# Scottish Government under mounting pressure as 2023 emissions fall short of climate targets



The Scottish Government is facing escalating pressure to accelerate its efforts in reducing national greenhouse gas emissions, following the release of recent statistics that indicate only a modest decline in emissions for 2023. While data reveals a reduction of nearly 2%, climate advocates stress that this progress is insufficient to meet the ambitious climate targets set by the government. Notably, Scotland has achieved a significant overall decrease of 51.3% in emissions since 1990 levels, yet the pace of change in crucial sectors remains troublingly stagnant.

Claire Daly, head of policy and advocacy at WWF Scotland, expressed disappointment over the slow progress, remarking, "These reductions are simply not enough. The pace of change is too slow to meet our climate ambitions." Emissions in key areas such as transport, buildings, and agriculture have shown little improvement, specifically indicating that agriculture emissions have remained essentially unchanged between 2022 and 2023. Alarmingly, the latest figures also report an 18.6% spike in emissions from international aviation and shipping as these sectors rebound to pre-pandemic activity levels, resulting in a total increase of 33% since 1990.

Oxfam Scotland raised further concerns by advocating for a "fair tax" on private jets, which they deem to be exacerbating air pollution in the country. Jamie Livingstone, head of the charity in Scotland, noted, “Falling emissions are welcome, but in a race against time, we’re simply not moving fast enough due to a lack of investment in major polluting sectors.”

The slow response has drawn criticism from opposition parties, particularly the Scottish Conservatives, who have accused the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP) of failing to meet its climate obligations. Douglas Lumsden MSP, the shadow energy and net zero secretary, asserted that the abandonment of their interim emissions reduction target has diminished the government’s credibility. “The SNP are full of hot air when it comes to climate change… net zero is just another empty slogan for the SNP,” he said.

Conversely, acting net-zero secretary Gillian Martin defended the government's record, emphasising Scotland’s leadership in emissions reduction across the UK. She highlighted the significant decreases in emissions from electricity generation and industry, alongside ongoing efforts such as extending free bus travel and increasing funding for low-carbon initiatives to £54.4 million. Martin also acknowledged the need for a transformative approach across multiple sectors, aiming for a net-zero, climate-ready Scotland, with plans for a Heat in Buildings Bill to target decarbonising heat by 2045.

However, the context becomes more complex as Scotland's trajectory towards its legally binding net-zero target continues to face significant obstacles. It is projected that the nation could fall short by up to 20 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2045 unless there are substantial investments in forestry, peatland restoration, and carbon capture technologies. The government’s decision to replace previously ambitious annual emissions targets with five-year carbon budgets has also sparked criticism and raised questions about long-term commitment to climate action.

As Scotland grapples with these challenges, cross-party collaboration and increased funding are being called for to address the pressing climate crisis effectively. The sentiment among environmental activists and organisations is clear: meaningful action and substantial investment are urgently needed to avert a climate disaster and to realise Scotland's climate ambitions.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/holyrood-urged-to-move-faster-as-scotland-misses-emissions-target), [[4]](https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2024/06/18/political-leaders-gambling-with-our-planet-after-scottish-emissions-target-missed/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/holyrood-urged-to-move-faster-as-scotland-misses-emissions-target), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/23/scotland-likely-to-miss-net-zero-climate-target-by-up-to-20m-tonnes), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/6960a200-2ccd-4279-ad1f-5ad1e749310d)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/18/scottish-government-carbon-emissions-pledge-carbon-budgets-2030), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/scotland-ditches-climate-pledge-cut-emissions-by-75-by-2030-2024-04-18/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/holyrood-urged-to-move-faster-as-scotland-misses-emissions-target), [[4]](https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2024/06/18/political-leaders-gambling-with-our-planet-after-scottish-emissions-target-missed/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/holyrood-urged-to-move-faster-as-scotland-misses-emissions-target), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/scotland-ditches-climate-pledge-cut-emissions-by-75-by-2030-2024-04-18/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/6960a200-2ccd-4279-ad1f-5ad1e749310d), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/scotland-ditches-climate-pledge-cut-emissions-by-75-by-2030-2024-04-18/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/18/scottish-government-carbon-emissions-pledge-carbon-budgets-2030), [[4]](https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2024/06/18/political-leaders-gambling-with-our-planet-after-scottish-emissions-target-missed/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://news.stv.tv/politics/holyrood-urged-to-move-faster-as-scotland-misses-emissions-target> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/23/scotland-likely-to-miss-net-zero-climate-target-by-up-to-20m-tonnes> - An article from The Guardian discusses concerns that Scotland may miss its legally binding climate target by up to 20 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. Official data suggests that without significant increases in spending on new forests, peatland restoration, farming reform, and carbon capture technologies, the 2045 net-zero target is unlikely to be met. The article highlights the need for substantial policy changes and investments to achieve Scotland's climate goals.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/18/scottish-government-carbon-emissions-pledge-carbon-budgets-2030> - The Guardian reports on Scotland's decision to abandon its ambitious 2030 climate target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 75% from 1990 levels. This move follows criticism from the UK's Climate Change Committee, which deemed the target 'no longer credible' due to insufficient progress. The Scottish government plans to replace annual targets with five-yearly 'carbon budgets' aimed at meeting the 2045 net-zero goal.
4. <https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2024/06/18/political-leaders-gambling-with-our-planet-after-scottish-emissions-target-missed/> - Oxfam Scotland criticises the Scottish government's failure to meet its annual emissions reduction target, marking the ninth miss in 13 years. The organisation expresses concern over the government's plan to scrap annual targets, urging for urgent cross-party collaboration and significant new investments in climate action to address the escalating climate crisis.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/6960a200-2ccd-4279-ad1f-5ad1e749310d> - An article from the Financial Times reports that Scotland has abandoned its ambitious climate target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030, assessed as unattainable by the UK's Climate Change Committee. The decision follows insufficient progress and is recognised as an 'embarrassing' retreat from earlier commitments. Despite shelving the 2030 goal, Scotland aims to maintain its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2045.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/scotland-ditches-climate-pledge-cut-emissions-by-75-by-2030-2024-04-18/> - Reuters reports that Scotland has abandoned its ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 75% by 2030, citing limitations imposed by the British central government. However, it remains committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2045. The decision follows a critical report from the Climate Change Committee, which highlighted Scotland's lag in meeting the 2030 target.
7. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1449980/biggest-carbon-dioxide-emitters-in-scotland/> - Statista provides data on the largest CO₂ emitters in Scotland for 2023. The Petroineos oil refinery at Grangemouth was Scotland's biggest climate polluter, emitting almost 740,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide. The data highlights the significant contribution of industrial sites to Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions.