

Zero Waste Scotland: A Decade of Delivery

Charting the
impact of our
activities from
2014 - 2024

**ZERO
WASTE
SCOTLAND**

This report reflects a broad span of Zero Waste Scotland activities over the past decade. It is a set of highlights, broadly grouped into themes which have characterised our activity.

Acknowledgements

Zero Waste Scotland wishes to thank the many thousands of partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders that have played a part in our story of the last ten years. There are far too many to mention, but we have valued each and every engagement that has contributed to our work.

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1 Foreword by Iain Gulland, chief executive

Ten years ago, Zero Waste Scotland set out on a journey as an independent organisation, having started out as a programme within the UK Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

Emerging in 2008 as WRAP Scotland, after six years of progress under that banner, the Scottish Government took the decision to support the creation of Zero Waste Scotland as an independent body. This built on the work initiated by WRAP but also taking the initiative to sharply focus future efforts on the distinctive characteristics of the Scottish economy, our people and communities and setting out ambitions for a future circular economy.

Zero Waste Scotland was constituted as a company, limited by guarantee with an independent Board, ably created and guided by our much-missed founding Chair, the late Vic Emery OBE. Vic was instrumental in shaping the early years of Zero Waste Scotland. His wise counsel, vision and good sense were invaluable to me as we built our new organisation.

Throughout the last ten years, we have been consistently supported and funded by the Scottish Government, for whom we function as a support and advisor on policy development and implementation. This report – A Decade of Delivery – is a reflection on the past decade of work and a series of highlights of our activities and impact on, what continues to be, a journey for Scotland away from its historic dependency on landfill and its significant overconsumption of resources, through to a circular economy that makes much more efficient use of resources, focuses on reducing our use of materials and

keeps those we use in productive use for longer.

As we enter the next decade for Zero Waste Scotland, we are again embarking on a significant change as we evolve to a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) from October 2024. This will bring new responsibilities and duties, but also new opportunities as we embark on an ambitious new Corporate Plan in which we set out the imperative for Scotland's economy to 'rewire for circularity'.

I hope you enjoy this journey through the last decade, and we look forward to your continued support in the years to come, in which the essential need for the circular economy to enter the mainstream of economic and social policy must be realised, alongside its role in the continued shaping of environmental and climate policy.



Iain Gulland



"Congratulations to Zero Waste Scotland on ten successful years as an independent body, serving Scotland in the delivery of greater resource efficiency and the transition to a circular economy. I was always impressed with the rigour, energy and passion with which you supported, and continue to support the Scottish Government in our shared objectives. I'm proud to have played a part in your formation and wish you well for the next decade of important action."

Richard Lochhead MSP

Minister for Business and former Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (2007-2016)

Zero Waste Scotland Head Office, Stirling.

2 Building circular business

The journey to a circular economy needs more and more business activity to be focused on how they can contribute to circularity and thrive as businesses. Zero Waste Scotland has had a suite of activities and major projects focused on the needs of business – ranging from supporting start-ups with good propositions, to support on good housekeeping measures for energy and resource efficiency.

Utilising funds from the Scottish Government and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), we have provided SMEs across Scotland with bespoke support to identify and develop circular business opportunities. Our business support service was a groundbreaking initiative, one of the EU's first circular economy projects, and it included the introduction of lease services, circular product design, reuse, innovative material solutions, and the embedding of additional capacity to accelerate business development.

Since 2016 our **Circular Economy Investment Fund (CEIF)**¹ has invested £12 million in more than 60 Scottish enterprises, created 70 jobs and reduced carbon emissions to the equivalent of taking 40,000 fossil-fuelled cars off the road.

Our **Circular Economy Business Support programme (CEBS)**¹ supported over 200 companies to make improvements by introducing circular strategies such as circular design, resource recovery, and waste management.

Preventing waste at source is an important yet understated dimension of an effective circular economy and can make good business and environmental sense.

Our **Waste Prevention Implementation Fund**² was created to help businesses and other organisations overcome barriers to undertake a particular project with a focus on raw materials savings, carbon savings and the movement of waste material up the waste hierarchy. Since its launch in 2016, the Fund invested £2.8 million in projects with 65 SMEs, to implement measures which generated savings of £18 million, 19,785 tonnes of materials and 5,234 tonnes CO₂e.

