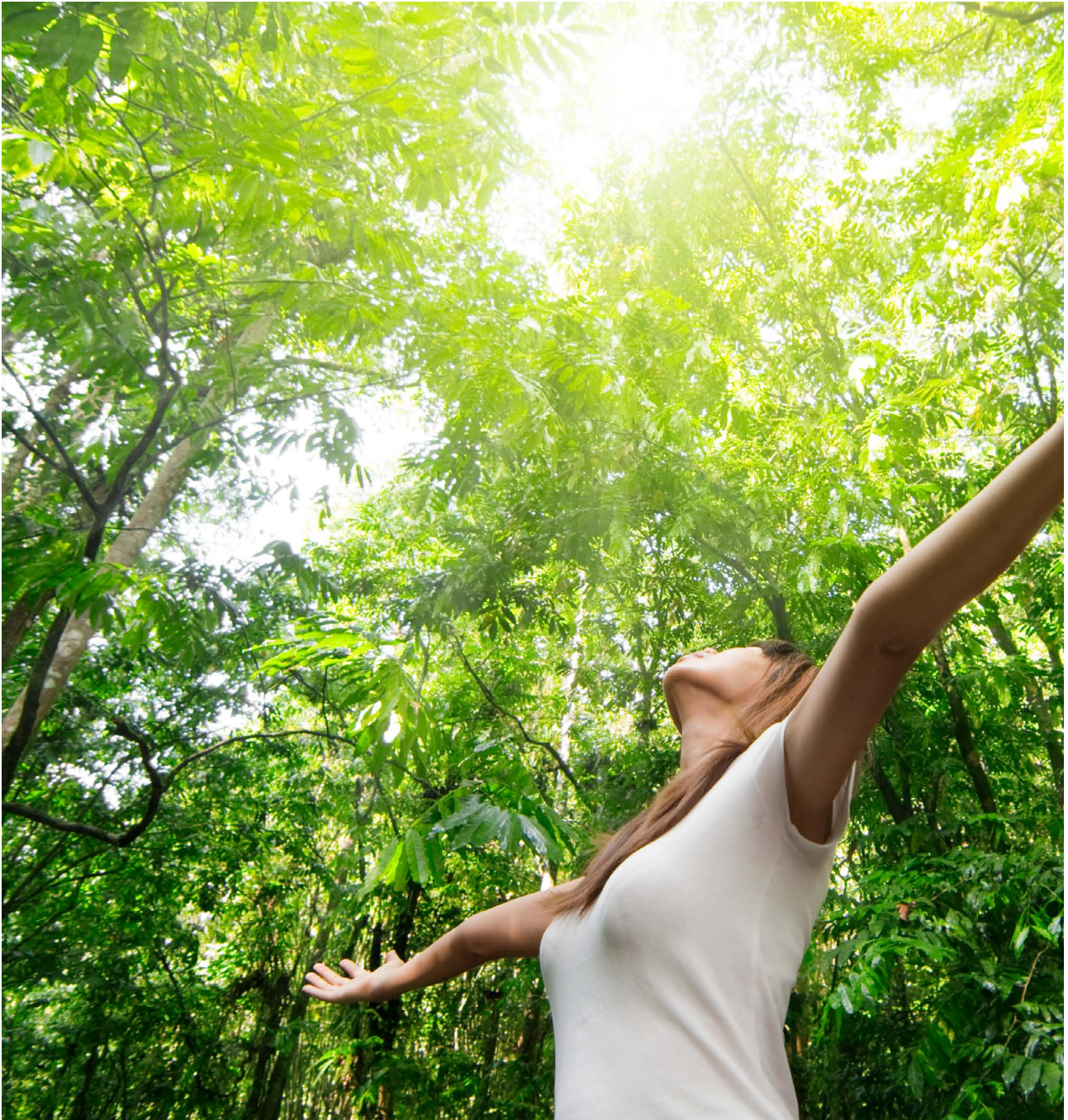


DECOUPLING ADVISORY GROUP



Building Back Better: Principles for sustainable resource use in a wellbeing economy

Briefing on recommendations from the Decoupling Advisory Group
to Zero Waste Scotland

July 2020

Executive Summary

Governments across the globe face what looks like a tightrope walk between the immediate economic needs after Covid-19 and the ongoing environmental and social needs which they remain committed to in order to overcome the climate crisis and build a fairer world.

The Green Recovery offers a way to achieve that balance and meet all three interlinked needs simultaneously.

Zero Waste Scotland established the Decoupling Advisory Group to gather expert independent advice on the challenges and opportunities for Scotland to find ways to use resources sustainably within a wellbeing economy. In response to Covid-19, the Decoupling Advisory Group produced a report on Building Back Better through sustainable resource use.

The main finding in the group's report is that Scotland needs to look beyond green growth as the primary solution because remaining within the limits of the Earth's resources is essential to delivering wellbeing. **The group concludes that this can only be achieved by reducing Scotland's consumption of goods and materials absolutely, rapidly, permanently and fairly.**

Some specific actions recommended by the group include:

- **Strengthening equality and redistribution** through suitable taxation policies, basic income, universal basic services and job guarantees, and delivering this through more effective community and social capital building
- **Developing national strategies to secure high-risk and critical materials**
- **Banning ecologically destructive products or industrial practices**
- **Reducing consumption-based emissions** through new or additional targets, or a greater role for those consumption-based measures in government decision-making
- **Embedding the circular economy across public sector and national curriculum**
- **Supporting innovative business models** that encourage sharing and giving economies, based on cooperation, communities and localised economies instead of competition.

