

ESS' approach to assessing impact through theory of change

As committed to in our Strategy 2026-2031 we evaluate both the impact of our work and the effectiveness of how we work.

For each of our major investigations and analytical projects that require action by a public authority to improve the situation, we will prepare a theory of change to explain how the actions taken by ESS are expected to contribute ultimately to improved environmental outcomes.

Each theory of change will set out the required improvements to environmental law and regulation, the chain of events that is expected to result in improvements, any key assumptions that underpin our theory of change and the wider context. Each theory of change will also identify specific indicators that ESS will use to track improvements in areas of the environment in which ESS has acted.

Those improvements should, alongside other contributing factors, lead to better environmental outcomes for nature and people and contribute to the achievement of Scotland's ambitions for the environment and climate change.

The following page shows a high-level illustration of the theory of change for our Invasive Non-Native Species analytical report. This report makes 4 recommendations. These have been simplified here under the outcomes section but please refer to the main report for the exact wording and detail of these.

There are several assumptions we have had to make and a number of external factors that will affect the realisation of the outcomes and impact, which include but are not limited to:

- statutory requirements on Scottish Ministers
- actions by other UK nations and international developments
- actions by other public bodies and regulators
- wider environmental conditions and drivers.

This theory of change represents the rationale and intended changes behind our recommendations at the time of publication. We will continue to monitor the implementation of our recommendations (the outcomes) as well as the impact of any actions undertaken by public bodies in response to these recommendations.

ESS Theory of Change: Invasive Non-Native Species

INPUTS

Why we are doing this work

ESS identified a need to understand the policy and regulatory framework for the control and impact of invasive non-native species (INNS) in Scotland.

ACTIVITIES

What we did

ESS produced an analytical report based on policy, legal, data, and scientific reviews to reach conclusions about how effective the current regulatory framework is for INNS control in Scotland.

OUTPUTS

What we have asked to see

Clear, time-bound remedial action plan to be agreed with ESS.

OUTCOMES

Change we expect (our recommendations)

IMPACT

Contribution to long term goals

The policy and regulatory framework for INNS should be updated to ensure controls are clear, understood and can be applied effectively

Proposals brought forward to strengthen and expand the range of regulatory tools available, ensuring that regulators are equipped to intervene effectively, proportionately and at the appropriate scale

Collection and publication of accessible INNS data showing outcomes and contributions to Scotland's biodiversity and INNS targets

A plan of remedial action, with a clear timeline for delivery, to resolve the issues highlighted in this report

Effective legislation

Sufficient monitoring

ESS impact

Contribution to long-term environmental benefit