

Thought leader: Zero Waste Scotland: Circular Economy

Written by **Iain Gulland** on 29 June 2015 in **Thought Leader**

A shift to a circular economy can boost growth, lower emissions and help tackle climate change, argues Iain Gulland.



In Scotland, we've made no secret of our ambition to lead the way in moving towards a circular economy. For some time, we've been identifying, discussing, and researching opportunities and now we want to directly help businesses to make them happen.

We're serious about making the circular economy a Scottish success story. We're also intent on sharing and learning with others internationally. Our economies are interlinked, so Scotland wants to work with others in Europe and beyond to build the case for a circular economy and support it through appropriately ambitious action.

We're greatly encouraged that MEPs voted almost unanimously in favour of the recent circular economy initiative. It's also helpful that the economic benefits of the circular economy are being increasingly brought into the foreground, with a variety of DGs now working collaboratively on the European commission's package.

The benefits of a circular economy are so compelling, it's right that there's a strong effort to mainstream it across all policy areas. That also has to include climate change, if the indications of our recent report on **'The carbon impacts of the circular economy'** are representative across Europe.

This report – one of the first studies of its kind to model the impact of circular economy strategies at a national level on greenhouse gas emissions – suggests that as well as enabling growth, the circular economy can also help combat climate change and contribute to national and international agreements to reduce emissions.

It shows that: material consumption is responsible for over two thirds of Scotland's carbon emissions; a more circular Scottish economy could reduce territorial emissions by 11 million tonnes CO2 equivalent per year by 2050 compared to business-as-usual, while providing the potential for continued economic growth; nearly one tonne of waste is produced for every four tonnes of material entering the Scottish economy, through imports and production; and regardless of carbon accounting methodology (territorial vs. consumption), achieving a more circular economy can help Scotland achieve its emissions reduction targets.

The timing of this report is important, with circular economy roadmaps in development both for Scotland and Europe-wide, and with UN climate talks taking place in Paris later this year.

While the circular economy and climate change agendas are distinct and have been progressing well in parallel, this report suggests there could be real advantages in aligning them more closely, particularly if the aim from a circular economy perspective is to establish a mandate at the heart of mainstream policymaking, whereas historically 'waste' policy has been more peripheral.

Getting the broadest possible range of stakeholders engaged in the circular economy and what it could achieve has to be one of our central aims. Policymakers are an important part of that process, but we also need to connect across the business and public sector landscape, and we need to make it real and tangible for people.

In Scotland, we've been taking the message out, to young people, to interest groups, to business leaders and to opinion formers, encouraging them to share their thoughts and ideas online using the hashtag #MakeThingsLast.

Our climate change minister Aileen MacLeod shared news of this initiative and the climate change report with environment commissioner Karmenu Vella at the last environment council meeting. We'd love to hear your thoughts too – so please read the report and get in touch [@ZeroWasteScot](https://twitter.com/ZeroWasteScot).

About the author

Iain Gulland is chief executive of Zero Waste Scotland