



Emissions Reduction Targets - Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Scottish Youth Parliament consultation response

Summary of our recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** If decision-makers agree to move from annual climate targets to 5-yearly carbon budgets, there should be an accountability mechanism put in place to ensure that young people and other key stakeholders are still able to feedback on Scottish Government action at more regular intervals.
- **Recommendation 2:** The Scottish Government should publish updated and ambitious actions to tackle the climate crisis as soon as possible and ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in the development and delivery of these actions.

Recommendation 3: Officials and decision-makers should publish youth-friendly and accessible information about the climate crisis and actions being taken to address it, and they should work with young people to identify what youth-friendly information looks like for them.

Who we are

Vision

SYP is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our **vision** for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

Mission

SYP's **mission** is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development and empowering them, using a youth work ethos.

Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (**MSYPs**) listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

Values

- **Democracy** - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14 to 25. Our democratic structure and the scale of our engagement across Scotland gives us a mandate that sets us apart from other organisations.
- **Rights** - We are a rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights and ensuring that local and national governments uphold their rights.
- **Inclusion and Diversity** - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure policymakers and politicians hear the voices of young people from every community and background in Scotland.
- **Political Impartiality** - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we deliver the policies that are most important to young people.

Our approach

As a youth-led organisation, we are constantly seeking the views of young people to ensure our policy positions represent their views as clearly as possible. This means that we have numerous opportunities to collect qualitative and quantitative data on a variety of issues underneath the umbrella of education. To ensure our response can accurately reflect the views of our members and the young people they represent, we pulled our information from various sources.

A number of the questions in the call for views refer to technical carbon accounting, which we were not able to meaningfully consult young people on with the necessary upskilling that would have been required. We have marked those responses with “no response” below.

Focus Group

To help respond to this consultation, SYP carried out a series of activities with a group of MSYPs to engage with the questions in the consultation. The views shared by our Focus Group form part of this response.

Previous responses and consultations

Young people have previously shared their views with SYP on Scotland’s climate targets and the Climate Change Plan. In our response we reference previous responses and reports produced by SYP and our partners.

SYP’s 2021-2026 Manifesto

The calls in SYP’s 2021-2026 Manifesto ([available here](#)) came directly from young people aged 12-25 across Scotland. The consultation was led by MSYPs and supported by the staff team. Due to the innovative and multifaceted approach we took to this manifesto, we do not have the exact number of young people engaged throughout this process. However, we estimate this to be around 10,000.

SYP Policy passed as a Members’ Motion

At SYP Sittings, the membership gets together and MSYPs have the opportunity to propose Member Motions that will become SYP policy statements. To submit a motion, they will have consulted with young people in their constituencies to demonstrate it is an issue important to young people. At the Sitting, the membership then votes on whether the motion should pass, again based on consultation of the proposed Motions with their constituents. By way of example, at SYP’s 79th Sitting in July 2023, nearly 5000 young people were consulted before MSYPs voted on Members’ Motions.

Responses to consultation questions

Part One - Carbon budgets

1. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed shift to 5-yearly carbon budgets (in place of current system of annual targets)?

- Please set out any advantages or disadvantages of a 5 yearly carbon budget approach in Scotland
- Please set out any advantages or disadvantages of retaining the current annual target system

Climate targets in general

Young people in our Focus Group argued that when the Scottish Government sets a climate target or goal, they “*must be loyal to it*” and “*cannot push it back.*” Following the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy’s confirmation in April 2024 that the existing target for emissions reduction by 2030 is out of reach, one of our MSYPs highlighted how important it is that “*the target set for 2045 remains on track.*”

We asked our Focus Group why this was important, and they responded commenting that “*young people are the future and will be left with the consequences*” of climate change. This echoed comments that two MSYPs made to the Permanent Secretary and Directors-General at the Children and Young People’s Executive Takeover in 2023. In that meeting, they commented that “*missed targets make us feel like our future is being stolen before our eyes.*”

These missed targets have led some young people to become sceptical of climate targets and think of them as “*just for show.*” These young people feel that “*we’re not doing anything active to reach them*” and are calling for the Scottish Government to focus on taking “*bold action.*”

5-yearly carbon budgets vs annual targets

MSYPs in our Focus Group took part in a debate to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the current annual target system and proposed 5-yearly carbon budget approach. The level of knowledge about Scotland’s climate targets and approaches varied within the group. Accordingly, a member of SYP staff gave an introduction to the topic and a summary of the points in the Interim Chair of the Climate Change Committee’s letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (see [here](#)) as a starting point for the debate. One group was asked to argue in favour of 5-yearly carbon budgets and the other group was asked to argue in favour of annual targets.