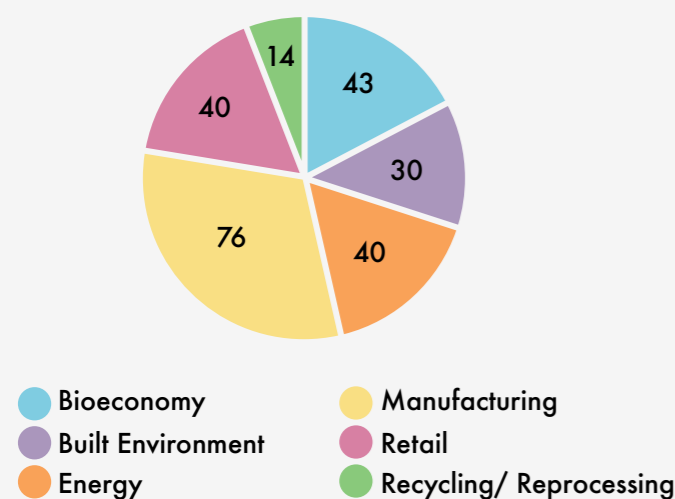
Social enterprise has been a significant dimension of our business support activity over the years. The significance of social and community enterprise in local economic development and community wealth building is increasingly recognised. Accelerating the

accessibility of good reuse and repair services is a core element for many Scottish social enterprises, and this is reflected in the activity we have developed over many years. It also provided resources to all businesses such as the **Inspiring Sustainable Circular Business Toolkit** designed to make advice and guidance easily accessible.

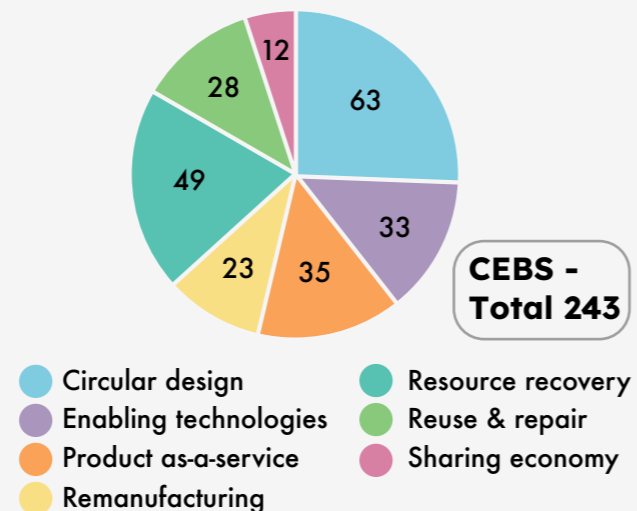
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Sectorial distribution of CEBS businesses



Circular strategies pursued by CEBS businesses



Revolve certification made it easier, more inviting, and safer to buy second hand for consumers by creating a reliable brand that denoted quality in reuse. The Revolve brand, and related marketing campaigns, promoted all certified stores in the network via a national public awareness programme. The Revolve promotional campaign drove footfall to those stores and encouraged people to buy more second hand goods³. Customers were encouraged to find their local Revolve certified store where they could be confident that they were buying quality goods from a trusted source. Businesses that acquired the certification saw benefits to their business development and maturity of the reuse sector.

The Revolve team work closely with **Circular Communities Scotland** on a number of projects, including the **Share and Repair Network**, which has demonstrated real

progress and expansion since its inception in June 2022. The Share & Repair Network was established with 21 members and, as of June 2024, there are 116 member organisations, with 79 active projects.

Revolve has demonstrated steady growth over time in the numbers of new businesses completing certification, starting off at 50 certified stores in 2017 and reaching more than double of that at 118 by 2021. Since the Network was established, their members have delivered more than 138,000 tonnes of reused goods and materials and provided opportunities for around 213,800 volunteer hours to contribute their skills and support their communities.

Building circular business has been at the heart of so much of our work, and we have been wide ranging in our efforts to build capacity, raise awareness, and celebrate success in the business community.



