



UNISON Scotland response: The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's call for views on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill.

August 2023

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with more than 150,000 members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's call for views as part of its Stage 1 consideration of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill.

Overview

UNISON joined with many other organisations in August 2019 in calling for a Circular Economy Bill¹ to meet the climate emergency. That cross sector coalition argued for a strong Circular Economy Bill which would:

"set ambitious targets for reducing the nation's material footprint – the amount of stuff which our economy uses... To protect the environment on which we depend, we urgently need to change the ways in which we make and use products and services, using less raw materials and reducing our demand on the planet's resources."

We welcome the Scottish Government's introduction of the Bill, but do not believe it goes far enough in several key areas. There are a number of ways in which we would like to see the Bill improved, including on Fair Work, Just Transition, targets, ethical procurement and more. We are also concerned about funding for the relevant public services, particularly for local government and the potential for further pressures on waste management workers, unless sufficient resourcing is there for dealing with the increased workload. We make recommendations and set out those concerns below in this brief submission.

UNISON is part of the Just Transition Partnership (JTP) and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition (SCCS) and we support their submissions, available soon on their websites.²

Recommendations

Among recommendations we wish to highlight, we strongly agree with the JTP and SCCS call for just transition principles to be applied, recommending that: "The Bill should introduce a requirement that the circular economy strategy must be

¹ <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/press-release-28-August-19-final.pdf>

² <https://www.jtp.scot/> <https://www.stopclimatechaos.scot/>

consistent with the Just Transition principles as set out in Section 35 of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.”

As SCCS states, this would be “to ensure a just transition domestically and adopt the aim to ‘do no harm’ as set out as a strategic priority by the Just Transition Commission to minimise negative social impacts of international supply chains”.

Fair Work practices must be embedded into the core of a Just Transition. As the JTP said in its 2022 response³ to the Scottish Government consultation on ‘Delivering Scotland’s circular economy – A Route Map to 2025’:

“At the core of a Just Transition must be attention to Fair Work practices. The transition to a circular economy will require both job creation – including increased demand for repair, reprocessing and recycling jobs; and job transformation – including retraining, upskilling and potentially relocating as jobs shift from linear to circular models, technologies and processes. The Scottish Government’s approach should aim to ensure that workers are protected in these changes and that overall the employment conditions of the workforce improve.”

All workers who are part of implementing the circular economy must be protected and included in the transition. UNISON Scotland represents many of those affected. We carried out a survey of members working in waste management in 2015 and warned then that the forthcoming circular economy requirements would mean far more reuse and recycling, with the associated workload needing increased investment in both capital spending and staff, but we noted that many members feared that changes would be at their expense. The immense pressures on local government funding and the disgraceful below inflation pay offer (that has led to a massive UNISON schools staff vote for strike action, on behalf of all local government staff) add to those fears today.

In the report ‘Dumped on - A UNISON Scotland survey of waste management staff’⁴, we concluded: “As we become ever more aware of the need to conserve resources their functions are becoming more of a social and political issue. This is not being reflected by how they are funded or treated and most definitely not in how they are paid.”

Other JTP recommendations we support include that, as well as the proposal, quite rightly, to consult with local authorities, the Bill should include a requirement to consult with the public, communities, workers, and trade unions on the code of practice on household waste recycling and recycling targets.

On targets, we believe that the circular economy targets in the Bill must be mandatory. They must include carbon-based consumption targets, set in primary

³ <https://www.jtp.scot/policy/call-for-just-transition-principles-to-be-applied-to-moves-towards-a-circular-economy/>

⁴ https://unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/DumpedOn_WasteManagementStaffSurvey_Jan2015.pdf

legislation. They must be science-based and aim to create a circular economy in Scotland by 2045.

Scotland's current climate targets are based on domestic emissions but by setting targets for consumption emissions which include imports, we help to tackle the problem of 'offshoring' emissions. This is important for combating climate change, for jobs and a just transition and in procurement; both for protecting quality jobs and conditions here and for seeking to prevent harmful impact in other countries⁵ - thereby supporting a global just transition.

We also believe the Bill should introduce duties on public bodies to contribute to the circular economy targets and public procurement requirements.

Conclusion

There are many ways in which the Bill can be improved and we urge Committee members to support the recommendations and raise the concerns presented by ourselves, the Just Transition Partnership and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland.

UNISON Scotland, August 23

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⁵ E.g. <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/working-internationally/key-issues/purchasing-power/> <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/working-internationally/key-issues/help-us-stop-stop-multinational-companies-abusing-human-rights/> <https://foe.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Unearthing-Injustice.pdf>