5-yearly carbon budgets

Young people in this group argued that 5-yearly carbon budgets are “*more reliable*” and “*give the bigger picture*” so would allow the Scottish Government more time to process and work out exactly what is happening. They also highlighted that there would be less time and resource spent on reviewing and reporting freeing up more time for “*actual action*” to be taken to meet the targets. They argued that freeing up this time would also allow the Scottish Government to consider and respond to the needs of other areas and sectors. By

way of example, they discussed how during COVID-19, the Scottish Government's focus shifted solely to responding to the pandemic and other areas such as mental health support were left behind. Overall, the MSYPs thought that if the Scottish Government has the correct infrastructure in place, that Scotland can work reliably towards net zero within the 5-yearly carbon budget model.

Annual targets

Young people in this group argued that although a year is a short time scale, the issues from climate change come up and disappear quickly so repeated reviewing and reporting is good as it allows the Scottish Government to continuously review what is happening and consider how to respond quickly. They also argued this keeps accountability within the Scottish Government to keep people in Scotland regularly updated. They felt this would help keep motivation up for the public as well as reassure young people and help prevent climate anxiety.

Young people in this group argued that *“we need to look at what’s happening now and have a solution now”* and *“the world is always moving and always changing.”* Responding to the argument that 5-yearly budgets better allow for fluctuations in emissions, one young person argued that *“we shouldn’t be at the stage where we are this close to not reaching our targets and net zero and shouldn’t have to balance out our fluctuations.”*

Overall, while young people in our focus group did not settle on a preference over 5-yearly budgets vs annual targets, it is clear that whichever route is taken the downsides need to be considered. Therefore, if the decision-makers agree to move to 5-yearly budgets, there should be an accountability mechanism put in place to ensure that young people and other key stakeholders are still able to feedback on Scottish Government action at more regular intervals.

Recommendation 1: If decision-makers agree to move from annual climate targets to 5-yearly carbon budgets, there should be an accountability mechanism put in place to ensure that young people and other key stakeholders are still able to feedback on Scottish Government action at more regular intervals.

2. What are your views on the advantages and disadvantages of carbon budgets / targets being expressed as a percentage reduction or as absolute levels of emissions?

No response.

3. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) suggested that the Scottish Government should consider aligning the proposed 5 yearly carbon budgets with the periods that are used for UK carbon budgets (i.e. 2023-27, 2028 - 32, 2033-2037 and 2038-42). What are the advantages and disadvantages of alignment with UK carbon budget periods?

No response.

4. At the end of a carbon budget period, there can be a surplus or deficit of emissions reductions. What do you think the legislation should say about how future surplus or deficits in emission reductions are dealt with?

No response.

5. In early 2025, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) will advise the UK on the level of its Seventh Carbon Budget. This is the legal limit for UK net emissions of greenhouse gases over the years 2038 to 2042.

The CCC have suggested that could be used as the basis for advice on appropriate levels for carbon budgets in Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that this ‘might be the point at which we are able to have clarity on the targets, and I would want a plan to be produced very quickly thereafter’.

- Should the Scottish Government wait for the planned advice on the UK’s seventh carbon budget from the CCC, before setting their carbon budgets?
- Should the Scottish Government propose multiple 5-year carbon budgets in 2025 up to the year 2042?
- How soon after the Scottish Government has received advice from the CCC should it propose their carbon budgets?
- What should the process of parliamentary scrutiny look like for the laying of carbon budgets and plans for meeting budgets?

SYP are a rights-based organisation, fundamentally based in the rights outlined under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. SYP has always advocated for a rights-based approach to engagement with young people in decision-making. Our work is grounded in Article 12 of the UNCRC - the right for young people to have their views heard and taken seriously on matters that affect them. Following the passing of the *UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024*, it is essential that decision-makers in Scotland actively consult, engage and involve young people in any decisions taken to address the climate emergency, including any plans for meeting carbon budgets. This should include a focus on engaging young people from seldom-heard groups who may not currently be engaged or do not feel they are able to participate in climate change discussions and actions.