138,000 tonnes of reused materials



213,800 volunteer hours

November 2021 Survey: Benefits experienced by organisations going through Revolve Certification





Resource Efficient Scotland was a significant programme to help Scottish businesses make financial and environmental savings work hand-in-hand. Through practical advice and support, this service and the subsequent **Energy Efficiency Business Support** service saw Scottish businesses accumulate total carbon savings from 2016 - 2022 of 292,600 tonnes CO₂e.



The Resource Efficient House was an award-winning sustainable construction project and visitor attraction at BRE Innovation Park, Ravenscraig. It was a contemporary three bedroom net-zero carbon home.



Our **Food Waste Reduction Business Support** service was designed to help businesses reduce food waste by understanding better how food waste is generated and identify practical measures to tackle this resource stream and avoid it turning to waste. Since inception, the support service has saved over 40,000 tonnes CO₂e and identified £8 million of financial savings for Scottish food manufacturing and hospitality businesses.

More widely, we have maintained a consistent approach to supporting the circular development of the bioeconomy. A range of initiatives included the **Bioeconomy Accelerator Funding Call**, launched in 2017 in association with our Circular Economy Investment Fund (CEIF) and supported by the Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre (IBioIC) to identify opportunities across bioeconomy sectors to develop innovative opportunities for enabling a more circular system⁴. Around £2.2 million was awarded to bioeconomy projects from CEIF. The Bioeconomy Accelerator generated 27 applications of which five were offered funding totalling £1.8 million.

During this decade of circular economy development, the role of remanufacturing as a key element in a circular economy rose to prominence and, in Scotland, Zero Waste Scotland was one of the founding partners of the **Scottish Institute for Remanufacturing (SIR)**⁵. SIR is hosted at the University of Strathclyde and was funded with an investment of £1.3 million over three years. It has since received additional support

from Zero Waste Scotland to continue its activities in stimulating and supporting the remanufacturing community in Scotland. Additionally, we supported the development of the **National Manufacturing Institute for Scotland** - aimed at shaping the future of manufacturing and innovation in Scotland - focusing on Circular Economy, Skills and Competitive Infrastructure⁶.

Recognising and celebrating business success stories is a vital part of the necessary awareness-raising needed to continue to popularise the value of going circular and encouraging action. To that end, we have been a partner in the **VIBES Awards**⁷ and, since 2019, Zero Waste Scotland has sponsored a bi-annual Circular Economy Award via **Scottish EDGE**⁸, to help raise the profile of the circular economy to Scotland's leading entrepreneurial community and to support the development and growth of high-potential circular start-ups.

Recognition through awards and success in developing new circular business ideas has to start somewhere - and often from very

small beginnings. We've recognised that many SMEs have limited resources to push a circular project towards commercialisation, or to run and monitor a pilot before moving to full scale adoption. To address this, Zero Waste Scotland's **Circular Economy Intern**

Placement programme offers SMEs the opportunity to receive a fully funded intern position for a period of twelve weeks⁹. Since 2020, 33 interns have been placed with host businesses.

Host businesses internship testimonials



"Overall, the internship was mutually beneficial and played a crucial role in the growth and development of both the intern and our organisation. Thank you so much for this opportunity."

Jane Franco
Business Development Manager, Saltire Patisserie Ltd.



"Overall, we enthusiastically recommend other businesses to partake in the Circular Economy Internship Scheme!"

Philip Shelton
Operations Manager, SilviBio



"Hosting a placement has been absolutely fantastic for our business."

Tom Anderson
CEO Evolve Metals Ltd.

Interns' feedback

"This internship has been a truly rewarding experience for me, offering valuable insights and hands-on learning in sustainability and innovation."

"This internship has been valuable in helping me achieve my future goals, as it has broadened my experience in a new sector, deepened my interest in sustainability, and enhanced my skills in strategy, project management, business partnerships, and customer relations, and I am keen to utilise these skills going forward."

"The internship has provided me with valuable insights into the circular economy and sustainability, which will be beneficial in my future career pursuits."

