

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
Tuesday 25 March 2025
12th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

Evidence session - Environmental Standards Scotland

Introduction

1. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has agreed to take evidence from Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) to take stock of the organisation's most recent [Annual Report](#), and to discuss issues relating to its roles and function as Scotland's environmental watchdog.
2. On 28 February, the Committee received ESS's most recent [six-monthly update](#) on its work programme.
3. The Committee took evidence on ESS's first annual report on [5 March 2024](#).

Background

4. ESS was established under the [UK Withdrawal from the European Union \(Continuity\) \(Scotland\) Act 2021](#) ('the Continuity Act') as an independent, non-ministerial office of the Scottish Government. ESS is accountable to the Scottish Parliament.
5. ESS is tasked with fulfilling a number of environmental governance functions which had previously been carried out by EU bodies. The Continuity Act confers on ESS a wide array of enforcement powers to undertake these duties to full effect. ESS has two main responsibilities:
 - To monitor the effectiveness of environmental law in Scotland; and
 - To oversee and, if necessary, investigate compliance of public authorities with their environmental obligations.
6. ESS undertakes its roles and functions in accordance with its [Strategic Plan 2022-25](#). The Committee considered the Plan on behalf of the Scottish Parliament as part of its statutory approval process, taking evidence from ESS at its meeting [on 25 October 2022](#). The Committee set out its conclusions and recommendations on the Plan in a report published [on 11 November 2022](#).

Meeting on 25 March

7. The Committee will take evidence from ESS at its meeting on 25 March. The Committee will hear from:

- Dr Richard Dixon, Acting Chair¹, Environmental Standards Scotland
 - Mark Roberts, Chief Executive, Environmental Standards Scotland
8. This will be a wide-ranging session, covering all issues within ESS's roles and functions that relate to the Committee's remit. The Committee will also take this opportunity to discuss information presented in ESS's Annual Report as well as its strategic priorities for the coming year. Topics may include:
- ESS's own assessment of how it has carried out its role so far, including the statutory framework and governance arrangements it works within, and its resources;
 - Its views on ensuring the effectiveness of the next Scottish Government Climate Change Plan, due to be laid in draft this autumn;
 - The performance of the Scottish Government and public authorities in relation to key environmental policy areas such as:
 - Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience
 - The water environment
 - Air quality
 - Environmental governance
 - Monitoring the Scottish Government's pledge to "keep pace" with EU environmental standards

Clerks to the Committee
March 2025

¹ Dr Dixon is the nominated chair, which was approved by [motion of the Parliament on 11 March 2025](#), but ESS inform us that this appointment has still to be formalised.