures like this in the UK in June is sobering.” WHO estimates that over 200,000 people in Europe have died from heat-related causes in the past four years.
- Scotland's [10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 1997](#).
- Storm Éowyn in 2024 battered Scotland and caused millions of pounds of damage. Droughts are especially affecting farmers in the north east. Wildfires are causing 'catastrophic damage' to wildlife. [The Carrbridge and Dava wildfires last year were the largest in Scottish recorded history](#).
- Inaction is far more expensive than action. The Scottish Government's own analysis estimates that unmitigated climate change could cost the Scottish economy up to 7% of GDP, rising above £100 billion by 2030. [The OBR estimates](#) that unchecked climate change could cost up to 8% of UK GDP by 2070 if the world warms by 3°C.
- The public wants action. 62% of the Scottish public want the government to maintain or speed up the pace on emissions cuts. A similar proportion believe doing so would be good for the economy.

- Inequality. [Research by Future Economy Scotland](#) shows that the average carbon footprint of the richest 5% of Scottish households is 4.1 times greater than that of the poorest 5%. Yet the impacts of climate change fall hardest on those with the least capacity to adapt.
- Wildlife loss is accelerating. [Scottish wildlife has decreased by 15% since 1994](#), with one in nine Scottish species at risk of extinction, driven in part by climate change.

The Climate Change Plan

Scotland Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 was published in final form in March 2026 following parliamentary scrutiny. SCCS welcomes the publication of this plan and the Government's commitment to net zero by 2045. However, we have significant concerns about delivery and credibility, particularly in the following six areas:

1. Over-reliance on unproven Negative Emissions Technologies

The CCP relies on removing around 3 million tonnes of CO₂ per year via negative emissions technologies (NETs) such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) by the late 2030s. This is equivalent to offsetting the entirety of Scotland's international aviation and shipping emissions. These technologies do not currently exist at the scale required and are unlikely to be operational in any meaningful capacity before the mid-2030s. They are likely to be significantly costlier than abating emissions in other sectors and thus are not value for money compared to proven interventions elsewhere.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has ranked CCS among the least effective and most expensive methods of meeting 2030 climate targets. [Research by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis](#) shows that no CCS project in the world has managed a capture rate of more than 80%, with many capturing significantly less.

[The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee](#), in its scrutiny of the draft CCP, recommended that the Government set out how it will monitor NETs deployment and what contingency planning is in place. The final Plan commits only to publishing a NETs route-map during 2026.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- When will the Government publish its promised NETs route-map? What are the specific, measurable milestones for CCS and NETs deployment, and at what point will Ministers acknowledge that current projections are not being met?
- What is the "Plan B" if NETs fail to deliver the 3 million tonnes per year of removals on which the CCP's credibility depends? Will the Government commit to reviewing and, where necessary, strengthening its CCP if delivery falls short?

2. Oil, Gas and the Energy Strategy

Scotland has world-leading potential as a clean energy nation. But realising this potential requires the Scottish Government to be clear and unambiguous about the future of oil and gas and to finalise an Energy Strategy that provides the framework within which major planning decisions, including data centre proposals, are made.

The case against new oil and gas licences

Scotland has already benefited from fossil fuels but the geological reality is that North Sea reserves are running out, becoming increasingly expensive to extract, and declining regardless of policy. [Jobs supported by the UK oil and gas industry have halved over the last decade](#) despite hundreds of new licences being issued and new fields approved.

New licences will not reduce energy bills or improve energy security. Analysis has found that the UK will no longer be able to meet its heating demand using only

[domestically extracted gas by 2027](#), even if new fields are approved, because North Sea reserves cannot replace the UK's growing reliance on imports.

The number of direct and indirect jobs supported by the oil and gas sector has more than halved in the past decade, from 247,400 jobs in 2014 to 115,000 jobs in 2024, despite new field approvals and hundreds of new licenses being issued.

The opportunity to retain this highly skilled workforce is substantial. But, Scotland is currently leaking industrial value: the average North Sea turbine contains more than three times as much imported material as domestic content. When most job opportunities in offshore wind are in manufacturing, rather than operations or maintenance, this matters.