3 Developing policy

Zero Waste Scotland constantly strives to produce the best possible evidence, technical support and analysis, and engagement with stakeholders on policy developments, to support the Scottish Government in the continual development of resource management and circular economy policy.

Over the past decade, the story of policy development is, of course, influenced by the impact of global events, economic and geopolitical impacts, and how businesses, people and wider civic society react to these influences. The impact of climate change is now firmly established in the minds of people and policymakers, but is yet to entirely translate into the actions needed to fully address the challenges. COVID-19 had an extraordinary impact on our society and economy and, in many respects, we are not yet fully recovered from this.

In the face of a decade of significant social, economic, environmental, and political headwinds, the progress towards a circular economy continues and we remain vigilant in supporting that progress.

The start and end points of this decade of action tell the story of the continuing journey towards circularity in themselves. We started in 2014 with the implementation of the **Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012** which have helped drive business and people towards greater awareness and action on recycling, as they required levels of separate collection of key materials from homes and businesses not previously seen¹⁰.

In the middle of the decade, the Scottish Government revised its previous resources and waste strategy, and published **Making Things Last** which, for the first time, explicitly referenced the importance of the circular economy and a range of measures and new targets for industry, commerce, councils, and people to strive for¹¹. Our Circular Economy Evidence Programme, developed in collaboration with SEPA and the Scottish Government helped to shape and inform this strategy.



Richard Lochhead MSP, then-Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment, and Iain Gulland photographed alongside a young circular economy champion to mark the 2016 launch of "Making Things Last: a circular economy strategy for Scotland".

The middle part of the decade also saw the development of a **Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for Scotland**¹². Zero Waste Scotland conducted the original research that informed the development of the scheme and supported the Scottish Government throughout the development, which was announced in 2017 and continued thereon until 2023. Our current work includes supporting Scottish Government with revisions to impact assessments, in preparation for the now UK-wide DRS - due for launch in October 2027.



Throughout much of the period, Zero Waste Scotland has strived to advance the concept of **Product Stewardship** as a means of tackling the need for greater responsibility of manufacturers for the products they place on the market and their eventual disposal, reuse, or recycling¹³. Interconnected with the continued development of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**, we have provided technical advice and support to Scottish Government on the revision of existing measures on Batteries and Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), the final shaping of measures on Packaging, and the early intervention to tackle the challenge of single-use vapes¹⁴.

It is widely acknowledged that UK progress on many of these producer responsibility measures has been limited in recent years. However, there is growing momentum again to accelerate these policy developments and extend into areas such as **Critical Raw Materials**, where we see growing recognition of the importance of capturing precious metals within our own circular economy, to mitigate the possible impacts

of dependence on increasingly inaccessible foreign supplies of resources - especially as many of these materials are needed for the growth in Net Zero Energy Infrastructure that is planned for the UK.

Construction and the Built Environment remains a significant source of carbon emissions and a major generator of waste and is a key target for more policy development and practice change. In recent years, we have developed the **Net Zero Public Sector Building Standard**, in partnership with Scottish Futures Trust and Health Facilities Scotland, with the second edition being published in 2024, to include major retrofit projects¹⁵. It provides a standardised framework of requirements for buildings to meet net zero emissions. It centres on three themes of Place, Carbon, and Environment, and ensures a balanced approach by enabling objectives to be met equally while not conflicting with each other. It is the first publicly funded standard in the UK to set out an embodied carbon target for buildings.



Currently there are a diverse array of 20 projects registered to the Net Zero Standard which include NHS Lanarkshire's Monkland's Hospital and the Dunfermline Learning Campus in Fife. These projects will be the first of their kind and will meet the ambitious Net Zero by 2045 target far in advance of it coming into force.



The decade of action has culminated in the passing of the **Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024** which extends our ambition and requires Ministers to produce a statutory Circular Economy Strategy which is then reviewed every five years¹⁶. This includes a refreshed set of targets designed to fully reflect new ways to measure the impact of a circular economy and stretch our ambition further into the territory of addressing material consumption rates and building consensus on how best to measure and deliver a circular economy which goes beyond just the improvement of recycling rates - important though that remains. Much of the detail we expect will emerge from the imminent **Circular Economy and Waste Route Map**, which will include the detailed action plans and parameters for new target-setting and delivery. Zero Waste Scotland has been proud to support Scottish Government throughout this process and looks forward to the next phase of implementation.

