How to apply

This is an old version of the page

Date published: 15 December, 2025

Date superseded: 25 November, 2026

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Introduction

In the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) there are three types of activity that you can apply for:

- Agri-environment support
- Organics (Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance)
- Irrigation Lagoons (the Water-Use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon option)

Application dates for the 2026 round

Type of application	Opening date	Closing date
Agri-Environment applications	23 February	29 June
Organics applications	23 February	31 July
Irrigation Lagoons applications	23 February	29 June
Agri-Environment combined with Organics and/or Irrigation Lagoons in the same application	23 February	29 June

Note: Improving Public Access (IPA) and slurry stores are no longer available for application.

Application Process

AECS applications are submitted online via your Rural Payments and Services (RP&S) online account. You will also need to prepare some documents offline and submit these with your online application.

This is a summary of the key stages (these are explained in greater detail further below).

Step 1: Prepare to apply: familiarise yourself with the AECS guidance. Check if you are eligible and if you need any consents, licences, etc, or any advice from NatureScot.

Step 2: Select your management options and capital items: read the full details of each option and item you are interested in, to check if you can meet the requirements. Check the Targeting Tool.

Step 3: Prepare all your supporting documents: some may require input from other individuals or organisations and you should allow enough time for that.

Step 4: Complete the online application: this is done using the RP&S system.

Step 5: Upload all your supporting documents: you must do this before the closing date.

Step 6: Check and submit your online application: the system provides a summary of your application. If everything is correct, confirm you have read the 'declarations and undertakings' and click 'submit application'.

Step 7: Application Assessment: a Case Officer from RPID or NatureScot will assess and score your application. They will also arrange a discussion with you and may carry out a site visit.

Step 8: FEA and moorland/bog management plan payments: submit payment claims for your FEA and/or moorland/bog plans if applicable.

Step 9: Notification of decision and offer of contract: you will be notified whether your application has been approved and if so, you will be sent a contract offer.

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1. Preparing to apply

Please familiarise yourself with the scheme guidance which you can find on the AECS homepage .

Use the Eligibility and Occupancy of Land guidance to check if you are eligible to apply. It has guidance about the particular requirements if you are applying as an owner, a tenant, a crofter or a common grazing. It also explains how many applications a business can submit in one year.

Check the Consents and Licences guidance to see if there are any consents, licences, approvals, etc, that you will need to obtain before submitting your application. Allow plenty of time to request these from the relevant organisations.

Seek pre-application advice from NatureScot:

- if your application will involve a designated site (SSSI or European site) please read the Designations guidance and we strongly recommend that you contact NatureScot for advice at least a month before the submit deadline
- if your application will include peatland management we strongly advise that you contact NatureScot at least a month before the submit deadline to discuss your proposals
- applicants for deer management must seek advice from a NatureScot Wildlife Management Officer before 30 April 2026
- please use the relevant regional emailbox for contacting NatureScot

Protected species: read the protected species guidance and consider if your proposed AECS management could affect any protected species. If so, you may need to provide an ecological survey.

Historic sites: if there are Scheduled Monuments or other historic sites on your land please read the section on historic and archaeological designations in the Designations guidance and seek advice from Historic Environment Scotland (HES) if necessary.

Returning applicants:

If you are reapplying to replace your expiring/expired AECS contract you **must** consider the current requirements of the land and not assume all the existing management can simply carry on unchanged. You will need to submit new information including up-to-date management plans using the latest plan templates provided.

Please note: it is essential that the application is prepared with the full involvement and understanding of the land manager who will be responsible for delivering the work on the ground.

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2. Select your management options and capital items

Please ensure you read the Management Options guidance page and the Capital Items guidance page .

These guidance pages also have links to all the **individual option and capital item pages.** It's essential to read the full details of each option and item that you are interested in, to check if you can meet all the requirements. This includes the requirements at the application stage and the requirements when carrying out works on the ground.

Targeted options/items: some options and capital items are targeted (restricted to certain parts of Scotland) as explained in the Management Options guidance . Enter your holding number into the targeting tool (MS Excel, Size: 12.3 MB) to check which options or capital items are available on your land. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately. If you find your location code is not recognised in the targeting tool, please contact your local RPID office for assistance.

In exceptional cases you can apply for options or capital items outwith their target area if you have obtained an **Endorsement** from NatureScot. You also need NatureScot endorsement to apply for the Species-rich Grassland or Habitat Mosaic options on rough grazings. You must send endorsement requests to NatureScot at least a month before the application deadline, as explained in the Endorsements guidance.

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3. Prepare all your Supporting Documents

Please note: all supporting documents must be submitted by the relevant application deadlines as shown above.

Consider early on what supporting documents you will need. Some may require input from other individuals or organisations and you will need to allow enough time for that. Failure to submit the required documents by the closing date may result in your application being deemed ineligible.

