# Scotland proposes groundbreaking ecocide law to jail company directors for environmental damage



Company directors in Scotland who cause severe or reckless environmental damage may soon face significant legal repercussions under a groundbreaking bill aimed at criminalising ecocide. Spearheaded by Labour MSP Monica Lennon, the Ecocide (Scotland) Bill marks a historic first for the UK, aligning Scottish legislation with broader international efforts to hold individuals and corporations accountable for ecological destruction. If enacted, this legislation would introduce strict legal duties on company executives and governmental agencies, imposing prison sentences of up to 20 years and hefty fines as deterrents against environmental harm.

Lennon articulated the bill's intent, asserting that it not only aims to protect Scotland’s rich natural environment but also hopes to provide a sense of hope to the public. “This should give confidence to policymakers and ensure the public knows we’re making sure our laws are fit for purpose,” she said. The bill has garnered substantial support, with 51 MSPs from various parties backing its progression, signalling a rare consensus on the need for robust environmental protections in Scottish governance.

In a broader European context, environmental crime legislation has been tightening. In February 2024, the European Parliament enforced stricter penalties for environmental offences across the EU, enabling up to ten years in prison for serious breaches. This includes ecosystems destruction and illegal trading of resources, along with financial sanctions of up to 5% of a company’s annual turnover. Member states are urged to adapt these regulations within two years, illustrating an escalating recognition of the urgent need to address environmental deterioration at a legislative level.

However, concerns have been voiced regarding the bill's implementation. A report by the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland emphasised that without adequate investment in environmental enforcement agencies, the potential impact of the ecocide law could be compromised. Dr Shivali Fifield, chief officer of the ERCS, underscored that robust enforcement mechanisms are essential for the law to be effective. There are also cautions from academics who warn that the proposed legislation should focus on holding accountable the executives and decision-makers rather than penalising employees who might be inadvertently ensnared in ecocide violations.

The conversation surrounding ecocide in Scotland is further contextualised by the international momentum for similar laws. Nations like Brazil, Italy, and Peru are advancing frameworks to criminalise ecocide, recognising the importance of addressing environmental degradation decisively. Activists cite notorious examples such as oil spills and rampant deforestation as critical catalysts for legislative action. Lennon’s bill mirrors these global movements, aiming to place Scotland at the forefront of the fight against environmental degradation.

As support builds around the ecocide bill, it highlights a pivotal shift in societal attitudes towards environmental accountability. Given the Scottish public's growing advocacy for environmental justice, the passage of this legislation could not only revitalise confidence in Scotland’s commitment to ecological stewardship but may also inspire similar legislative efforts across the UK and beyond. This legislative push could redefine how environmental harms are perceived and prosecuted, ensuring that the urgency of the climate crisis is met with equally robust legal frameworks designed to protect the planet.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/29/company-directors-who-cause-nature-damage-in-scotland-could-face-jail), [[5]](https://www.stopecocide.earth/2024/ecocide-bill-lodged-in-scottish-parliament)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/29/company-directors-who-cause-nature-damage-in-scotland-could-face-jail), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ecocide-law-scotland-monica-lennon-scottish-water-5112003)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-lawmakers-approve-tougher-bloc-wide-penalties-environmental-crime-2024-02-27/), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24263057.criminalising-ecocide-must-come-better-enforcement-warns-report/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/new-ecocide-bill-should-not-punish-staff/), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24263057.criminalising-ecocide-must-come-better-enforcement-warns-report/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/in-criminalising-ecocide-scotland-can-be-at-the-forefront-of-a-global-movement-to-save-nature-monica-lennon-4224567)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/29/company-directors-who-cause-nature-damage-in-scotland-could-face-jail), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-lawmakers-approve-tougher-bloc-wide-penalties-environmental-crime-2024-02-27/), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24263057.criminalising-ecocide-must-come-better-enforcement-warns-report/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/29/company-directors-who-cause-nature-damage-in-scotland-could-face-jail> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-lawmakers-approve-tougher-bloc-wide-penalties-environmental-crime-2024-02-27/> - In February 2024, the European Parliament approved stricter penalties for environmental crimes across the EU, including up to 10 years in prison for serious offences. The legislation targets numerous crimes such as illegal timber trade, depletion of water resources, severe chemical law breaches, and ecosystem destruction. Corporate directors can be prosecuted for environmental crimes committed by their companies, which will face fines up to 5% of annual turnover or 40 million euros. The law updates a 2008 directive and requires offenders to rehabilitate damaged environments and pay compensation. Member states have two years to integrate these rules into their legal systems.
3. <https://www.ier.org.uk/news/new-ecocide-bill-should-not-punish-staff/> - In February 2024, academics warned that plans to make ecocide an offence in Scotland must avoid punishing employees instead of those responsible for environmental damage. The proposed ecocide legislation, introduced by Labour MSP Monica Lennon, aims to criminalise severe environmental harm, including deforestation, water pollution, habitat degradation, and wildlife persecution. The bill suggests that major polluters could face up to 20 years in prison and fines up to 10% of their turnover. The Institute of Employment Rights emphasised the need to protect employees and communities within the legislation.
4. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24263057.criminalising-ecocide-must-come-better-enforcement-warns-report/> - A report commissioned by the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS) cautioned that without sufficient investment in environmental enforcement agencies, the impact of an ecocide law in Scotland would be limited. The report, co-authored by legal experts Dr Rachel Killean and Professor Damien Short, reviewed existing and developing ecocide laws globally and discussed legal definitions, implementation, sentencing, and enforcement considerations for Scotland. The ERCS chief officer, Dr Shivali Fifield, highlighted the importance of investing in environmental enforcement to effectively hold polluters accountable.
5. <https://www.stopecocide.earth/2024/ecocide-bill-lodged-in-scottish-parliament> - In November 2024, a proposal for a members’ bill to introduce the crime of ecocide into Scots law was lodged in the Scottish Parliament. Spearheaded by Monica Lennon MSP, the Ecocide (Prevention) (Scotland) Bill aims to prevent and criminalise severe environmental damage, including deforestation, water pollution, habitat degradation, and wildlife persecution. If passed, Scotland would become the first country in the UK to recognise the crime of ecocide, aligning with a global movement to hold polluters accountable for environmental destruction.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ecocide-law-scotland-monica-lennon-scottish-water-5112003> - Proposed ecocide laws in Scotland could result in public bodies, such as councils and water companies, facing criminal prosecutions. Labour MSP Monica Lennon confirmed she would officially introduce her Ecocide Bill at Holyrood, which could see executives at companies found to be committing ecocide jailed for up to 20 years and have assets seized. The bill has secured the backing of the Unison trade union and 51 MSPs, indicating significant support for the legislation.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/in-criminalising-ecocide-scotland-can-be-at-the-forefront-of-a-global-movement-to-save-nature-monica-lennon-4224567> - In November 2023, Monica Lennon MSP launched a public consultation on her proposed member’s bill to introduce ecocide law in Scotland. The bill aims to deter mass environmental damage and destruction by criminalising severe harm to nature, with proposed jail terms of between ten and 20 years for individuals and large fines for companies. The legislation seeks to reinforce existing pollution laws and international agreements on the environment, positioning Scotland at the forefront of a global movement to protect nature.