Equality Impact Assessment for Scotland's Fourth Land Use Strategy

March 2026

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Equality Impact Assessment for Scotland's Fourth Land Use Strategy

Title of policy: Scotland's Fourth Land Use Strategy (LUS4)

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of policy:

To enhance knowledge, discussion and insight into the land use system and support and drive a collaborative and cohesive national environment that supports integrated land use discussion, planning and delivery.

Directorate: Agriculture and Rural Economy
Division: Land Reform, Rural and Islands Policy
Team: Rural Skills, Land Use Policy and Partnerships

Executive summary

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires Scottish Ministers to produce a Land Use Strategy every five years. The first Strategy was published in 2011, the second in 2016, the third in 2021 and the fourth is being published in March 2026. The third strategy marked a significant shift by moving away from an approach focused on individual sectors to better reflect the integrated nature of land use.

The LUS4 builds on this approach and will contain the following vision: ‘Scotland’s national landscape is integrated and resilient supporting the diverse needs of a net zero, nature-positive, wellbeing economy.’

The primary objective of LUS4 is to enhance knowledge, discussion and insight into the land use system and support and drive a collaborative and cohesive national environment that supports integrated land use discussion, planning and delivery. Specific actions will be identified and taken forward as part of a two-phased approach to the strategy, with the publication of a streamlined high-level strategic document setting out a new vision and objectives for integrated land use (Phase One) followed by a delivery/work plan to drive integration across policy and practice to be published within 12 months of the strategy document (Phase Two).

A consultation was carried out which helped identify potential impacts of the strategy. Responses to the consultation did not provide a significant amount of evidence on the possible impacts of LUS4 on those with protected characteristics. One respondent highlighted that those with disabilities may face barriers to accessing land-based opportunities, such as physical limitations for disabled people in rural fieldwork or cultural biases affecting participation in land use planning, which may also apply to those in other protected groups. Another respondent noted that LUS4 should recognise the distinct relationship of gypsy traveller communities to the land.

Suggestions were made for addressing these, including:

- ensure accessibility in consultations and land-based activities.
- provide culturally sensitive outreach and materials in multiple formats/languages.
- embed inclusivity and equity in all land use initiatives.

The strategy document, to be published in March 2026, will focus on identifying a new vision and relevant objectives from existing policy areas and ensuring strategic alignment across these policy areas. As such it is a high-level strategic document. We will review these potential impacts and consider mitigating measures when identifying actions from relevant policy areas for the development of the LUS4 delivery plan. To the extent that individual policies which are within scope of LUS may impact equalities, this will be addressed by impact assessments carried out by relevant policy teams in relation to those respective policies.

Background

The LUS4 is a document that sets out our strategic direction and vision for sustainable land use in Scotland, and the objectives, policies and actions that will help deliver it. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires Scottish Ministers to produce a Land Use Strategy every five years. The first Strategy was published in 2011, the second in 2016, the third in 2021, and the fourth is being published in March 2026.

These previous versions set out a clear vision, objectives and guiding principles to support land use in Scotland that can meet multiple needs, such as food, housing and energy while contributing to a reduction in emissions and protecting and restoring nature. Most recently, the third strategy marked a significant shift by moving away from an approach focused on individual sectors such as agriculture, forestry and nature to one focused on landscapes, to better reflect the integrated nature of land use, (which means that across our different landscapes there can be many activities taking place in the same area).

The LUS4 will contain the following vision: “Scotland’s national landscape is integrated and resilient, supporting the diverse needs of a net zero, nature-positive, wellbeing economy.”

This vision reflects the ambition to manage land in a way that balances environmental, economic, and social priorities, while recognising the interconnectedness of land use decisions.

The primary objective of LUS is to enhance knowledge, discussion and insight into the land use system and support and drive a collaborative and cohesive national environment that supports integrated land use discussion, planning and delivery.

This will be supported by a thematic approach to objectives, drawing objectives from across different SG policy areas, under the key thematic areas, which we have worked with stakeholders to identify:

- Nature and Climate
- Jobs, Skills and Economy
- People, Place, Communities and Equity: this objective aims to enhance the position of communities affected by policies in these areas, ensuring greater equity, and in particular supporting thriving rural communities.

As LUS4 is intended to be a live and evolving document, we will not set out every objective across the Scottish Government as a fixed position in the publication of this strategy. Instead, the strategy document will set out shared outcomes aligned with those of Scotland's National Performance Framework**.** By embedding these outcomes at the heart of the Strategy, we create a platform that connects policies, priorities, and actions across the wider land use system. Specific actions will then be identified and taken forward as part of a two-phased approach to the strategy.

- Phase One – develop and publish a streamlined high-level strategic document (LUS4) setting out a new vision and objectives for integrated land use. It will set the strategic direction in order to support alignment across relevant policy areas.
- Phase Two – using the insights gleaned from our consultation and wider stakeholder engagement, develop and publish a delivery/work plan to drive integration across policy and practice (to be published within 12 months of the strategy document being published).

Of the National Outcomes it will primarily contribute to: Value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment (Environment); but also to: Communities, Economy, Health, and Fair work and Business.

If successful in increasing integrated land use, LUS4 will ultimately affect all those who use land in different ways. Its primary impact will, however, be on those affected by **policies relating to six key land use policy areas:**

- agriculture
- forestry
- peatland
- nature/Biodiversity
- housing
- renewable energy

The Scope of the EQIA

A consultation was carried out which helped identify potential impacts of the strategy. This included a number of workshops and meetings which explicitly discussed impacts on particular groups and communities. The consultation specifically sought information on how the proposed approach to integrated land use might impact those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

Having conducted this consultation, it was concluded that a separate, specific framing exercise is not necessary at this stage.

Key Findings

Responses to the consultation did not provide a significant amount of evidence on the possible impacts of LUS4 on those with protected characteristics. One respondent highlighted that those with disabilities may face barriers to accessing land-based opportunities, such as physical limitations for disabled people in rural fieldwork or cultural biases affecting participation in land use planning, which may also apply to those in other protected groups. Another respondent noted that LUS4 should recognise the distinct relationship of gypsy traveller communities to the land.

Suggestions were made for addressing these, including:

- ensure accessibility in consultations and land-based activities.
- provide culturally sensitive outreach and materials in multiple formats/languages.
- embed inclusivity and equity in all land use initiatives.

The strategy document published in March 2026 is not in a position to take forward consideration of these actions because it is primarily focused on identifying a new vision and relevant objectives from existing policy areas and ensuring strategic alignment across these policy areas. We will review these potential impacts and consider mitigating measures when identifying actions from relevant policy areas for the development of the LUS4 delivery plan.

To the extent that individual policies which are within scope of LUS may impact equalities, this will be addressed by impact assessments carried out by relevant policy teams in relation to those respective policies.

Recommendations and Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, it is concluded that an in-depth EQIA is not required at this stage. This assessment will be revised during the development of the delivery plan and the evidence gathered will be shared with relevant policy areas, for example the ongoing development of the Land Use and Agriculture Just Transition Plan which will seek to address a fair and just transition to net zero in relation to land use and agriculture.

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