While the group is clear that this will mean reducing activity in unsustainable sectors, it highlights **valuable opportunities to grow key domestic sectors supporting wellbeing**, including clean energy, the bioeconomy, education and care. The group also stresses the **wider social justice benefits of creating more local, sustainable jobs** and providing **more affordable access to essential goods and services while reducing Scotland's contribution to the climate emergency**.

The Decoupling Advisory Group recommends that the following three key policy principles guiding the immediate actions which it has outlined in its report should be adopted across Scottish Government and public sector agencies to ensure that Scotland does Build Back Better through the Green Recovery to create a wellbeing economy by Making Things Last.

Three key policy principles for using resources sustainably in a wellbeing economy

Principle 1: Recognise that green growth is not sufficient to Build Back Better:

Green growth has not yet been achieved at anywhere near the scale or pace necessary to end the climate crisis, which remains the greatest challenge of our time¹. Key issues to overcome include the rebound effect and offshoring our environmental impacts abroad. Simply growing a green economy also fails to address systemic social injustices including wealth inequality and unequal access to essential services. As a result, green growth alone cannot be relied upon to deliver the wellbeing economy.

1. Nature Climate Change, Financial Times, New Political Economy, OECD, European Environmental Bureau, Nature Communications, Globalizations.

Principle 2: Put wellbeing at the heart of everything we do:

To create a truly wellbeing economy, we need to rethink and redesign the way our society

functions. This means changing the way we work and live, from how we use energy and how we eat and produce food to how we travel and socialise².

Recommended actions include strengthening equality and redistribution through suitable taxation policies, basic income, universal basic services and job guarantees, and supporting innovative business models that encourage sharing and giving economies and reduced resource consumption.

Principle 3: Reduce Scotland's consumption of natural resources absolutely, rapidly, permanently and fairly:

Reduce absolutely: If everyone in the world lived and consumed as we do in Scotland we would need the resources of three planets not just one, as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) highlighted in its One Planet Prosperity campaign³. As a nation we need to reduce the amount of resources we use in absolute terms, recognising - as the Environment Strategy for Scotland does - that wellbeing does not depend on the quantity of resources being consumed⁴. Sectors supporting wellbeing including clean energy, education and care - should be supported to grow and need investment. However, some sectors will need to shrink radically given their fundamental lack of sustainability including those which drive excessive consumption and environmental impacts (such as oil and gas, mining, and aviation).

Recommended actions include embedding the circular economy across public sector; and banning ecologically destructive products or industrial practices.

Reduce Rapidly: Our unsustainable consumption of natural resources is one of the primary drivers pushing us towards fast-approaching and fundamental ecological tipping points on Earth, which risk resulting in "abrupt and irreversible climate change"⁵. We urgently need to prioritise reducing our consumption over the pursuit of growth. Without a stable and healthy environment there is no economy.

Recommended actions include developing national strategies to secure high-risk and critical materials.

Reduce Permanently: This report highlighted several studies demonstrating that policies aimed at achieving this have largely failed due to effects such as the rebound effect⁶. To achieve collective wellbeing long-term policies must demonstrate that their impact is lasting.

Recommended actions include carefully considering the rebound effect within the policymaking process and embedding the circular economy across national curriculum.

Reduce Fairly: We import most of the products we consume, and often waste. Exporting production means that we offshore, or transfer, the burden of our mass consumption overseas - including half our carbon emissions - to the countries which produce goods for us. This can cause other environmental and social problems too including biodiversity loss and slavery which can be much worse in places with weaker laws and less capacity for mitigating environmental impacts. To reduce fairly we need to focus on consumption, not just production.

Recommended actions include reducing consumption-based emissions through new or additional targets, and a greater role for consumption-based measures in government decision-making.

2. Wellbeing Economy Alliance. 3. Footprint Network. 4. A Good Life for All within Planetary Boundaries. 5. Climate Tipping points – Nature Journal. 6. Decoupling Debunked Report by European Environmental Bureau.

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ADVISORY GROUP

About the Decoupling Advisory Group:

The members of the group include: **Prof. John Barrett** (University of Leeds), **Prof. John Barry** (Queens University Belfast), **Prof. Iain Black** (University of Stirling), **Kate Chambers** (2050 Climate Group), **Dr Craig Dalzell** (Common Weal), **Dr Gioele Figus** (Fraser of Allander Institute), **Janine Finlay** (embedded artist), **Dr Alex Hilliam** (Hilliam Research & Analysis), **Dr Andrew Kerr** (EIT Climate-KIC), **Tom McKenna** (Scottish Natural Heritage), **Catherine Payne** (Fife Council), **Timothée Parrique** (Stockholm Resilience Centre), **Prof. Dave Reay** (University of Edinburgh), **Prof. Colin Reid** (Dundee University), **Aedan Smith** (RSPB), **Dr Katherine Trebeck** (Wellbeing Economy Alliance), **Ruth Wolstenholme** (Sniffer).

The Decoupling Advisory Group is facilitated by **Dr Jack Barrie**, Circular Economy Policy Analyst, Zero Waste Scotland. Please contact Jack at jack.barrie@zerowastescotland.org.uk if you require any further information about the Decoupling Advisory Group.

While the paper constitutes the collegial work of the advisory board, the views expressed in the document do not necessarily fully represent the ones of the individual members of the group.

