

**Annual Operating Plan
2023–2024**
Delivering for Scotland's Environment



About this plan

Our Annual Operating Plan lays out our work for 2023–2024. The plan defines what we want to achieve and how we’ll measure our performance.

Contents

Chief Executive’s foreword	3
Facal-toisich bhon àrd-oifigear	5
About us	7
Delivering for Scotland – 2022–2023	8
Our focus for 2023–2024	9
Environmental regulation	10
Flood risk management	13
Our organisation	16
Our performance	19
What will success look like?	20
Our resources	21
Supporting government outcomes	22
Further information	23

Chief Executive's foreword



Nicole Paterson

Chief Executive Officer

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is Scotland's principal environmental regulator, protecting and improving Scotland's environment. Scotland's environment is a precious and unique resource which is at the heart of our commitment to deliver for Scotland.

Climate change presents the greatest risk to humanity. It's happening now and we're experiencing more and more of its impacts. The World Economic Forum has singled out the top 10 global challenges, among which the environment plays a pivotal role not least in the call for sustained action on climate change. The impact of flooding is more widely felt due to climate change. There are currently around 284,000 homes, businesses, and services at medium to high risk of flooding in Scotland. By the 2080s, this is projected to increase by around 110,000 due to rising sea levels and changing rainfall patterns.

In my first Annual Operating Plan as Chief Executive of the agency, I have set out an ambitious programme for the nationally important public services that we deliver – environmental regulation and flood risk management – as well as continuing to modernise and transform our organisation; listen and respond to our people, communities and customers.

Throughout 2022-2023, we delivered for Scotland with significant achievements including, providing critical warnings of flood events to communities and businesses, launching Scotland's three-day flood forecast, leading Scotland's response to its tenth driest summer in 100 years in the east, and using our water scarcity powers to protect local water environments. We also drove improvements in water quality and saw our waters achieve the best status on record.

We help business and industry to understand and comply with their environmental responsibilities and legislation and have a range of enforcement powers which we can apply to ensure that regulations are complied with. Over the last year we've used these enforcement powers to tackle environmental performance at sites across Scotland and disrupt waste crime.

We have been given a unique and visionary Statutory Purpose: to protect and improve the environment in ways that, as far as possible, also create health and wellbeing benefits and sustainable economic growth. It's a very powerful purpose for an environment protection agency and delivering this successfully requires new ways of thinking and new ways of acting. We're clear that we cannot do this alone and will continue to build strong partnerships to align delivery for Scotland.

This year we'll also focus on public sector reform to ensure we are prepared to meet the unprecedented challenges ahead. Several programmes will deliver the key objectives of building our services around people and communities; working with other organisations; promoting equality and seeking to improve performance.

Our programme for One SEPA Modernisation will focus on the future of regulation and aim to achieve business improvement, build organisational capacity to deliver more systemic and preventative interventions and enable a competent, confident and supported workforce. Regulatory reform will also come through our work on amendments to the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations, bringing together four regulatory regimes for water, waste, pollution control and radioactive substances into a single framework. This

work will go hand in hand with our digital transformation which will accelerate reforms in digital infrastructure to improve efficiency and accessibility and enable transformational outcomes for SEPA, services users and Scotland's environment.

I recognise that this is no easy task and there is much to be done. However, I also recognise that we have a proven track record of delivering for Scotland.

I very much look forward to leading the delivery of this ambitious plan; both playing our part and working in partnership with others in making Scotland a greener, fairer and more prosperous country.

Facal-toisich bhon àrd-oifigear

'S e Buidheann Dìon Àrainneachd na h-Alba (SEPA) am prìomh-riaghlaidhe àrainneachdail ann an Alba, a tha a' dìon 's a' leasachadh àrainneachd na h-Alba. Tha àrainneachd na h-Alba na stòras prìseil, àraidh agus tha i aig teis-meadhain ar rùn coileanadh air leas àrainneachd na h-Alba.

Tha atharrachadh gnàth-shìde na chunnart ro-mhòr don chinne-daonna. Tha e a' tachairt an-dràsta agus tha a' bhuaidh oirnn a' sìor dhol am meud. Chomharraich Fòram Eaconamach na Cruinne na 10 dùbhlain as motha san t-saoghal, sa bheil pàirt riatanach aig an àrainneachd gu sònraichte a thaobh a bhith a' gairm airson gnìomhan seasmhach mu choinneamh atharrachadh na gnàth-shìde. Thathar a' faireachdainn buaidh thuiltean nas fharsainge ri linn atharrachadh na gnàth-shìde. Gheibhear 284,000 taigh, gnìomhachas is seirbheisean a tha aig ìre cunnairt mheadhanach gu ìre cunnairt àrd ann an Alba an-dràsta.