As Scotland accelerates its clean energy transition, with the ambition to power the equivalent of around 45 million homes a year through additional offshore wind capacity by 2040, now is the time to firmly establish wind manufacturing and port infrastructure capacity in a way that delivers for the oil and gas workers and their communities.

The [landmark Finch ruling](#) now requires oil and gas developers to assess the climate impacts of combustion emissions in their Environmental Impact Assessments. This has been applied to the Rosebank and Jackdaw fields following successful court challenges.

The unfinished Energy Strategy

The Scottish Government has committed to publishing an Energy Strategy. This remains unfinished. Without it, there is no coherent policy framework within which to assess major energy-intensive planning applications, including hyperscale data centres, against Scotland's climate commitments.

SCCS calls on the Government to publish a finalised Energy Strategy that:

- Adopts an unequivocal position against new oil and gas exploration or extraction in Scottish territorial waters.

- Sets clear targets for community energy ownership, at least 1GW of community-owned energy by 2031 and 25% of energy installations in community ownership by 2040.
- Commits to developing sector-specific just transition plans in genuine partnership with trade unions, ensuring workers in fossil fuels and related industries have clear, funded pathways into quality employment in the clean energy economy. Such plans should have a delivery timetable with milestones not just vague commitments.
- Enables locally-owned public energy and heat companies, co-owned by community organisations.
- Community ownership matters for both climate and economic reasons. 64% of the Scottish public support community-owned renewables in their area, compared to just 40% for private projects. Community-owned wind farms provide, on average, 34 times more financial benefit per MW to local communities than privately-owned equivalents.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- When will the Scottish Government publish a finalised Energy Strategy? Will it include an unequivocal position against new oil and gas exploration in Scottish waters?
- New North Sea oil and gas licences will not reduce household energy bills or improve energy security. Can the Minister explain the climate or economic rationale for supporting new licences?
- What targets and policy levers will the Government use to ensure community ownership becomes a substantial part of Scotland's energy transition, as set out in the Climate Change Plan?

3. Heat in Buildings

Decarbonising how we heat our homes and public buildings is Scotland's second largest emissions challenge and one of the most direct ways to tackle both climate change and fuel poverty simultaneously. Yet progress has been far too slow, and the Heat in Buildings Bill, committed to in the Programme for Government 2025–26, has not yet been introduced.

[According to the CCP](#), heat in buildings currently accounts for around 15% of Scotland's annual greenhouse gas emissions. Around 90% of Scottish homes still rely on oil or gas for heating, and 50% fall below recommended levels of energy efficiency.

The benefits of action

- Household bills: Improving energy efficiency to a minimum EPC C standard could reduce average household energy bills by around 15% (approximately £365 per year at current prices) and cut carbon emissions by around one tonne per home.
- Jobs: The [Existing Homes Alliance estimates](#) that rolling out insulation and clean heating could sustain between 16,200 and 21,600 jobs.
- Carbon: Switching from a gas boiler to an air-source heat pump [can cut a household's carbon emissions](#) by up to 90%.
- Economy: Energy efficiency investment generates [a return of over £3 for every £1 invested](#) in GDP terms.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- When will the Heat in Buildings Bill be introduced to Parliament? Will it include more robust and ambitious proposals than the earlier, watered-down version consulted on at the end of the last session?
- Will the Government commit to working with the UK Government to rebalance electricity and gas prices so that running a heat pump is cheaper than running a gas boiler as the Climate Change Committee has advised is essential?

4. Transport

Transport is Scotland's [single largest source of carbon emissions](#). Car traffic alone accounts for more than [60% of road transport emissions](#). Despite commitments to reduce car kilometres driven by 20% by 2030, progress has been slow and the final route map to achieving this target remains unpublished.

Active travel

SCCS has consistently called for at least 10% of the transport budget to be committed to active travel. The Government previously held this as a commitment; the 2025–26 budget fell significantly short, with the central government allocation for active travel [falling by 11% in real terms](#). The route to meeting the 20% car-km reduction target without major investment in active travel and public transport does not exist.

