



Climate Change - Net Zero Nation: draft public engagement strategy – consultation

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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Yes

No

If you wish to respond to this consultation by email or by post please provide your responses and any comments on the next page.

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Response from the Free Church of Scotland

Our Approach

1. Objectives

a) What are your views on the three objectives underpinning our approach to engagement on climate change?

As a Christian Church we recognise that the goodness of our world is a gift from God to us. God cares about all of his creation and so should we. At the beginning of the Bible God specifically commanded humanity to care for the environment (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15). We recognise that as human beings we have not always shown enough care for creation and we acknowledge as a church we have not always been as quick to speak out on issues around climate change as we should have been. Accordingly, we welcome the draft public engagement strategy as an opportunity to engage everyone in society – to make clear that these issues affect us all – and that we all have a role in caring for our world. We commend the Scottish Government’s desire to engage widely and welcome the three objectives that underpin their approach.

Whilst supporting the key objectives we wonder if they are in the right order – we would encourage the Government to place “Enabling Participation in Policy Design” before “Communicating Climate Change Policy”. The order of the objectives as currently expressed in the draft strategy might not be intentional, but we think the logic is better to begin with participation in policy design which then leads to communicating that policy which then leads to action. Going further we wondered about expressing this in a circular formation as following action we should be going back to policy design to determine what still needs to be done. This recognises that we will not “fix” issues around climate change but need to constantly be challenging ourselves to do better. The current strategy is ambitious, which is welcomed, but we could go even further.

b) Do you think that any of these objectives should be removed or changed?

While we support the top level titles of the objectives, we think some of the detail could be improved. In particular, in relation to “Communicating Climate Change Policy” the descriptor states: “People are aware of the action that the Scottish Government is taking to address climate change and how it relates to their lives.” We would suggest this should be broader than just the action the Scottish Government are taking – it must include the Scottish Government, Local authorities, Community Groups and Industry.

We note that on page 8 of the consultation document you state: “We recognise that government are not, and cannot, be the only ones who engage with the public on this matter. Addressing climate change will be a truly national endeavour. We wish to work collaboratively and consistently alongside trusted messengers to ensure that the public are put at the heart of our national approach.”

Recognising this, we would encourage the objective of communicating climate change policy to include communication of the actions everyone is taking to address climate change. This also has the advantage of allowing examples of good practice to be mirrored across our country and society.

Moreover, we also believe the strategy should explicitly cover engagement with industry – as substantial change is needed from industry to meet the challenges posed by climate change. We understand the focus of this strategy isn’t really industry but it is essential that industry are included

so that we can see that we are all truly in this together. If we only focus on individuals, they might look at the challenge and see little impact of their actions on the bigger picture. If we target everyone, including industry, we all start to see the difference our actions can make.

c) Are there any objectives that you think should be included that are currently missing?

No.

2. Principles

a) What are your views on our seven principles for public engagement set out in Box 1?

We welcome the principles outlined in the document. The principle of putting people first is really important. We are pleased to see the Government's recognition that we must not disadvantage those who can least afford to make changes.

We are also pleased to see the positive message being put across – too often people can be overwhelmed by issues around climate change. They can feel there is nothing they can do to make a difference. But the principles make clear that there are many opportunities open to us.

Taken together the principles recognise the importance of dialogue and discussion, evidence in decision making and a just outcome for everyone. The principles also emphasise the message that we are all in this together. These are excellent principles for all public engagement and discussion, and we hope will be followed in other areas as well.

b) Do you think that any of these principles should be removed or changed?

No.

c) Are there any principles of good public engagement on climate change that you think are missing?

No.

3. Other comments

a) Do you have any other comments on our overall approach?

Alongside the current objectives, action needs to be taken to address and challenge the underlying causes of inaction. At the root of issues of climate change is greed and selfishness and we need to help people to see that through education and other means. Change in behaviour begins with a change in attitude. This was strongly seen in the fair-trade movement and a similar approach is needed with climate change. Teaching on concepts like stewardship and altruism are essential. It is in this area we believe faith groups can help people to understand that we are not the ultimate owners of our world, we are merely tenants, and accordingly have responsibility to care for creation. By shifting people's attitudes in this way, we move people away from compulsion as a motivation to change their behaviours – instead they want to do better because they recognise it is the right thing to do.

Green Recovery

4) What are your views on the opportunities and challenges for public engagement in the Green Recovery?

The pandemic has helped people to see how aspects of their lives can be done differently especially using technology. People are now more aware of the options of conducting business remotely, without the need to travel for meetings. Of course, face to face meetings are sometimes essential, but we should be more discerning about when it is important to travel and when an online meeting can be more efficient. However, in all of this we must remember that some people have been left behind by technology and more must be done to educate and support those who cannot afford the technology.