Scotland's policy story is one that reflects the evolution of thinking and practice - we have had some significant success in reducing the impact of landfill, increasing our overall recycling performance, tackling producer responsibility, and pioneering circular business. Now we move towards a new phase in which circular thinking, policy, and practice needs to become mainstream.

4 Changing behaviour

The journey towards a circular economy requires a constant evolution and evaluation of the mix of measures needed to deliver success. Policy and regulation are important, investments in the right infrastructure and systems to deliver are just as important, and so is the need to change hearts and minds and provide the information, data, and practical messages that change behaviour - whether that be of people, businesses, or wider civil society.

Over the past decade, Zero Waste Scotland has been at the heart of a range of initiatives to communicate the value and importance of reducing waste, challenging established norms of thinking about how we consume, increasing recycling and reuse, and advancing the concept of the circular economy. Of course, like other campaigning and advocacy organisations, we do this in the face of mainstream mass media that continues to drive in the opposite direction, so we have always needed to be innovative in our methods and messaging.

We have built on the inheritance from our origins at WRAP, and so have continued to

support the successful **Love Food Hate Waste**¹⁷ campaigns and develop the **Recycle for Scotland** brand throughout the decade. Love Food Hate Waste was extended by an innovative cascade training programme in which we delivered 290 workshops, attended by 206 organisations and 3,262 individual campaigners - all of whom were provided with tools and techniques to take the knowledge to their own localities. An overwhelming 92% of attendees said the workshop changed their understanding and practice in relation to food waste.

Food waste has featured regularly, given its importance in terms of the potential positive impacts on carbon emissions and tonnage from reducing food waste. The **Good to Go Initiative**¹⁸ sought to change attitudes to leftovers, increasing awareness of food waste and sustainability in restaurants and cafes and with their customers. 98% of venues we engaged with reported a positive experience from the project, leading to positive changes in practice.



We successfully raised the profile of food waste as a driver of climate change during COP26, by partnering with internationally renowned photographer Rankin to create a photography installation in the streets of Glasgow highlighting that food waste is more harmful to the planet than plastics.



On a very practical level, we delivered a **Community Fridges Fund**¹⁹ during the height of the cost-of-living crisis, to address issues of food poverty and support practical food redistribution and expansion of the capacity of local organisations to respond to the growing crisis, with the benefit of reducing food waste at the same time. Through a pilot phase, followed by a main fund, 41 community projects in Scotland benefitted from £96,000 of investment in cold storage capacity (fridges and freezers) to help their redistribution effort and reduce food poverty.

Recycle for Scotland has had a pivotal role in communicating about recycling to householders and is used by all 32 local authorities in Scotland. We have delivered communications training to all 32 local authorities, produced over 30 toolkits of communication resources and collateral to support stakeholders with their communications, hosted 20 national events and supported the delivery of 80+ service changes or improvements.



Landmarks go green for Recycle Week 2017



We have also supported people to tackle food waste through the cost-of-living crisis by championing the incredible shelf life of the humble tin. Through our **CAN-paign**, we showed that you can plan a few exciting and aspirational meals each week based around canned ingredients, so that if plans change or busy lives intrude, you can enjoy those amazing low cost can-based meals next week or even next month, with no worries about them going to waste. The roadshow we undertook with TV chef Julie Lin was so popular we were invited to come back for the ultimate encore, and take it to Scotland's biggest music festivals TRNSMT and Connect.

5 Supporting local communities

The motto “Think Global, Act Local” can still be a good guide and drive our ambitions, as the circular economy is nothing if not local in the power it can have to support and sustain local communities. Some of this we have already reported, such as our work on local reuse and repair through the Revolve scheme, the Community Fridges Fund, and our continuing support for the work of Circular Communities Scotland (formerly Community Recycling Network Scotland) in supporting local social enterprise and community projects.

