

# URC National Synod of Scotland Environmental Policy

For adoption at March Synod 2025

## 1. Introduction

General Assembly 2022 adopted an Environmental Policy and encouraged Synods to adopt the same policy as a minimum commitment of its care for Creation. The General Assembly policy can be found [here](#). At the same time it established a Net Zero task group and resolved to take urgent action to reduce carbon emissions over the whole life of the church with the aspiration of reaching Net Zero by 2030. As of this year different Synods and Local Churches as well as Synod Trust Companies are invited to complete an annual net zero questionnaire to enable them to monitor their progress towards net zero.

Since 2015, the Synod has taken a number of individual resolutions concerning climate justice. This document brings these resolutions together to help the Synod monitor its past commitments to climate justice and encourage it to continue moving towards Net Zero.

## 2. Biblical and Theological Basis (drawn from GA paper)

As a Synod, we affirm that care for Creation, a just and sustainable use of the world's resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments.

We acknowledge humanity's interdependence with the rest of Creation, and that the flourishing of humankind cannot be separated from the flourishing of all life. We believe that God calls human beings to live in relationship with the rest of Creation, and to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings, but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

We know that human activity is responsible for the degradation of the Earth, increasing climate change, and a frightening acceleration in the loss of biodiversity. This cannot be the will of God. It is harming the web of life and the balance of nature and imposing most heavily upon the poorest people in the world. We believe that knowingly to continue in such activities is a sin for which highly industrialised nations must repent, seek forgiveness and make restitution.

We acknowledge our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to Creation, perpetuating injustice, and delaying action to change direction.

We affirm that it is part of Christian mission to strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth. This involves acknowledging humankind's responsibility, sharing in putting right the relationships within God's Creation that have gone wrong, and working within the Church and with partners outside the Church to pursue justice and sustainability, as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.

### 3. Synod of Scotland Environmental Policy

It is our intent, as a body of people committed by our faith to caring for God's Creation, and who recognise the urgency of the climate emergency, to:

- Work with, and support individual congregations as they care for Creation
- Refrain from doing those things which add to the climate crisis
- Integrate our concern for environmental issues into the whole of our church life
- Act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life as we aspire to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030
- Use Earth's resources wisely
- Enjoy, protect and where possible renew the natural environment
- Protect and increase biodiversity.

### 4. We offer the following areas of church life as examples of how the Synod with local congregations may work together towards climate justice. We recognise that we are on a journey together and affirm our aspiration to achieve Net Zero status. Beside the examples you will see a symbol

The seeds indicate an area where there is potential for work to be carried out

The seedling indicates that we have begun to make progress in this area

The tree indicates we have made more progress in this area, but as a tree continues to grow, there are always more possibilities for development.



#### **Synod Meetings and Travel**

- a) Meet physically less frequently, and make greater use of video-conferencing
- b) Assess the environmental policies and credentials of the venues used for meetings and events including the use of single-use plastics.
- c) Prioritise the accessibility of meeting locations for public transport.

- d) Consider the necessity and benefits of all travel with regard to its environmental impact and continue to carbon offset necessary journeys.
- b) Give preference to using lower-carbon modes of transport, and offer incentives for doing so.



### **Synod-Owned Buildings (Office, Churches and Manses)**

- a) Build environmental assessments into quinquennial surveys of buildings
- b) Investigate and, where possible, improve the levels of energy efficiency and environmental performance of buildings, including insulation, glazing, ventilation and heating and cooling systems, through refurbishment or replacement
- c) Ensure any buildings purchased have an Energy Performance rating of C or above, or are upgraded immediately after purchase to achieve this rating
- d) Implement measures to reduce energy use
- e) Support the generation of renewable energy – either on our own buildings or by investing in and cooperating with local community projects
- f) Choose green energy tariffs, from suppliers investing in new renewable energy generation, and pay to offset the carbon emissions of any unavoidable use of fossil fuels.
- g) encourage local congregations to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings through the provision of advice and funding from the Energy Crisis Fund.



### **Investments**

- a) Continue not to invest in fossil fuel companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels, including thermal coal, natural gas and oil.
- b) Where possible, play a proactive role as investors, by engaging further with companies whose activities foster significant carbon emissions, for example the electricity and automotive industries, and producers of energy intensive products (eg cement)
- c) Support investment in renewable energy and clean technologies.



### **Use and disposal of resources**

- a) Reduce the use and consumption of unsustainable resources
- b) Continue to work towards eliminating the use of single-use plastics, given their significant environmental impact
- c) Support, promote and publicise our reuse and recycling of materials
- d) Dispose of waste in ways that minimise its impact on the environment.



### **Worship, teaching and education**

- a) Ensure that those serving and being prepared for service in the church are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis, as well as the response required by our faith
- b) Promote resources for worship and teaching related to environmental themes
- c) Promote resources and campaigns that support churches and church members to reduce their environmental footprint.



### **Advocacy**

- a) Advocate for action by government, industry and others to foster a deep, rapid and just transition towards a net zero carbon economy
- b) Urge the UK and Scottish government to set targets and establish policies that will ensure a rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions so that net zero is achieved by well before 2050
- c) Campaign with others at local and national level for policies, targets and actions that take steps towards realising these goals
- d) Advocate for global climate justice and international financing mechanisms to be put in place to enable mitigation, adaptation and compensation for loss and damage.



### **Eco-Synod**

- a) Make equivalent commitments, working with Eco-Congregation Scotland to the Eco-Synod Scheme operating in England and Wales.
- b) Encourage congregations with the Synod to register and become members of Eco-Congregation Scotland and progress through the award levels, which involves looking at the broad areas of spiritual living, practical living and global living.

## 5. Our commitment

As a Synod:

- we aspire to enrich our relationship with creation, experiencing its wonder and enjoyment and offering care wherever we can
- we continue our journey towards Net Zero and ask the Synod Mission Committee to monitor our progress.
- we invite local congregations to reflect upon these aspects of church life and make visible their own commitments and possibilities for further development.

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Notes:

- 1) The use of a capital letter for Earth, to encourage more relational thinking, is taking off globally.