Thathar a' ro-mheasadh gum meudaich seo le mu 110,000 àite ro na 2080an ri linn èirigh nan àirdean-mara agus pàtrain sìleadh uisge caochlaideach.

Mar sin dheth, sa chiad Phlana-obrach Bhliadhnail agam mar Àrd-oifigear na buidhne, dheasaich mi prògram adhartach airson nan seirbheisean poblach fo ar n-uallach a tha cudromach gu nàiseanta: 's e sin riaghladh àrainneachdail agus stiùireadh cunnart nan tuiltean – agus tha mi a' leantainn orm ag ath-nuadhachadh 's a' cruth-atharrachadh ar buidhne; ag èisteachd ri ar daoine, coimhearsnachdan agus custamairean.

Bho 2022 gu 2023, choilean sinn às leth na h-Alba le dèanadas nach beag, na mheasg sin, a' toirt rabhaidhean riatanach mu thachartasan tuile do choimhearsnachdan agus gnìomhachasan, a' cur ro-fhios trì-latha nan tuiltean gu dol, a' stiùireadh freagairt na h-Alba don deicheamh samhradh

as tioraime a bh' ann an taobh sear na dùthcha bho chionn 100 bliadhna, agus a' cleachdadh ar cumhachdan a thaobh gainnead uisge airson àrainnean uisge ionadail a dhìon. Cuideachd, chuir sinn air adhart leasachaidhean ann am mathas an uisge agus fhuair na h-uisgeachan againn an inbhe as fheàrr a bh' air a clàradh a-riamh.

Tha sinn a' cuideachadh luchd-gnothaich is luchd-gnìomhachais tuigsinn agus gèilleadh ri an dleastanasan is reachdas àrainneachdail, agus tha raon de chumhachdan èigneachail againn as urrainn dhuinn cleachdadh airson dèanamh cinnteach gu bheilear a' gèilleadh ris na riaghailtean. Thairis air a' bhliadhna a dh'fhalbh, chleachd sinn na cumhachdan èigneachail againn gus dèiligeadh ri dèanadas àrainneachdail aig làraichean air feadh na h-Alba agus buaireadh a dhèanamh air eucoir sgudail.

Thugadh dhuinn Adhbhar Reachdail sònraichte agus lèirsinneach: a bhith a' dìon 's a' leasachadh na h-àrainneachd ann an dòighean a chruthaicheas, cho fad 's as urrainnear, buannachdan slàinte is sunnd is fàs seasmhach don eaconamaidh. Seo adhbhar glè chumhachdach do bhuidheann dìon àrainneachd, agus feumar dòighean smaoineachaidh is gnìomhachaidh ùra airson a thoirt gu buil shoirbheachail. Tha làn tuigse againn nach urrainn dhuinn seo a dheanamh nar n-aonar, mar sin, leanaidh sinn oirnn a' togail chom-pàirteachasan làidir airson lìbhrigeadh a cho-rèiteachadh às leth na h-Alba.

Leigidh sinn cuideam am-bliadhna air ath-leasachadh na roinn phoblaich gus dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil sinn ullachte mu choinneamh nan dùbhlann gun samhail seo a tha romhainn. Lìbhrigidh grunn phrògraman na prìomh-amasan a thaobh a bhith a' togail ar seirbheisean timcheall

air daoine is coimhearsnachdan, ag obair còmhla ri buidhnean eile; a' brosnachadh co-ionannachd is a' sireadh ri dèanadas a leasachadh.

Cuiridh ar prògram One SEPA Modernisation pròsbaig air riaghailtean san àm ri teachd agus amaisidh e air feabhas gnothachais a thoirt gu buil, a' cur ri comas na buidhne a dhol an-sàs le barrachd ghrabaidhean gu siostamach, ro-chasgach airson taic a chumail ri feachd-obrach comasach, misneachail. Thig ath-leasachadh riaghlachail ri linn an ath-dheasachaidh a rinn sinn air Riaghailtean Ceadachd Àrainneachdail (Alba), a tha ag aonachadh ceithir rèimean riaghlachail airson uisge, sgudal, smachd air truailleadh is stuthan rèidio-beò mar aon fhrèam-obrach. Thèid an obair seo a dhèanamh an cois cruth-atharrachaidh dhigitich a bhios a' greasadh ath-leasachaidhean ann am bun-structar digiteach mar dhòigh air èifeachdas is inntrigeadh a mheudachadh agus

builean cruth-atharrachail do SEPA, luchd-cleachdaidh sheirbheisean is àrainneachd na h-Alba a thoirt gu bith.

