

Election 2016 Response from the Scottish Labour Party

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A sustainable future for Scotland's mountains

What the MCoFS said:

1. Develop a shared vision for Scotland's uplands Scotland's mountains and remaining wild lands should be treated as an irreplaceable natural, cultural and economic asset – respected and safeguarded for the benefit of all. Only the Scottish Government is in a position to bring together a full range of stakeholders, landowners and user groups in partnership, to develop a clear, shared, vision for how this can be achieved and how future developments should be prioritised and directed.

Labour's response:

Agree in the aftermath of the new Land Reform Act and the discussions around deer management and biodiversity, linking in discussion on mountains, uplands and wild land is something that Scottish Labour would be interested in. We believe the Parliament should have early discussions on CAP reform, land management issues, tree planting so it would be good to discuss these issues more holistically. The Land Use Strategy needs to be a focus for these discussions so that we get joined up thinking on developing a shared vision which can lead to action.

2. Support sustainable economic development for mountain communities

Scotland's mountains and wild land can contribute to a thriving future for fragile rural economies. But these communities need support and investment to diversify and develop skills in ecosystem services, sustainable production compatible with a high quality environment, mountain and nature tourism, and communications links which enable remote working.

We'd be interested in the MCoFS view on how this should take place.

3. Enforce existing legal powers & safeguard Scotland's access rights

Scotland's access legislation is widely admired for the freedom it offers to roam responsibly. Our access rights provide unrivalled opportunities to appreciate our mountains' wildness and grandeur, to encourage tourism, recreation, and the active lifestyles so essential for our nation's health and wellbeing. These rights are backed up by legal powers to deal with access abuses robustly and effectively. Due to a failure to effectively enforce the legislation, our universal access rights are increasingly at threat of erosion. Scotland needs enlightened political leadership to protect our access rights and invest in solutions that address the small proportion of access abuses.

Concerned to hear that MCoFS believe there to be a "failure to effectively enforce legislation" and would be happy to discuss how you believe this should be remedied.

4. Guarantee planning protection for Wild Land Areas

Development should be planned and regulated to enhance, not diminish, our mountain landscapes and wild land. Our planning system needs to provide greater recognition for beauty and wildness, giving protection against intrusive and industrial-scale developments in designated Wild Land Areas. Planning consent should also be required for vehicular access hill tracks, which can presently be constructed with minimal planning involvement, monitoring and quality control.

I have long supported the requirement for planning consent for hill tracks and would be happy to return to the issue in the next Parliamentary session. See also my comments on the importance of the Land Use Strategy.

5. Capitalise on the health & wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation

Here in Scotland we are ideally placed to capitalise on the health and wellbeing benefits hillwalking, climbing (indoors or outdoors) and mountaineering activities can offer, from childhood to older age, whether they be in terms of exercise or relaxation, teamwork or self-reliance. These benefits need recognising and promoting at a strategic and operational level in both education and health services.

These ambitions are shared by Scottish Labour and we have referenced the need for more physical activity as part of not just our Environmental Justice ambitions, but for our health and well-being.

6. Commitment to improving safety in the mountains

A sector-wide Mountain Safety Group, led by the MCofS, is developing a strategy for improving safety in Scotland's mountains. Government investment in safety services such as mountain weather and avalanche forecasts, training and mountain rescue plays a vital part in this and must continue. An evidence-based review into access to safety information and opportunities to gain skills should help guide future investment.

We are committed to ensuring that mountain safety is maintained and again would be interested in hearing from MCofS how we ensure this is the case going forward. Underpinning all of these ambitions is the challenge of funding them and Scottish Labour is clear that we need fairer taxation to fund our health, education and housing priorities. Without our additional investment using the new powers of the Scottish Parliament we have real concerns about the budgets which are needed to sustain the six commitments listed above. We could already see pressures in this year's Rural Affairs, Climate and Environment budget and the wider capacity to fund existing and new commitments has to be an issue for the next term of the Scottish Parliament.