To us, supporting local communities also means the focus we have had over many years on providing **advice and practical support to Scottish local authorities** in the shaping of their recycling infrastructure, including major investments in food waste collection schemes, and their communications with people through our Recycle for Scotland

messaging. Supporting local communities also happens through the shaping of many valuable partnerships we have been involved in, through our **Circular Cities and Regions** work and with local business communities such as Glasgow Chamber of Commerce.

We’ve also supported local communities in developing heat networks, and since the passing of the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 we have supported local authorities in developing Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) which are the principal mechanism for locally led heat planning. We also established the Heat Network Support Unit (HNSU) in 2022, a collaboration between ourselves, Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust focused on supporting heat network project development in Scotland by addressing key challenges in the pre-capital stages of heat network development



East Lothian Council was funded £2.74 million in 2021 to purchase infrastructure to improve their kerbside recycling collection as part of the Recycling Improvement Fund.

and building capacity across the public sector to deliver successful projects.

Our work on **Litter and Flytipping** has also supported local action, including development of a National Litter & Flytipping Strategy and a stronger focus on litter prevention which included the successful implementation of the Carrier Bag Charge in 2014.

Our work supporting Scottish local authorities has been ever-present in our programmes and has had many dimensions. This has ranged from regular technical and policy support provided by our Recycling, Litter and Flytipping and Policy teams, through to past investment in food waste communications and infrastructure, to increase participation in food waste collection and the provision of tools and templates to assist in local communications.

Zero Waste Scotland has an enduring and important relationship with councils and the communities they serve. In recent years, we have provided technical advice to support bids to the **Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF)** which we administer for the Scottish Government, designed to increase recycling through investments in new infrastructure, aimed at improving the quality and quantity of material collected for recycling. Since 2021, 41 projects across 26 local authorities have been supported, with a combined investment of £63.5 million. Many of these projects are still in implementation and they are estimated to produce an additional 60,673 tonnes of recycling annually, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a consequent 59,841 tonnes CO₂e annually – equivalent to taking 31,380 fossil-fuelled cars off the road.

It is widely recognised that local authority recycling rates are both variable and have slowed in their improvement in recent years, across most of the UK, with various factors at play including elements of uncertainty in UK policy implementation (Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging), the impact of the economic downturn, and COVID-19 affecting both investment and behaviour and the strain on local government finances making self-financed new initiatives difficult.

The RIF investments are starting to take shape and Scotland’s local authority recycling is improving, with the most recent data indicating a modest, but welcome, increase in Scotland’s local authority recycling rate from 41.7% in 2021 to 42.1% in 2022 (the most recent data)¹²⁰.

Partnerships on a local and regional level have played an important part in our development in the past decade. We have recognised the power of partnerships and the ability to amplify our expertise and effectively deploy for local, regional, and city benefit has influenced the way we work.

In 2016, Zero Waste Scotland established a network of **Circular Cities & Regions** across Scotland. Initiated in Glasgow (working closely with the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce as key partners) then working across Edinburgh, the North East, and Tayside. The initial focus was on raising awareness of the circular economy with the business community, which led to greater uptake of our business support services and supported local collaboration. Over time, this evolved, and we developed valuable partnerships with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise and Scotland’s Towns Partnership. Our relationship with Glasgow Chamber of Commerce resulted in a ground-breaking report, with OECD - a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people - which set out a vision for a Circular Glasgow, launched at COP26 in Glasgow.

Our approach has become more strategic and ‘place-based’, drawing in wider stakeholders seeking to embed circular economy principles in a city/region. We’re proud of the relationships we have developed and are confident that they will continue to evolve and shape the future of circular policy, and practice, on a local and regional level.

6 Creating insight

Zero Waste Scotland is an organisation dedicated to using the best evidence available to advance policy and practice towards a circular economy. Being evidenced is critical to our mission, and we constantly look ahead to the next challenges of data provision, stakeholder opinion and behaviour, impact assessment, and the range of qualitative and quantitative research needed to build the economic, social, and environmental case for the circular economy.

The research and insight we have generated in over a decade of multi-sectoral programmes is just too numerous to mention in detail, with over 500 reports and publications produced in that period. To highlight the breadth of work, and the journey again towards a circular economy, we offer examples to illustrate that breadth and the impact that research and insight can have on policy and practice, from both ends of this decade of activity.