'S aithne dhomh nach e obair shoirbh a tha seo agus gu bheil tòrr ri dhèanamh. Ach, 's aithne dhomh cuideachd gu bheil eachdraidh dhearbhte againn a thaobh a bhith a' lìbhrigeadh do dh'Alba.

Tha mi a' coimhead gu mòr ri bhith aig stiùir lìbhrigeadh a' phlana adhartach seo; a' gabhail ar pàirt ann agus ag obair ann an co-bhann ri càch gus Alba a dhèanamh nas uaine, nas cothromaiche agus nas beartaiche.

Nicole Paterson
Àrd-oifigear

About us

We are Scotland's principal environmental regulator. Our purpose is to protect and improve Scotland's environment. Whilst doing so, we also help create health and wellbeing benefits and sustainable economic growth. We are a non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government with around 1,300 staff across Scotland delivering two fundamental services – environmental regulation and flood risk management.

Through environmental regulation, we help to protect the environment and communities from harm by ensuring compliance with our environmental laws and taking enforcement action where necessary. We help Scotland adapt to a changing climate by ensuring that our regulation helps operators to realise the opportunities

of a net zero, circular economy and be resilient to changes in our climate. We help to improve the quality of our environment for people and for nature by encouraging nature-based solutions and valuing multiple benefits.

Through our flood risk management service, we work in partnership to help Scotland avoid the risk of flooding to new communities and businesses. We help protect existing communities and businesses that are at risk from the effects of flooding through forecasting and warning, enabling them to take action and reduce the impacts.

As a public body, we are committed to delivering a high-quality public service; a service that listens and responds to meet our customers' expectations and needs. Part of this is our commitment to openness and transparency, coherent corporate governance and informed communications, enabling our people to deliver the best for Scotland's environment.

This is the last AOP under our current Corporate Plan which was published in 2017. It was intended to cover the period 2017–2022 but has been rolled over until 2024. It was a very different world seven years ago. A world now changed by several external shocks including the global pandemic, the UK's departure from the European Union, the war in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis and an acceleration in global warming and biodiversity loss. There has been a strengthening recognition by the public and businesses that we need to take urgent action together to tackle the climate emergency declared in 2019 and to transition Scotland to net zero by 2045. We've taken the opportunity in this plan to reflect our current corporate outcomes against this changed context as well as a look to the future as we develop our next Corporate Plan.

Delivering for Scotland – 2022-2023

Using our unique skills and knowledge to help solve complex environmental issues, we delivered benefits for Scotland's environment and communities. This included:



Innovating critical COVID wastewater testing



Piloting an innovative new three-day flood forecast



Developed a new flood warning scheme for the River Carron



Leading Scotland's response to its tenth driest summer



Helping prepare for the UK's first Deposit Return Scheme



Two new bathing water designations and our waters having the best status on record



Helping salmon return to the Garrell Burn in Kilsyth for the first time in 100 years



Authorising the first move of a waste vessel from the Cromarty Firth for safe and proper dismantling



Supporting the next steps for Scotland's low emission zones



Using our powers to protect local water environments from water scarcity

Our focus for 2023–2024

Our priorities for 2023–2024 will continue to focus on our key services – environmental regulation and flood risk management. We will work towards achieving our existing goals from the Corporate Plan whilst strengthening our focus on delivering for Scotland’s communities and tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

All our work is enabled by putting our people, our expertise and our partnerships at the heart of delivering for Scotland’s environment. Read more in **Our organisation** section. We will focus on our own net zero route map showing leadership in the public sector with the ambition to go further and give back to Scotland’s environment – we call this Regenerative SEPA.

We will contribute to the Scottish Government’s Programme for Government ‘**A stronger and more resilient Scotland**’, particularly in the key areas of excellent public services, tackling the climate emergency and restoring Scotland’s environment.

We will measure our delivery through key performance indicators and will report our progress through our quarterly performance reports and our Annual Report and Accounts.



Environmental regulation

Help
PROTECT
Scotland's
environment
from harm.

Help Scotland
ADAPT
to a changing
climate.

Help Scotland
IMPROVE
the environment.

We use our regulatory tools to deliver environmental protection and improvement, providing advice and guidance, setting standards through authorisations, checking compliance, and using our enforcement tools where necessary. We also carry out environmental monitoring to understand the state of Scotland's environment, inform our regulatory response and assess improvement.

