

Introduction



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Scotland's environment is [world-famous](#) and generates wealth for Scotland, both directly (e.g. providing water for the whisky industry, growing crops and timber) and indirectly (e.g. through tourism and the recreation opportunities afforded by a healthy environment). A [recent study](#) valued the benefits provided by Scotland's environment at up to £23.5 billion per year.

Industrialisation and agricultural reform altered Scotland's environment, with some aspects being significantly degraded (e.g. land, air and water quality and associated habitats). However, during the last 60 years many of these [issues have been addressed](#) and there have been major improvements as a result.

These very substantial successes are a reflection of an increased appreciation of the importance and value of the environment. Planning control by local authorities and the use of regulatory powers (by organisations such as [Scottish Natural Heritage](#), [Forestry Commission Scotland](#), [Marine Scotland](#) and the [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#)) have ensured that new developments minimise their impacts, protecting people and the environment.

The shift in our economy away from heavy industry has also reduced pressure on the environment, although in some areas this loss of industry has led to a reduction in prosperity and a reduced quality of life. We now face different environmental challenges.

The biggest environmental problems faced by Scotland (and the rest of the world) relate to the decisions we make and our lifestyle choices.

For example:

- we still throw away many valuable resources that could be reused, or recycled by industries within Scotland;
- we use energy inefficiently, and the energy we use contributes to increasing the rate of climate change - the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is at its highest for 450,000 years;
- we carry out unsustainable fishing of some species;
- we are over-reliant on cars - quality of life in many cities and towns is seriously affected by exhaust emissions, noise and congestion;
- we have expectations of cheap food – driving agricultural intensification, which puts pressure on Scotland's wildlife.

These environmental issues are complex; solving these problems will require working in partnership across the whole of Scotland, as well as changes in our behaviour.

Addressing these problems is a matter for us all. We need information to understand the environmental consequences of our actions and we need opportunities to take action to improve our environment. The intention in creating this website and partnership is to help this process.