In 2014, Zero Waste Scotland completed an Evidence Gathering Programme that was initiated the year before, established to better understand how a more circular economy could operate in Scotland and what the benefits might be. The aim was to use the evidence gathered to inform a road map for the circular economy in Scotland²¹. One sector study on **Beer, Whisky and Fish** was key, recognising the strong growth potential in these industry sectors and, also, the challenges in meeting future growth targets. The sector study informed next steps (including development projects in the bioeconomy) and longer-term work to understand and maximise the employment, growth, and opportunities to be achieved by moving towards a circular approach. It was one of the first studies into the economic potential of adding value to waste/by-products from the food and drink sector and remains a core piece of research.



Throughout the decade, we have provided a comprehensive and intensive **support service for the Scottish Government on policy development**, providing much of the analysis and research for impact assessments that have informed a wide range of policy development - from Deposit Return Scheme, to recycling collection systems, Packaging EPR, food waste reduction, disposable vapes, and many more.

More recently, Zero Waste Scotland has developed a suite of research and analysis, which are beginning to shape the next phase of policy and practice to support progress to circularity. The well-worn phrase “you can’t manage what you can’t measure” remains very valid, and so we have generated an evidence base which, while it tells the story of how far we still need to travel to become a more circular economy that uses much less material resource, it gives us the practical baseline to work with as we embark on the next generation of activity - fuelled by the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act and the

need for a regenerative Circular Economy Strategy.

Our work on **Material Flow Accounts²², the Circularity Gap Report for Scotland²³ and Scotland’s Circular Economy Practices Ecosystem²⁴** provide the backdrop that Scotland consumes too many resources, per person, every year. Our circularity will improve rapidly as we reduce our dependency on linear material flows (especially fossil fuels) and focus on key sectors where the potential for circular practice is high (such as Net Zero Energy Infrastructure and Construction). We know that, in a relentlessly linear economy, many businesses find the barriers to becoming more circular challenging and that fundamental change in our economic base and definition of prosperity will be needed.

We’re proud of our record of generating the evidence and insight to inform policy, shape public and industry opinion, and ultimately, drive us further forward on the journey to a circular economy.

7 Sharing and learning

Another real characteristic of Zero Waste Scotland, and the people that work here, is our relentless desire to learn from others and our eagerness to share our own experiences and learning. Optimism and internationalism are in our DNA. We understand the benefits of an open, sharing, approach and have benefitted from this ourselves.

We work in a sector which is diverse and generous, and there are many opportunities to share best practice and generate new ideas and initiatives. Of course, the changed post-COVID world - and our own desire to reduce the organisations' carbon footprint - means that the nature of many interactions has changed. But, in reality, digital engagement has increased the ability to meet experts and practitioners from overseas without the need for lengthy and carbon-intensive international travel, and we regularly showcase our own work, through webinars and digital events that are accessed worldwide. We are a collaborative participant in the global circular economy village without the major impact of

air travel. Before COVID-19, we had already implemented a no-fly zone for mainland UK, Benelux and Paris travel and our air miles have reduced from 164,449 in 2018 - 2019 to 6,419 in 2023 - 2024.

Scotland has, itself, welcomed circular economy practitioners from more than 20 countries. After all, we hosted the **2018 Circular Economy Hotspot**, which was a showcase for Scotland's progress and a great learning opportunity for ourselves²⁵. Scotland also hosted a major global event, COP26 in 2021, and we were able to showcase our work to a much wider audience.

We have played, and continue to play, an active role in many national and international networks, including the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), the Association of Cities and Regions for Sustainable Resource Management (ACR+), the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Circular Economy Hotspot Network, and more.



Iain Gulland addresses delegates at the Circular Economy Hotspot Scotland in Glasgow, 2018.

8 Our transformation journey

Over the last decade, Zero Waste Scotland has grown both in size and maturity as an organisation. We have worked hard on our own transformation, as we evolved from a smaller more organic body into a more complex entity requiring more matrix management and project management process, to ensure consistency of approaches and continued value for money in project implementation.