We protect the environment by ensuring compliance. We focus our compliance checking in areas which have the greatest benefits to the environment and communities. Our monitoring of data, information and intelligence identifies where harms may occur and we use our regulatory tools and enforcement powers to take action on those causing the greatest risk. We use disruption and

intervention approaches to prevent harm from occurring in the first place. We prioritise our regulatory efforts to those areas of greatest risk. We respond to incidents that have the potential to cause environmental or community harm. We help compliant businesses by supporting innovation and take action against those who are operating illegally.

Much of our regulatory activities will help Scotland adapt to the climate challenges we all face. We will support the transition to a net zero economy through using our existing regulatory powers and exploring the potential of new innovative approaches.

We will continue our efforts to improve the environment and biodiversity. We use our regulatory powers to improve the environment by requiring the restoration of environments which have been harmed by previous non-compliance, by reviewing permissions to ensure protections keep pace with new environmental threats and by valuing

nature in our decision making. We implement projects through the Water Environment Fund that deliver multiple benefits for the environment and communities. We work in partnership to upgrade our rivers from the impacts of wastewater. We monitor our environment to check if improvements are making a difference. Our activities support a circular economy; designing out waste and keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible.

A key focus during this year will be our work to prepare to deliver the benefits from the amendments to the [Environmental Authorisations \(Scotland\) Regulations](#), designed to standardise, simplify, and streamline the process for complying with environmental legislation in Scotland.

During 2023–2024, we will:

- » work in partnership to target high risk environmental crime, clamping down on unlicensed operators
- » work in the Grangemouth Future Industries Hub to test out innovative approaches to achieve net zero and support a just transition
- » accelerate the transition to a circular economy by regulating Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme
- » prepare for the implementation of an integrated and simplified authorisation framework
- » support sustainable aquaculture by implementing our new sea lice risk assessment framework
- » work with the Scottish Government, abstractors and others to prepare Scotland for drought
- » support the efforts of the Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 Delivery Plan.



Flood risk management



Help Scotland

AVOID

the risk of flooding to businesses and communities.

Help

PROTECT

those existing businesses and communities that are at risk of flooding.

Help

WARN

that flooding is imminent so that action can be taken to reduce the impact.

Through our flood risk management service, we will continue our efforts to avoid, protect and warn. Our role is to provide information, advice and co-ordination to help communities help themselves and assist our partners to target measures on the ground to those who need it most.

Flood forecasting and warning is essential for reducing the disruption and damage from floods. Working with the Met Office, we will provide daily advice on the risk of flooding to all responders in Scotland including the emergency services and local authorities.

Central to this service overall is the delivery of information and co-ordination of flood risk management across Scotland. This requires close and productive working relationships with several organisations including local authorities, Scottish Water, other public bodies and third sector organisations, alongside other stakeholders and the public.

Our focus for 2023-2024 will be on continuing to build upon these strong relationships and partnerships, clarifying roles and responsibilities, building strength and depth in our service, improving the resilience of our systems and preparing information, guidance and engagement for long-term activity.

During 2023–2024, we will:

- » implement the flood risk requirements of the new national planning framework
- » support the Scottish Government on the development of their flooding strategy and related policy development
- » identify and begin to implement a set of measures to improve the resilience of our flooding services.



Our organisation



As a public body, we are committed to delivering high-quality public services for the people of Scotland, ensuring that we are a well-run organisation and supporting our people to do great work for Scotland's environment.

To do this, our focus will be on continuing to transform our organisation: improving our efficiency, our governance and our resource management. This requires working together effectively; being innovative in our partnership approach both nationally and internationally to achieve the greatest impact for the environment.

Central to our efforts will be our ambitious reform programme – One SEPA Modernisation – our organisational wide transformation programme to drive the reset and modernisation of the organisation. The programme will focus on the future of regulation and aiming to achieve business improvement, build organisational capacity to deliver more systemic and preventative interventions and enable a competent, confident and supported workforce.

Our delivery depends wholly on the dedication and commitment of our people. Our people are our most important asset. We will enable our people to be the best they can be at work (both now and in future), focusing on the values and behaviours that are integral to a positive and supportive work culture.

Recognising the importance of Scotland's world leading target for net zero by 2045, we will continue to implement our route map for not only achieving net zero in our direct emissions but going further and giving back to Scotland's environment. This goes hand-in-hand with taking forward our strategic approach for our workspaces, taking opportunities to share workspaces with others and creating a modern and professional working environment.



