



Everyone's Watching

Executive Summary

A Partnership for a Better Scotland, drawn up by Labour and the Liberal Democrats as a programme of government for the parliamentary term from 2003 – 2007 contained a number of actions to safeguard and improve the environment. The coalition recognised the importance of the environment to Scotland throughout the Partnership Agreement with a 'green thread'. These commitments were welcomed by environment groups in 2003 and many have worked with the Scottish Executive to implement these actions. The aim of the environment groups has been to maximise the benefit of environmental commitments to Scotland's landscape, natural heritage, communities and the economy. However, whilst progress on many of the actions has been welcome, others have been slow to be progressed or implemented in a way which has not resulted in significant environmental benefit. Finally it has emerged during this parliamentary term that, although good work has been undertaken in a number of areas, contradictions in other areas of government policy have frustrated progress on, for example, reducing climate changing emissions.

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

The Scottish Executive has achieved a significant milestone in the attainment of the target of 18% of electricity to be generated from renewable sources by 2010 and LINK is pleased that the 2020 target of 40% is on track. We welcome Jack McConnell's recent comments that 'caring for our natural heritage and encouraging the development of renewable energy are compatible objectives'. However, concern remains that without a national strategy for the location of renewable energy projects, conflict between community groups, environment charities and developers will remain unresolved. In addition, the focus on renewable electricity has diverted attention away from stabilising consumption with electricity demand continuing to rise at 1% per annum. A consultation on the long-promised energy efficiency strategy has now been published, and we look forward to its implementation in the next parliamentary term. LINK would like to see a Scottish Energy Strategy that would co-ordinate action on demand reduction and energy conservation, and maximise the opportunity for renewable energy whilst preventing ad hoc developments in areas needing protection.

The strategy to promote Green Jobs was also welcomed, however there has been a lack of momentum in its implementation and a focus on jobs in the environmental sector rather than pioneering wider job opportunities that would put sustainable development at the heart of the jobs economy.

A welcome action, not contained within the Partnership Agreement, was the launch of a Climate Change Programme which incorporated carbon targets in the form of a 'Scottish Share' and a commitment to adopting a sustainable approach to tackling climate change. The programme contributes to the growing recognition of the scale of the problem faced by the government in Scotland. However, prioritisation of its implementation varies across different departments, and is particularly problematic in relation to enterprise and transport.

Scotland's sustainable development strategy recognised for the first time that economic growth must not be at any cost. However, at present it remains the case that priority is often attached to unqualified economic growth rather than pursuing sustainable economic development.

Transport

Progress in the area of transport goes to the heart of the dilemma faced by the Scottish Executive on the environment. Excellent work has been undertaken in the area of investment in public transport with new railway stations, carriages and routes and we welcome the introduction of a free bus scheme without restriction for older people and people with disabilities – a policy that goes beyond the original partnership agreement commitment. However, the Executive has also committed to invest heavily in road building projects such as the urban M74 and Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route as well as the Air Route Development Fund, all of which have significant environmental implications.

The National Transport Strategy has retained the target for traffic stabilisation; however the strategy itself does not contain the measures to contain traffic growth. Worryingly, the new transport agency, Transport Scotland, is focused on the delivery of major infrastructure projects rather than seeking innovative solutions to reduce climate changing emissions and speed up journey times. The transport sector is the fastest growing contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland and current patterns are unsustainable. The next Scottish government cannot afford to rely upon carbon emissions reductions in other sectors to balance out emissions increases in this sector.

Rural

Reform of the Common Agriculture Policy affects 75% of Scotland's land area and the Executive has had some notable success in this area such as the take up for the Land Management Contract Menu Scheme with associated benefit for breeding birds, plants and other wildlife. However, the vast majority of farm subsidy, paid for by taxpayers, remains contingent on only the most basic environmental conditions with more advanced environmental measures suffering from a lack of funding. Scotland's agri-environment programme remains the worst funded in the whole EU, per hectare of farmed land. The competitive nature of the Rural Stewardship Scheme, now closed to new applications, did not encourage farmers to manage their land to benefit the environment, with 4 out of 5 applications to the scheme rejected in 2006. There are also problems with the organic sector, with a fall in the area of organically managed land and no increase in public expenditure on organic

support since 2006 – this despite the fact that the market for organic food rose by 30% across the UK in 2005.

Protection of Scotland's water environment was advanced by the Water Environment and Water Services Act introduced in 2003. Scotland was the first country to translate the EU directive and LINK congratulated the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament on legislation that goes beyond the EU requirements. However, there is now concern that implementation will be hampered by budget cuts, and there is a lack of ambition in efforts to address diffuse pollution.

Although there has been only limited progress towards making Scotland's aquaculture industry sustainable, progress towards safeguarding the marine environment has been good. The Partnership Agreement Commitment to create Scotland's first Marine and Coastal National Park is welcomed. Looking ahead, LINK is hopeful that a Scottish marine bill for holistic marine management including protection of marine species and habitats will be high on the agenda for the next parliamentary term following the work of the Executive's Advisory Group on a Marine and Coastal Strategy.

Implementation of the Land Reform Act has been an area of success for the Partnership Agreement. Access arrangements under the Land Reform Act are potentially the best in Europe and plans are underway for the core path network which will help promote access to the countryside and increase environmental awareness.

The implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, has not, however, been a notable success. The Executive is committed to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 but with only 1000 days to meet this target on April 5th, progress remains very slow. The next Executive must take up the opportunity to significantly improve the actions in the next round of Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plans so that the objectives of the strategy are addressed. As part of this there is a need to ensure the laudable biodiversity duty in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act is understood and acted upon by all public bodies.

Education

The Partnership Agreement committed the Scottish Executive to emphasising environmental education throughout the school years and progress has been made through the Sustainable Development Education Liaison Group which advises the Scottish Executive Education Department and registration of Eco Schools has passed 80% - a great success! However, resources have been lacking to implement these aspirations with, for example, Eco Schools, a small charity, expected to deliver a National Priority.

A missed opportunity has also been the failure to install micro-renewables in new and existing schools. The involvement and engagement of school children in the generation and conservation of energy is a key learning opportunity.

Justice

The Partnership Agreement committed the Executive to take strong action to reduce environmental crime and the framework put in place by the Nature Conservation Act provides a strong mechanism for safeguarding Scotland's valuable wildlife. However, the implementation of this framework is being undermined by a lack of resources in enforcement with environmental cases given a low priority in Courts. The consultation on the case for or against environmental courts was much delayed and significantly misdirected. This was a major missed opportunity which a new administration should re-visit.

Social Justice

A major disappointment for the environment sector has been the omission of a limited third party right of appeal into recent planning legislation following a consultation in 2004. The consultation responses were 84% in favour but the Executive chose instead to focus on better consultation procedures rather than democratic rights. LINK welcomed the sustainable development duty on the National Planning Framework but is concerned that there will no longer be an opportunity for communities to object to national developments in their area under the new National Planning Framework.

More welcome, however, has been the activity on home insulation and waste. Over 8,000 pensioners have received home insulation and central heating - more than double the original commitment. The Executive and local authorities have also met their target of 25% of waste to be recycled by 2006.

Governance

The publication of *Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy* and *Scotland's Climate Change Programme* made significant progress in embedding the concept of sustainable development and the importance of reducing emissions across government departments. However, the priority of sustainable development is still seen as a barrier to economic growth by some sections of the Scottish Executive, rather than an opportunity, and therefore continues to be overlooked. However, the implementation of strategic environmental assessment, on which Scotland is leading within the UK, is a useful tool to ensure that public bodies examine the environmental effect of strategies, plans or programmes before they are agreed.