We grew in headcount by 69%, between 2014 - 2019, and recognised the need to radically transform our growing business and change our focus to enable us to best deliver our strategy. From 2019, we embarked on a five-year Transformation Programme designed to reshape the organisation to respond, with operational excellence, to an ever-complex external landscape. This has involved leadership and people development, evolving processes and governance, and improving our systems and tools to deliver that operational excellence.

Transformation has been much more than just systems improvement. Our journey has seen Zero Waste Scotland build on the pioneering, and passionate culture that characterised our start-up phase. We have deepened our understanding and practice around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; we transformed our office space into one designed for collaboration, networking, and engagement; and we moved to a 'digital first', primarily home-working based approach, which has also reduced our organisation's carbon footprint and enhanced our internal Net Zero programme. We've shaped a culture which holds that pioneering spirit and values the diverse contributions of colleagues, and we have held it up to scrutiny, which has resulted in recognition from several respected industry groups and accreditation bodies.

In the 'warp and weft' of culture, process, passion and purpose that binds us together, our transformation journey has been a critical

element in this decade of delivery. It has put us in good shape for the future as we evolve, again, into a Non-Departmental Public Body.



9 Into the next decade

We can look back on an extraordinary decade of delivery, with an extensive range of initiatives and projects, reaching many sectors of industry and commerce, local authorities, people and communities, and wider civic society.

We can see the accumulated result of a decade in which reuse and recycling are increasingly mainstream and in which the vital next challenges of reducing carbon emissions to tackle climate change – as well as the role that reducing material resource use and increasing circularity will play in this – are increasingly recognised.

Our next challenges are to take this accumulated learning and improvement to a much higher level of mainstream recognition of the need to rewire the economy if we are

to genuinely embrace a circular approach that meets the needs of the planet and the economic wellbeing of all our people at the same time.

This is no mean task, but we will work towards it. Our new Corporate Plan sets out this significant mission. We know it will require even more ambition and collaboration with a wider range of partners, agencies, and other parts of Government, to build the economic, social, and environmental case for a circular economy and really build it into the mainstream thinking of economic policymakers.

The next decade must look and feel different to the last decade, however vital our work has been to date. We hope you will join us on this optimistic and exciting journey.



"Zero Waste Scotland and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation have been great collaborators for many years. We share the desire to see a regenerative circular economy embraced by governments, business and wider society. I applaud the progress you have helped to bring about in Scotland, and your approach to sharing expertise and learning from others remains of great value to my Foundation. I look forward to many more years of great work together."

Dame Ellen MacArthur

Founder of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation

10 Closing thoughts from Dominic Fry, chair

When I was appointed as Chair of Zero Waste Scotland in March 2024, I was struck by the passion of our team and by the scale of the opportunity ahead of us.

In championing the circular economy, we aim to combat the devastating impact of climate change by promoting new ways to repurpose, remanufacture and reuse material resources.

Make no mistake: the climate emergency and biodiversity loss are existential threats. We are doing all we can to counter them in partnership with the Scottish Government, business and the public.

I hope our Decade of Delivery has explained the evolution and ambition of Zero Waste Scotland. The next decade holds challenge and promise in equal measure. The Circular Economy (Scotland) Act, our new Corporate Plan and our status as public body all represent enormous future opportunity.

We have achieved a lot for sure. But much more needs to be done for the circular economy to become a reality that changes our nation for good.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dominic Fry".

Dominic Fry



In 2023, we collaborated with street artist 'The Rebel Bear' creating metaphoric artworks in Dundee and Glasgow to coincide with the publication of our Carbon Metric report, which showed that textiles make up 32% of Scotland's household waste carbon emissions.

11 Accreditations and awards



Achieved.
Valid Until
July 2025



Zero Waste Scotland is proud to have won and been shortlisted for multiple award-winning campaigns including:

Trial Period (2019)²⁶

Scotland is Stunning – Let's keep it that way (2020)²⁷

Everything we buy has a carbon cost (2021)²⁸

Consumption & Rankin Food Waste (2022)²⁹

The Can-Paign (2024)³⁰

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⁶National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (2024) [About us | National Manufacturing Institute Scotland \(NMIS\)](#)

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Glasgow hosted COP26, 2021

