

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL CONSULTATION

## GREEN ACTION TRUST RESPONSE

### Part 1 – Targets for improving biodiversity

#### 1. Are statutory nature targets needed in Scotland?

Green Action Trust (GAT), as the lead body for the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN), generally supports the setting of statutory nature targets. The CSGN is a key delivery mechanism within NPF4 and has an active role in addressing the biodiversity crisis through habitat creation, protection, and connectivity across 19 Local Authorities (LAs) in central Scotland,

The proposed statutory targets would help drive coordinated action and provide an essential framework for delivery. These should not only focus on specific species but also on broader ecosystem health and resilience.

Such targets need to build ecosystem health and resilience and not just specific species. It is also important to ensure that such targets are seen across the policy landscape, to mainstream biodiversity actions across government and local authority actions. These targets will drive actions, but GAT hopes that this is not to the exclusion of other biodiversity and climate requirements, so the advisory committee must consider the knock-on effects of setting specific targets.

These targets must also align with the work of biodiversity forums and should be shaped with consultation from key stakeholders. Embedding targets within a data-driven, participatory framework will support positive effects for biodiversity, and provide monitoring for the CSGN, the Biodiversity Strategy, and other national policies. In order to meet these nature targets, upskilling and fieldwork capacity must be addressed, and the CSGN could support this via partnerships (e.g. with Lantra).

**2. Are you satisfied with the proposed topics for nature targets set out in the Bill?**

Yes, we support the proposed topics as they broadly reflect the essential aspects of ecological health. However, to ensure successful implementation, it is vital to work with NGOs, academia, and relevant sectors to align actions and improve data sharing. Citizen science should be encouraged to increase community engagement, and the CSGN is well-placed to coordinate these efforts regionally. We recommend alignment with initiatives like the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) to support high-quality biological data collection and sharing.

These targets will also need to clearly identify and respond to key influencing factors, such as land use change and the climate emergency.

**3. Do you have a view on the framework established in the Bill for how nature targets will be governed, including how targets will be set, monitored, reviewed and reported on?**

The proposed framework is adequate; however, we would recommend adding a process review every three years to assess whether the governance mechanisms remain fit for purpose.

There must be strong consultation and engagement throughout target setting, implementation, and reporting. A formal scientific advisory group could strengthen transparency and credibility. The CSGN could play a key role in convening local authorities and contributing to consultation processes.

**4. Is there anything else you would like to say about Part 1 of the Bill on nature targets?**

N/A

## **Part 2 – Power to modify or restate environmental impact assessment (EIA) legislation and Habitats Regulations**

- 1. Do you support the Scottish Government being granted powers to modify or restate EIA legislation and Habitats Regulations?**

Yes. These powers are necessary to update legislative framework following the European Union exit. However, safeguards must be in place to ensure environmental protections are not weakened.

Flexibility is important, particularly in relation to habitat designation and management, but any changes must be underpinned by transparent consultation and expert advice.

- 2. Do you agree with the purposes set out in the Bill for which powers to amend those regimes may be used?**

Yes. The purposes listed are comprehensive and sensible. Any amendments must be guided by scientific evidence, with clearly articulated responsibilities and demonstrable biodiversity gains.

- 3. Is there anything else you would like to say about Part 2 of the Bill on powers to modify EIA legislation and Habitats Regulations?**

N/A

## **Part 3 – National Parks**

- 1. Do you agree with proposed changes to the aims of National Parks in the Bill?**

Yes. The changes reflect current priorities around climate resilience and biodiversity protection, while retaining core aims. The modernised aims better reflect the challenges Scotland's landscape now faces.

- 2. Do you agree with new duties around the implementation of National Park Plans that are set out in the Bill?**

We support the strengthening of duties to implement National Park Plans. This will encourage stronger alignment between park plans, local development plans, and national strategies such as NPF4.

- 3. Do you support provisions in the Bill enabling the Scottish Government to make regulations for the issuing of fixed penalty notices for breaches of National Park byelaws?**

Yes. This should allow for quicker enforcement of byelaws, reducing court burden while maintaining environmental protections.

- 4. Is there anything else you would like to say about Part 3 of the Bill on National Parks?**

N/A

## **Part 4 – Deer management**

- 1. Do you agree with the proposed changes in the Bill to the statutory aims and purposes of deer management?**

GAT supports the changes in the Bill as they support the findings of the Deer Working Group.

Effective deer control is essential to enabling natural regeneration, particularly within Scotland's protected sites and priority habitats. By reducing overgrazing, these changes could support more successful and cost-effective establishment of native woodland – minimising reliance on deer fencing, which is both expensive and poses risks to species such as black grouse and caper.

The Bill should also recognise the increasing relevance of deer management in urban greenspaces. In these areas, unchecked deer populations can undermine efforts to improve woodland cover and greenspace quality and raise public safety concerns such as road traffic collisions. A targeted, regional approach to urban deer management is needed to ensure biodiversity gains are achieved across all landscapes.

- 2. Do you have any comments on Section 11 of the Bill regarding NatureScot representation on advisory panels?**

Yes. This could aid transparency and help to put across NatureScot's views in these matters.

- 3. Do you agree with the proposed changes in Section 12 which changes how frequently NatureScot reviews compliance with the code of practice for deer management?**

The previous requirement was every 3 years, so extending the compliance review cycle (to up to 10 years) could mean that bad management could go unnoticed for many years. We would suggest that this be reduced to every 5 years.

- 4. Do you support the new ground for intervention by NatureScot for the purpose of nature restoration, as set out in the Bill?**

Yes. These changes allow for broader grounds for NatureScot intervention, which is important to address overgrazing issues that impede woodland regeneration and biodiversity gains.

- 5. Do you agree with modifications set out in the Bill for the operation of deer management plans, control agreements and control schemes?**

Yes. GAT supports the proposed modifications. The introduction of these compulsory plans will support more consistent and accountable land ownership, which will help facilitate woodland regeneration and habitat enhancement.

- 6. Do you agree with the proposed changes to investigatory powers for NatureScot as set out in Section 21 and Section 22 of the Bill?**

N/A

- 7. Do you have a view on proposals in the Bill for changes to the authorisations issued by NatureScot for:**

- a. the culling of deer during the closed seasons**
- b. the culling of deer at night**
- c. the use of vehicles to drive deer**

N/A

- 8. Do you support a new offence of shooting a deer with a shotgun, along with a corresponding ability for NatureScot to authorise the activity in appropriate circumstances?**

N/A

- 9. Do you have any comments on Section 28 and 30 of the Bill in regard to the register of authorised persons and requirement to be fit and competent for certain authorisations?**

N/A

- 10. Do you agree that a new offence should be created for a person failing to report the taking or killing of stray farmed deer?**

N/A

- 11. Do you agree with provisions which remove the need for venison dealer licences?**

Yes. Deregulating the venison industry in this way may help facilitate greater access to local venison markets and reduce administrative barriers for producers. It could enable more efficient processing and distribution, increasing the availability of venison at a local level and potentially supporting more sustainable deer management through market incentives.

- 12. Is there anything else you would like to say about Part 4 of the Bill on deer management?**

We recommend the establishment of evidence-based targets for reducing deer populations or browsing impact, with regionally tailored thresholds. These should be informed by scientific research and monitored over time to ensure effective outcomes for biodiversity and habitat restoration.

## **General/aspects not in the Bill**

- 1. Are there any areas not addressed by the Bill that you believe should be included? If so, what are they?**

There should be greater integration between the Natural Environment Bill, the Climate Change Act, and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. These areas are closely linked, and their alignment is critical to ensure policy implementation, efficient use of resources, and meaningful progress toward shared climate and biodiversity goals.

Clearer cross-referencing between these legislative and strategic frameworks – particularly around targets, funding mechanisms, and land use planning – would help delivery bodies like GAT work more effectively across nature restoration, climate resilience, and greenspaces improvements.