During 2023–2024, we will:

- » implement our strategic approach to workspaces within our future of work programme to ensure staff have the tools required to undertake their roles and deliver our net zero ambitions
- » set up our One SEPA Modernisation programme, ensuring we have a clear pathway for modernising and transforming our regulatory, flooding and organisational efforts
- » By 2025, SEPA will have reformed reporting according to services that are grant in aid or external/charges funded and the available financial resources will be matched to high level priorities.
- » prepare our 2024–2027 Corporate Plan and supporting strategies to focus more on systemic issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and resource over-consumption with clear outcomes, objectives and indicators
- » continue to build skills, capability, resilience and leadership capacity to enable our people to successfully deliver for Scotland



Our performance

Measuring our performance is vitally important for understanding our progress in delivering this plan and how we are making a difference. We will publish a quarterly report using the following performance measures to assess our delivery throughout the year.

Our purpose

To protect and improve the environment in ways that, as far as possible, also help create health and wellbeing benefits and sustainable economic growth.

Our outcomes



Scotland is thriving in a low carbon world



Scottish businesses are prospering from better environmental performance



The impact of flooding is reduced

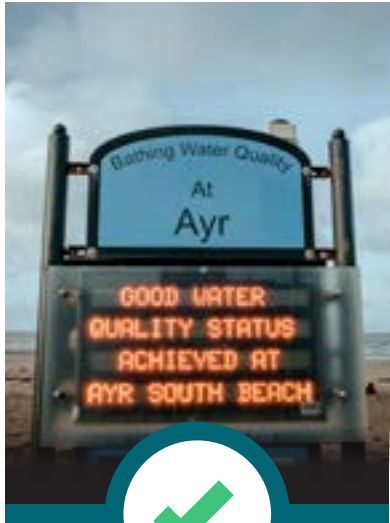


People benefit from Scotland's improving environment

Our measures



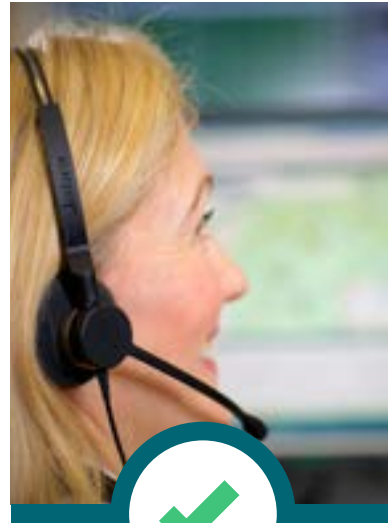
What will success look like?



Our efforts make a difference to the people of Scotland.



Scotland's environment will be improved with better air, land and water quality.



Our services will be modern, simple, streamlined and trusted.



Scotland's people will be prepared for flooding.



Our organisation will be an exemplar in public sector reform and striving towards net zero.

Our resources

Our funding comprises grant-in-aid of £42.76 million plus funding from our charging regimes of £48.47 million, recovering relevant costs of our regulatory activities and £2.07 million in other income. Together, this provides us with £93.317 million to invest in protecting and improving Scotland's environment. This investment will contribute to delivering services across a range of Government priorities. In 2023-2024 we will also receive £6.2 million in capital grant-in-aid to fund our capital programme.

Draft income and expenditure for 2023-2024

Income and expenditure account	Draft budget 2023-2024 £'000
Grant-in-aid	42,761
Charging schemes	48,479
Other income	2,077
Total income	93,317
Staff costs	65,123
Other staff costs	238
Transport costs	929
Property costs	3,852
Supplies and services	17,705
Total expenditure	87,847
Depreciation/impairments	5,470
Total operating costs	93,317

Draft other income for 2023-2024

Other income	Draft budget 2023-2024 £'000
Scottish Landfill Tax	450
Scottish Landfill Communities Fund	149
Facilities recharges	229
Network access	115
Greenlist	314
VIBES	70
Netregs	60
International services	685
Bank interest	5
Total expenditure	2,077

Supporting government outcomes

The Scottish Government has a national performance framework for all of Scotland, aiming to:

- create a more successful country
- give opportunities to all people living in Scotland
- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth
- reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress.

To support its purpose, the Scottish Government has identified national outcomes that describe the kind of Scotland it aims to create.

We make a contribution to the following national outcomes:





For the future of our environment

For information on accessing this document in an alternative format or language please contact SEPA by emailing [**equalities@sepa.org.uk**](mailto:equalities@sepa.org.uk)

If you are a user of British Sign Language (BSL) the Contact Scotland BSL service gives you access to an online interpreter enabling you to communicate with us using sign language. [**contactscotland-bsl.org**](http://contactscotland-bsl.org)

[**sepa.org.uk**](http://sepa.org.uk)