Bus travel

[Over 75% of public transport journeys in Scotland are made by bus](#), and buses are particularly vital for residents in low-income areas. The £2 bus fare cap pilot in Scotland has demonstrated the impact of affordable fares on travel behaviour with [evidence from England's £2 fare cap](#) showing that 35% of participants took more journeys by bus, and 49% of young people aged 16–24 reported a positive or very positive impact on their living costs.

Aviation and the Private Jet Tax

Aviation is a significant and growing source of emissions. [Oxfam Scotland research](#) estimates that private jets are 5 to 14 times more polluting per passenger than commercial flights, and that taxing private jets at the highest possible rate of Air Departure Tax would generate up to £29 million in additional revenue per year.

More than 12,000 private flights involving Scottish airports were recorded in 2024. The Government has committed to a Private Jet Tax as part of its Air Departure Tax plans, but the Private Jet Tax should not be delayed by a full year after ADT is introduced.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- When will the Government publish the final route map for achieving a 20% reduction in car kilometres driven by 2030, and what legislative and fiscal measures will it include?
- Will the Government commit to restoring the active travel budget to at least 10% of the total transport budget and maintaining this commitment in future years?
- When will the £2 bus fare cap be extended across all of Scotland?

- Will the Government confirm that the Private Jet Tax will not be delayed by a full year after Air Departure Tax is introduced? On what grounds can it be justified to give some of the most polluting and regressive forms of travel a further year's exemption from fair taxation?

5. Agriculture

Agriculture and land use is Scotland's largest gross source of emissions, greater than the transport sector, though this is frequently obscured by the headline net figure. Yet it is also the sector where the Climate Change Plan is least ambitious, and where Government policy is most clearly focused on maintaining the status quo rather than managing the transition that climate change is making inevitable.

[Official statistics](#) show that agriculture emitted 7.5 MtCO₂e in 2024, a fall of just 13.7% since 1990. This compares to an overall reduction of more than 50% across the Scottish economy over the same period, and reductions of 50–90% in other sectors. [The CCP](#) projects a further reduction of only 22.6% in agriculture by 2040, against a 61% reduction in transport, 61% in business and industry, and 45% in buildings over the same period. The CCP itself acknowledges that agriculture is expected to become the highest-emitting sector in Scotland during the Third Carbon Budget period.

The [Climate Change Committee's 2025 progress report](#) flagged "significant risks for agriculture due to the lack of detail in the Agricultural Reform Programme", a warning that has not been adequately addressed.

The Rural Support Plan, published alongside the final CCP in March 2026, was described by environmental groups as a "[lost decade](#)" for climate and nature. The Scottish Government currently provides around £677 million per year in public support to agriculture, but around 80% of this is delivered as direct area-based payments with few or no environmental conditions. The Agri-Environment and Climate Change Scheme, which does make a measurable difference to emissions, was in fact cut in the 2025–26 budget.

The Rural Support Plan commits to maintaining this framework essentially unchanged until 2030 at the earliest, deferring any significant reform. This is inconsistent with the scale and pace of change needed and with the Government's own net zero ambitions.

This gap in ambition in the agriculture sector has a direct knock-on effect. As the CCP cannot rely on meaningful emissions reductions from farming, it is forced to lean even more heavily on unproven Negative Emissions Technologies (NETs) to make its overall arithmetic add up. Deeper reductions from agriculture would reduce this over-reliance.

[Scottish Environment LINK](#) has set out practical steps that could accelerate progress within this parliamentary term, two of which are especially significant for emissions reductions.

On agroforestry, a [report by the Soil Association and Woodland Trust](#) found that an investment of £10 million or more per year could double the area under agroforestry and farm woodland in Scotland, delivering meaningful additional carbon sequestration above and beyond what the CCP projects.

On organic farming, Scotland's organic land area stands at just 3.3% of total agricultural land. Ireland has set a target of 10% by 2030. A similar Scottish target, requiring additional investment of around £4–8 million per year rising to perhaps £20 million per year by 2030, would reduce emissions, increase soil carbon storage and open significant market opportunities for farmers.