3.1 Complete a Farm Environment Assessment (FEA)

All applications need to include a Farm Environment Assessment (FEA), apart from applications which are solely for the following:

- Coastal embankment breaching, lowering or removal
- River embankment breaching, lowering or removal
- Restoring (protecting) river banks
- Organics
- Upland habitat impact assessment for deer management (as stand-alone capital item)
- Water-use Efficiency Irrigation Lagoon

The FEA is a tool to help you to take stock of the important environmental features on your holding and plan what to include in your application.

The Farm Environment Assessment guidance explains how to prepare your FEA, which must include the following documents:

- Farm Environment Table
- Farm Environment Map
- Farm Management Map (with locations of options and capital items you are applying for)
- it must also include a Diffuse Pollution Risk Assessment. Please see the Diffuse Pollution guidance
- for certain water quality capital items, you must also provide a Diffuse Pollution Steading Assessment as explained in the Diffuse Pollution guidance

3.2 Prepare all other supporting documents that are required

The documents required will vary from case to case. It's important to read the Checklist of Supporting Documents (MS Excel, Size: 42.4 kB) to help identify which documents you need to provide.

These are some examples:

- many management options require management plans (such as a Moorland Management Plan or Wader Management Plan)
- to gain points under some of the Scoring Criteria , you must submit documents (such as a Wader Survey or Collaborative Plan)

For some documents (such as management plans) we provide templates which you must use. Please make sure you use the templates for the current round as some may have changed since previous rounds.

When producing maps, ensure you follow the Mapping guidance .

See also Section 5 below, about how to submit your supporting documents.

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4. Complete the online application

AECS applicants must be registered with Rural Payments and Services (RP&S). You can register for this service if you have not registered already.

Please read the Online application guidance (PDF, Size: 4.1 MB) . This provides detailed instructions and screenshots to guide you through the online process.

To start your application, you will need to log in to RP&S. Then click on ‘Applications’ from your customer home page and select ‘Agri-Environment Climate Scheme’ from the drop-down list to start a new application.

In the ‘Application Information’ section, you will be asked a series of questions about your application. (You can see the questions in Appendix 1 of the Online application guidance (PDF, Size: 4.1 MB) .)

In the ‘Select Options’ section, enter the management options that you wish to undertake.

In the ‘Allocate Options’ section, you will be asked for details for each option. You will need to enter the relevant Land Parcel Identifiers (LPID) (unless not yet allocated by RPID), the areas (hectares) to be managed, and the years when the management will take place. You must also enter details for any associated capital items.

For some options you will also be asked to fill in a Grazing Plan table. We recommend checking the guidance on calculating stocking densities when filling in the table.

The application system will prompt you when errors arise during the completion of the application. For example, when information requested at a particular section has not been provided and is preventing you from moving to the next stage of the application process.

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5. Upload all your supporting documents

You should upload these directly into the application system, as explained in the online application guidance (PDF, Size: 4.1 MB) . If you have problems doing this or are not sure which documents you need to submit, contact your local RPID office or NatureScot .

Supporting documents must be submitted by the relevant application deadline for the application type you are applying for, as set out in the Introduction above.

Don’t wait until the last few days of the application round to upload your supporting documents and finalise your application, instead upload as you finalise your documents to avoid issues with RP&S which may occur when usage is very high.

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6. Check and submit your online application

Once you have completed your application, the system will display a summary of the options or items you have applied for.

A more detailed **Schedule of Works** will also be available in the summary screen, setting out the proposed claim profile of any annual management option payments and the payment details for any capital items in your application.

If you are satisfied that the summary and Schedule of Works are accurate and correct, you should then confirm you have read the declarations and undertakings. View a copy of the declarations and undertakings.

You will then be directed to click **'Submit application'**. An acknowledgment of your application will appear on screen along with your application reference number. This reference number can be used to track the progress of your application.

You **cannot** amend an application after it has been submitted. However, an application can be withdrawn and an amended application submitted before the closing date.

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7. Application assessment

Your application will be assigned to a Case Officer from RPID or NatureScot who will be your main point of contact. Your Case Officer will assess and score your application using the Scoring Criteria . There are separate criteria for each of the following: Agri-environment, Organics, Irrigation Lagoons. As part of the assessment, the Case Officer will arrange a discussion with you and may also carry out a site visit.

You can find full details of the assessment process in the Application Assessment guidance .

8. FEA and moorland/bog management plan payments

If you submitted a Farm Environment Assessment, a Moorland Management Plan and/or a Lowland Bog Management Plan you may be entitled to make a payment claim for these. Please see further details in the Funding, Claims and Payments guidance .

9. Notification of decision and offer of contract

You will be notified as to whether your application has been approved, part approved or rejected. If your application is approved or part approved you will then be sent a contract offer. If your application is unsuccessful we will explain the reason for this. If you are not satisfied with the decision reached you may seek a formal review .

You may only start work if you have accepted the contract offer and have received a confirmation letter letting you know that you can begin.

Please see the Contracts guidance for full details about receiving a contract offer and how to accept or reject the offer. You can view a copy of the standard contract terms and conditions (PDF, Size: 271.0 kB) .

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