Young people are interested in climate issues and have been advocating for urgent action in response to the climate emergency for many years. In 2019, MSYPs passed a Members’ Motion with 94% agreement stating that:

“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there is a global Climate Emergency and calls on local and national decision-makers to prove that they urgently give priority to tackling climate change.” (Members’ Motion passed in 2019 with 94% agreement).

At Executive Takeover in 2023, two MSYPs spoke about why this is important. They explained how *“inaction around solving climate change is making young people anxious and affecting their mental health”*. Further, as Marcus Flucker MSYP explained in his blog, *“the effects of the climate emergency are already impacting communities in Scotland”* whether that be from extreme weather, unprecedented flooding or habitat damage.

In 2023, the UN published General Comment Number 26 on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. This General Comment confirms that children and young people have a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and lays out the obligations on states to address environmental harm and climate change.

Following the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law, we would encourage the Scottish Government to see climate change as a rights issue and ensure that Scotland's young people have access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. This includes involving young people in any decisions taken and ensuring that any changes to the current emission reduction target approach are made a matter of priority and implemented urgently.

Part Two - Climate Change Plan

6. Under the current statutory regime, the legal deadline for laying a draft of the Climate Change Plan (CCP) is November 2024. This Plan was due to apply to the period of 2025-2040. The Scottish Government intends to use the Bill to change the timing for the production of the CCP.

- Do you have views on when and how the Scottish Government should publish their plans for meeting the proposed carbon budgets?
- What period should the next Climate Change Plan cover?
- Do you think the current requirements for Climate Change Plans within the existing legislation provide an effective regulatory framework?
- Are there any other aspects of the current legal framework for the creation of Climate Change Plans that you think should be updated?

In his response to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy's announcement in April 2024, Marcus Flucker MSYP called for the Scottish Government to "*set out as soon as possible how they plan*" to reach net zero by 2045. Accordingly, SYP would strongly encourage the Scottish Government to publish their updated Climate Change Plan "*as soon as possible*".

At Executive Takeover in 2023, two MSYPs highlighted the importance of the Climate Change Plan stating that this was an "*instrumental way the Scottish Government could increase ambitions*". They acknowledged that the Climate Change Plan had - at that time - been delayed for reasons out with the Scottish Government's control but called on them to "*take control of what you can*" and use the period whilst the update is delayed to ensure that young people's rights and views are at the heart of the Climate Change Plan. They explained that young people have "*unique experiences, viewpoints and opinions which are valuable*."

Recommendation 2: The Scottish Government should publish updated and ambitious actions to tackle the climate crisis as soon as possible and ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in the development and delivery of these actions.

As a starting point for this, SYP would strongly encourage the Scottish Government to use the following information, and views shared by young people to inform the updated Climate Change Plan.

Our Focus Group were asked what they would want to see included in Scotland's Climate Change Plan. They told us they would like to see:

- A focus on regeneration and extraction of CO² through peatland restoration and reforestation.

- Better infrastructure to make the transition to net zero easier. They commented how this transition is moving very quickly but no one is prepared enough. In particular, they discussed the transition to electric cars and highlighted how electric cars need charging points which can be difficult in rural areas and very expensive. They also highlighted how many people do not understand how electric cars work currently or know what to do if it breaks down.
- Championing of public transport to raise awareness of the benefits and help people make good use of free public transport.

The above suggestions have been echoed by young people that SYP has spoken to more broadly. In particular, young people have told us that they would like to see more action on the following topics:

Nature restoration and waste reduction

In 2022, SYP's Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee passed a motion stating that: *"The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that, in order to ensure the future of young people everywhere, decision makers should take more action to protect Scotland's natural environment and biodiversity."* (Committee Motion passed in 2022 with 96% agreement).

Tied to this, MSYPs have passed the following policies aiming to reduce waste and pollution levels and protect the natural environment:

"The food and retail industry should...

- *Make it possible to recycle and reuse packaging (93.5% agreement)*
- *Avoid using too much packaging in their products (90.7% agreement)*
- *Make it possible for people to rely less on plastic packaging (89.3% agreement)*
- *Make it possible for people to rely less on packaging that can only be used once (85.8% agreement)."* (Manifesto Policy passed in 2020).

