

New framework will help to make 'net zero' a reality

July 20 2020



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A new framework developed by the University of Stirling will enable policymakers and businesses to meet ambitious targets for a low-carbon future by helping to balance the demands of economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

The [Stirling Protocol](#) consists of three pillars that must be considered to

put the environment at the heart of sustainable economic prosperity. The framework can be used to analyze whether decisions:

- deliver prosperity and promote economic growth that is environmentally sustainable
- conserve and enhance biodiversity and natural resources, and help progress towards a carbonless society
- Enhance health and wellbeing and maximize social inclusion

Where proposals, policies or practices do not meet these criteria equally, steps can be put in place to balance the competing demands. The simple framework can be adopted in organizations to analyze a range of activities—from procurement and recruitment, to project planning and business development. The Protocol's flexibility means that it can be used to prompt and frame discussions around sustainability, leading to new approaches being considered, or as a reference point by which to benchmark strategic decisions.

Professor Maggie Cusack, dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences, led the study. She said: "It can often seem as if there is a conflict between the need to address climate change and demands for economic growth. When solutions are put in place, they can often exclude some sections of the population, and can also be impractical or burdensome for smaller organizations to adopt. The [flexible approach](#) at the heart of the Stirling Protocol means that it can be utilized by a range of organizations, large and small, to undertake a simple, low-cost analysis of activity, leading to more sustainable outcomes."

The researchers identified several cases where the Stirling Protocol was actively helping to shape decision-making. One example focused on Stirling Council, which installed a network of E-bikes to support economic prosperity and wellbeing by providing a carbon-free transport alternative for work and leisure. Reassessing the initiative using the

Stirling Protocol, the local authority is considering discounted membership of the scheme for lower income families to ensure that it is accessible, and does not exclude sections of the local population.

The [protocol](#) is particularly timely, as the economic impact of the global coronavirus pandemic leads politicians and business leaders to consider how clean growth can form the basis of a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery.

Dr. Martin Valenti, Head of Climate Enterprise at Scottish Enterprise, co-authored the study. He said: "The Scottish Government has set an ambitious target to achieve net zero emissions by 2045, while at the forthcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference, [world leaders](#) will need to agree the next steps towards lower carbon emissions globally. The benefit of the Stirling Protocol is its simplicity. This free-to-use framework will enable decision-makers in Scotland, or elsewhere in the world, to consider and adopt approaches that promote [environmental sustainability](#) and social inclusion, while still delivering economic success. Adopting the framework will help to deliver a successful transition towards the ultimate goal of minimizing damage from [climate change](#), and driving economic prosperity that works for all."

More information: M. Cusack et al. The Stirling Protocol – Putting the environment at the heart of prosperity and social inclusion, *Science of The Total Environment* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.140079](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.140079)

Provided by University of Stirling

Citation: New framework will help to make 'net zero' a reality (2020, July 20) retrieved 12 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-07-framework-net-reality.html>

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