

# **ENVIRONMENTAL**

## **Standards Scotland**

### **Ìrean Àrainneachdail na h-Alba**

News Release

Immediate Release

24 March 2026

#### **Environmental Standards Scotland publishes new five-year Strategy**

Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) has today published its new Strategy, setting out how the organisation will deliver its functions over the next five years. This marks the start of the next chapter for Scotland's environmental scrutiny body.

The publication coincides with a significant moment for ESS, as the organisation prepares to take on additional scrutiny functions and looks ahead to becoming accountable to a newly elected Scottish Parliament following the May elections, with different committees and a refreshed legislative agenda.

The Strategy sets out four priority areas for ESS' proactive work – climate change, nature, resources and water – while the document commits the organisation to continuing to receive representations from members of the public on any area of environmental law.

The document also outlines ESS' vision for Scotland's environment, along with five strategic objectives and the principles which will guide how the organisation will undertake its work over the next five years.

Alongside the new Strategy, ESS has today published its latest Business Plan for the year ahead, as well as a revised Communications and Engagement Plan and information on its performance indicators.

Dr Richard Dixon, Chair of ESS, said: "Our new Strategy places us in a strong position to navigate this period of change effectively. It will ensure we can continue

delivering on our core purpose: making sure that environmental law in Scotland is fit for purpose.

“Our priority areas – climate change, nature, resources and water – reflect the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises in Scotland, and where we believe ESS’ focus can make a real difference.

“We are grateful to everyone who took the time to contribute to our consultation on our draft Strategy. Their feedback has directly shaped and strengthened the final document we are publishing today.”

Since its establishment, ESS has played an important role in strengthening compliance with and the effectiveness of environmental law in Scotland. Its work under the first Strategic Plan has delivered improvements in how Scotland’s environment is protected. For example, ESS has:

- undertaken an investigation to ensure the framework for reporting, monitoring and supporting local authorities in meeting climate change targets is effective
- made recommendations that have led to the increase in monitoring and publishing of information on storm overflows in Scotland and prompted a review of when storm overflows operate
- delivered actions that have strengthened protections for wetland sites, marine habitats and agreed changes to prevent excess incineration capacity
- contributed to the scrutiny of new environmental law in Scotland, including the Scottish Government’s Climate Change Plan and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026

The new ESS Strategy builds upon this successful approach, ensuring continuity while empowering ESS to expand its role and maintain sharp, evidence-based scrutiny of environmental law.

## ENDS

Notes to editors

i) Read ESS' new Strategy: [ESS Strategy 2026-2031 - Environmental Standards Scotland](#)

ii) ESS will take on two new scrutiny functions:

- 1) **The Independent Review Body for Scotland's new statutory biodiversity targets.** Part one of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 assigns ESS as the independent review body that will scrutinise Scotland's new statutory biodiversity targets. These new targets are due to be set in 2026/27.
  
- 2) **The body responsible for scrutinising local authorities' reporting of their climate change duties** (as set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009). The Scottish Government published [new statutory guidance](#) on this earlier this month, and local authorities will start reporting based on that guidance during 2026/27. ESS will start the scrutiny of that reporting during 2027/28.

ESS received an increase in its budget to a total of £3.742 million in 2026/27. This additional funding recognises that ESS will be taking on these two new scrutiny functions and will allow the organisation to recruit new staff to help deliver on them.

iii) For more information, please contact [press@environmentalstandards.scot](mailto:press@environmentalstandards.scot)