"The Scottish Youth Parliament recognises the environmental impacts of single-use disposable vapes and calls upon the Scottish Government to ban these devices; further calls upon the Scottish Government to take interim actions to mitigate these impacts while working towards a ban and to meaningfully engage with young people throughout this process." (Members' Motion passed in 2023 with 84% agreement).

Just transition

At Executive Takeover 2023, two MSYPs emphasised the importance of *"businesses and polluters"* paying for the transition to net zero to ensure that the burden is not placed on consumers or future generations.

Further, climate justice and a just transition to net zero is a significant theme throughout SYP's policy, particularly including:

"The global climate emergency is an issue of climate justice, where those who contribute least to greenhouse gas emissions are most impacted. Countries most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions must:

- *Be the first to reduce their emissions (75.4% agreement)*
- *Share benefits of their increased wealth and development with those countries most impacted by climate change (71.4% agreement)*
- *Compensate loss and damage incurred in less developed countries as a result of climate change by contributing finances to a global fund, supporting research, and working on international cooperation (69.9% agreement).” (Manifesto Policy passed in 2020).*

Following consultation with their constituents, SYP’s External Affairs, UK and International Relations Committee have chosen to focus on the topic of climate justice as a priority for Scotland’s young people.

MSYPs have also passed policy calling for support for sustainable farming and subsidised sustainable and locally sourced produce to ensure that sustainable products are accessible and affordable for everyone whilst ensuring a just transition for farmers.

Public transport

Previously, SYP campaigned for travel to be made free for all under 25s across all public transport networks in Scotland. The Scottish Government made bus travel free for under 22s, but SYP believe that more still could be done. Young people’s asks covered all forms of public transport to better support rural young people who may rely on ferries. This is not an expensive policy ask but would make a big difference to the lives of young people around Scotland. Further, reports show that Scotland’s transport emissions are not going down despite current efforts meaning that we should be doing more to promote the use of more sustainable forms of transport.

Following consultation with their constituents, SYP’s Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee have chosen to focus on making public transport more accessible and affordable for young people this year. This builds upon previous SYP policies including:

“Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government should provide funding to support initiatives which make it easier, cheaper, and safer for young people to use active and sustainable travel options.” (Manifesto Policy passed in 2020 with 89% agreement).

Part Three: Monitoring and reporting

7. The Scottish Government has confirmed that their annual reporting on progress towards targets will be retained. The CCC have however, suggested that if 5-yearly budgets are adopted in Scotland, CCC reporting may move from a system of annual Scottish ‘Progress’ reports to two dedicated reports on Scottish progress every 5 years.

- **What are your views on whether there should be changes to the existing Scottish Government monitoring and reporting framework?**
- **What are your views on the potential changes to the level of Scottish reporting provided by the CCC?**

Please see our response to Question 1 above in relation to the advantages or disadvantages of changing the regularity of current monitoring and reporting.

As two of our MSYPs made clear to the Scottish Government’s Executive Team “*young people should be included in all stages of policy development and implementation*”. This includes ensuring that young people are kept updated on progress towards targets.

Young people have told us how the lack of youth friendly materials is a barrier to their participation in climate change decision-making. Young people are interested in climate issues and keen to get involved and stay updated but the way that climate issues are spoken about is often too technical for the average member of the public to meaningfully engage with.

SYP are strong advocates of accessible, youth-friendly communications and encourages the Scottish Government to work with children and young people to identify what youth-friendly reporting looks like for them. Having young people involved in this stage of the process is key to their Article 12 right being realised.

Recommendation 3: Officials and decision-makers should publish youth-friendly and accessible information about the climate crisis and actions being taken to address it, and they should work with young people to identify what youth-friendly information looks like for them.

8. A Bill, according to the Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, must “..be accompanied by a Financial Memorandum which sets out best estimates of the costs, savings, and changes to revenues to which the provisions of the Bill would give rise, and an indication of the margins of uncertainty in such estimates.” (Rule 9.3.2).

- **The 2045 target will not be amended. How much do you estimate it would cost to achieve that target?**

No response.

- **Are current spending levels on policies to achieve this in line with what is required?**

No response.

Budget

- **How can the Scottish Government use this year’s Budget to ensure all portfolio areas are focused on achieving the 2045 target?**

No response.

- **Has the inclusion of a Climate Change Assessment of the Budget improved outcomes and progress towards a target?**

No response.

- **What are your views on the presentation of the Climate Change Assessment and are there any changes you would like to see to this?**

No response.