Another challenge posed by the Green Recovery is financial. Huge sums of money have been spent in combatting the pandemic and so now there are less resources available for issues around climate change.

Part of the green recovery should also include the positive, holistic approach that recognises the changes we are making to our working practices can be beneficial to our own wellbeing as well – spending more time with family, less travelling, better physical fitness through walking / cycling, etc.

Communicating Climate Change Policy

5) What are your views on our approach to communicating climate change policy?

The strategy helpfully recognises that governments are not always the most suitable messengers. We would encourage the Scottish Government to recognise in a more explicit way that that faith leaders are trusted communicators both within and out with their communities. Faith plays an important part in many people's lives and has the potential to greatly influence society in a positive way in the area of climate change. As Christians, we are committed to caring for the poor and our planet – this often results in practical projects undertaken by churches and this work should be recognised and encouraged. More support should be given to faith leaders to help us communicate on issues surrounding climate change.

We also believe communication should focus on explaining in an honest way the need for change as people do respond to truth being authentically communicated. The covid-19 daily briefings have been a good example of the type of communication we are talking about.

6) Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for communicating on climate change that could be useful for informing our approach?

We would commend the work done by Tearfund in communicating on the climate emergency and creating the Climate Emergency Toolbox. They have produced excellent resources including short user-friendly videos that discuss various aspects of climate change. The uses of videos are key to communicate in our modern world where not everyone will read text but people will watch video media.

Enabling Participation in Policy Design

7) What are your views on our approach to enabling participation in policy design?

We would welcome further climate conversations and would love to be involved in hosting these conversations in our churches. Faith communities have the ability to support the government in delivering this objective.

We also think it is essential to encourage engagement from all parts of society. Our younger generations are currently more engaged with issues of climate change, but it is essential we also

encourage older generations. One of the difficulties with any public engagement is that those who choose to engage are always a self-selecting group and so more work is needed to engage a wider constituency.

8) Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for enabling participation in decision-making that could be useful for informing our approach?

Encouraging Action

9) What are your views on our approach to encouraging action?

As already mentioned, we would like to see more engagement with industry as part of the strategy. We also note that grassroots change is starting to take place in businesses – driven by stakeholders changing investment patterns and the workforce themselves encouraging change. This type of action should be encouraged and supported.

We also believe it is important that a broad range of potential action is highlighted – we must not be too prescriptive. This encourages us to realise that we can all do something to make a difference. It is also worth highlight examples of action that have been effective to encourage others to take similar action in their own communities.

In all of this we would again emphasise that faith group leaders should be seen as key messengers. Faith and spirituality provide a helpful framework for approaching issues of climate change and care for creation. Our faith helps answer the why question – why should we be involved in addressing climate change? Because our God commands us to care for one another and our world.

10) Are you aware of any practical examples or case studies of good practice for encouraging climate change action that could be useful for informing our approach?

COP26

11) How do you think COP26 can help deliver a positive legacy for people of Scotland and climate action?

It really depends on what outcomes come out of COP26 but it could be seen as a positive cultural moment to encourage action.

12) How can we work with stakeholders and actors across Scotland to deliver our “people” theme for COP26.

It is vital to work with a broad range of people across all of Scotland. The pandemic and the use of technology should open up the ability of others (outside Glasgow) getting more involved in COP26 without having the travel to Glasgow.

13) Are there other initiatives that the Scottish Government should consider joining or supporting ahead of COP26?

Monitoring and Evaluation

14) What are your views on how our progress towards our objectives could be most effectively monitored and evaluated?

Data that is currently measured such as how much waste is recycled should be communicated more clearly. If people see a reduction in something like waste going to landfill sites this encourages them to also take positive action.

The pandemic has also shown how animal diversity has increased with less pollution. This is really positive and could be measured going forward.

In any monitoring and evaluating it is also important that people have all facts available, including some that might be contrary to the present zeitgeist. For example the relative effects of importing fruit and vegetables from all over the world compared to the local rearing of sheep and cattle on our upland farms; the effect on the environment and on human communities (in the developing world) of mining for the metals required in battery production of electric cars; the success or otherwise of the government's replacing of our indigenous oil industry with local manufacture of wind turbines and other green technology.

15) How regularly – and in what format – should we report on progress on the strategy?

The Covid briefings have been a good example of the difference regular communication can make and should be used as a model. Video communication has the potential to reach more people. Communication should be regular (once a month?) but perhaps the areas that are reported on each time could vary to promote engagement with the communication.