The Government's June 2025 indicative statement explicitly stated there is "no policy to reduce livestock numbers." Yet the analytical annex to the final CCP acknowledges that its baseline projections already incorporate "a downward projection in livestock numbers" driven by wider market and dietary trends. This contradiction, acknowledging that livestock numbers will fall while refusing to manage that change, risks an unmanaged and unjust transition for rural communities. The CCP is entirely silent on diet, despite the fact that [NHS](#)



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[Scotland's own guidelines](#) recommend limiting red meat consumption to 70g per day and 32% of Scottish adult meat eaters currently exceed this.

SCCS supports a continued and significant livestock sector in Scottish agriculture, but one that is transformed towards fewer, higher-quality, higher-value animals produced through more extensive, nature-friendly systems. This requires proactive government policy.

SCCS is calling for a comprehensive, Parliament-led review of the Agriculture Reform Programme and agriculture's role in the Climate Change Plan. The Rural Affairs Committee's [own legacy report](#) recommended that its successor committee scrutinise the Rural Support Plan at an early opportunity. That scrutiny should explicitly examine whether current policy is consistent with Scotland's legally binding climate commitments.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- Given that agriculture is projected to become Scotland's highest-emitting sector during the Third Carbon Budget period, and the Climate Change Committee has flagged significant risks from the lack of detail in the Agricultural Reform Programme, when will the Government bring forward a genuinely reformed rural support framework rather than maintaining the pre-2022 status quo?
- The Rural Support Plan has been described as a "lost decade" by environmental groups. Will the Government commit to redirecting a substantially higher share of the £677 million per year in agricultural support from unconditional direct payments towards climate and nature outcomes and will it set a specific target for this, such as the 75% proposed by SCCS and others?
- Will the Scottish Government bring forward increased investment in agroforestry and organic farming this parliamentary term, in line with proposals endorsed by Scottish Environment LINK, as practical short-term steps to increase carbon sequestration above the CCP's projected pathway?
- The CCP's baseline implicitly projects a fall in livestock numbers due to market trends and dietary change, while Government policy explicitly

refuses to manage this transition. Will the Minister explain how the Government plans to ensure this change is fair and just for farming communities, rather than simply unmanaged?

- The Rural Affairs Committee's legacy report recommended its successor committee scrutinise the Rural Support Plan in detail. Will the Government commit to full engagement with any such parliamentary review and to acting on its recommendations?

6. International Climate Justice

Scotland has been a global pioneer on climate justice, establishing the world's first Climate Justice Fund in 2012 and becoming the first Global North country to specifically allocate funding for climate-induced Loss and Damage. This leadership must be maintained and strengthened.

The world's most climate-vulnerable countries are spending twice as much on debt repayments as they receive in climate finance. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), agreed at COP27 in 2022, has still not spent a single penny but is due to dispense funds next year. Financial pledges to the fund amount to only around 0.2% of the annual costs of Loss and Damage globally. The Fund requires a top-up next year from countries as requests outweigh monies promised.

Scotland has an opportunity to demonstrate global leadership by endorsing the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) which 18 countries have endorsed. The treaty is backed by the WHO, the European Parliament and over 900 parliamentarians across the world. As a subnational government Scotland cannot formally sign to the treaty, however it can endorse the initiative, and add its voice to a growing coalition to press the UK government to engage.

MSPs may wish to ask...

- Will the Government commit to significantly increasing funding for Scotland's Climate Justice Fund, including the Loss and Damage element, in the next budget?
- Will Scotland join the "Fill the Fund" campaign to champion greater grant-based pledges to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage?



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- Will the Government fund a centre of excellence on Loss and Damage, as SCCS has proposed, to support Scotland's leadership role in this area?
- 18 Countries have backed the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty and the first international conference took place in April 2026. Will the Scottish Government formally endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty initiative - and attend the next conference - as well as using its international platform to urge the UK Government to engage with this process?