

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

This is an old version of the page

Date published: 8 November, 2023

Date superseded: 14 February, 2024

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#) .

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) will start to open again for applications in January 2024.

Guidance is in the process of being amended to facilitate changes required for the 2024 application round and will be published as soon as possible.

The [latest AECS news release can be found on gov.scot](#)



The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) promotes land management practices which protect and enhance Scotland's magnificent natural heritage, improve water quality, manage flood risk and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

It also helps to improve public access and preserve historic sites but please see information below in relation to Improving Public Access for the 2024 round.

Full scheme guidance

AECS 2024

The 2024 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) application round will start to open for applications in January 2024. A summary is below but it is important that you read the detail for each element you wish to apply for as there are important changes.

Application windows

Slurry stores: Will open in early 2024, details will follow shortly.

Stand-alone Organic conversion and maintenance: 01 February 2024 – 31 July 2024

Agri-environment: 01 February 2024 – 10 June 2024

Note: If you are applying for Organic conversion and maintenance as part of a single application with Agri-environment management it must be submitted by the 10 June deadline

Slurry Storage

Details on the availability and requirements for Slurry Storage will follow shortly.

Organic Conversion/Maintenance

The area caps were removed in 2023 for conversion and maintenance. While there is no upper limit for land in organic conversion or maintenance you must be able to demonstrate that the land is used for agricultural purposes.

Improving Public Access

IPA will not open for applications in 2024.

Agri-environment

To maximise the benefits of the scheme while mindful of budgetary pressures, the amount that can be applied for under the following two options have been restricted.

- Pond creation and restoration is restricted to 2000m² per application and 600m² per pond.
- Creation of Hedgerows is restricted to 1000m per application (The limit has been raised from the 500m limit set in the 2023 round)

The capital items below that were not available for the 2023 application round are available for the 2024 application round:

- Restoring Drystone or Flagstone Dykes
- The Heather Cutting element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item
- Primary Treatment of Bracken – Mechanised or Chemical*
- Follow up Treatment of Bracken - Mechanised or Chemical*

*Chemical control of Bracken is no longer funded through AECS following the decision by the manufacturers of Asulam not to pursue authorisation for the chemical in the UK.

For clarity, the items/options below remain suspended for the 2024 round.

- Creation of Species Rich Grassland
- Heather Restoration
- Heather Restoration – Follow-up Molinia control
- The Muirburn element of the Muirburn and Heather Cutting capital item

Designated Sites

If you intend to apply for management to benefit a designated site (SSSI or European site) you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot before preparing your application. Also, you are strongly advised to contact NatureScot if you are considering applying for deer management. You should make contact as early as possible and at least a month before the closing date to allow time for a response.

If you require a NatureScot [endorsement](#) to allow you to apply for an option outwith its target area you MUST submit the endorsement request form to NatureScot as early as possible and at least one month before the closing date. If it is approved you must upload the endorsement as part of your application.

Rules and supporting information

[Full Scheme Guidance](#)

[Management options](#)

[Capital items](#)

Note that, each management option and capital item page has a link to supporting information which provides recommendations and best practice in relation to the why, where, how and what for each option and capital item. Your application could gain additional points if you follow these.

Please note the AECS pages (and the Targeting Tool) are currently being updated, where required, and will be available in advance of the relevant opening dates noted above. A list of the AECS web pages with changes for the 2024 round will be available at that time. Applicants should acquaint themselves with the latest guidance before preparing/ submitting an application.

Updated webpages will have a date of August 2023 or later.

AECS 2024 List of Updates (To be published in advance of the 2024 round opening dates)

For further AECS updates from previous application rounds, please check our updates page and previous versions of this page.

How to get help and advice:

The scheme is being delivered jointly by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID) of the Scottish Government and NatureScot

A case officer will be assigned to your project once you have formally submitted your application. However, if you have any questions about this scheme before then, please get in touch. Contact details for RPID offices can be found in our [Contact us](#) section or find [contact details for NatureScot](#) .

You can also book an appointment at your local RPID office if you need any help to use this guidance, or with the online application system.

Updates

Updated webpages for 2023 will have a date of November 2022 or later.

[AECS 2023 List of Updates \(MS Word, Size: 57.4 kB\)](#)

For further AECS updates from previous application windows, please check our [updates page](#) .

Eligibility

The scheme is open to farmers, groups of farmers and other land managers with land in Scotland, who are registered with us and have a Business Reference Number.

You must be able to demonstrate that you have the legal right to carry out the projects to be funded for the length of the contract and any associated monitoring period.

To maximise environmental outcomes and ensure value for money, support under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme is geographically targeted.

This means you will need to check which options are available in your area before applying.

You can check which options and capital items you are eligible to apply for by entering your Holding Code in the targeting tool. If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately.

More information on **eligibility** can be found in the [Eligibility](#) and [Ownership of land](#) sections of the full scheme guidance.

Selection criteria

There are two levels of entry to this scheme. Applications falling into each category will be assessed as follows.

- Level 1 - this is for lower value applications up to an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications for this level will undergo an initial assessment by a case officer including a discussion with you. The discussion may take place during an on-farm visit, depending on the options you have applied for. Your application is then considered by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division or NatureScot (formally Scottish Natural Heritage) for approval or rejection.
- Level 2 - this is for higher value applications above an agreed monetary value for the round. This agreed value is dependent on the amount and value of the applications received. Applications for

this level will undergo an initial assessment as per level one. After assessment the case will be considered by an expert panel constituted on a national basis for approval or rejection.

Applications will be scored against selection criteria.

More information on **selection criteria** can be found in the [How to apply](#), [Application assessment](#) and [Scoring criteria](#) sections of the full scheme guidance.

Applications

To apply to this scheme, you will first need to register with and then log in to Rural Payments and Services.

[Register](#)

To ensure an effective use of scheme funds, you will normally be limited to a single application per year. However, an exception will apply for the management of designated sites, as well as for certain situations where land managers have widely separated areas of land.

More information on **applications** can be found in the following sections of the full scheme guidance:

[How to apply](#)

[What you need to apply](#)

[Designations](#)

[Mapping](#)

[Farm Environment Assessment](#)

[Diffuse pollution risk assessment](#)

[Endorsements](#)

[Funding under this scheme](#)

[Double funding and option incompatibility](#)

Claims

If your application to the scheme is successful, you will be issued with a contract of up to five years setting out the approved work you can claim funding for.

You can submit your claim for the funding set out in the contract on completion of the work. Management options on your contract must be declared on your Single Application Form by the agreed date, on an annual basis, for the duration of your contract.

Capital items are claimed separately on the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme capital claim form and can only be claimed once you have completed the work.

Any capital expenditure incurred before your application to the scheme has been submitted is not eligible for payment.

More information on **claims** can be found in the [Claims and payments](#) section of the full scheme guidance.

Payments

Management option payments

Payments for management options will be paid annually in the year following submission of your Single Application Form.

For example, if you submit a claim in 2022 payment will be made in 2023.

Capital item payments

Payments for capital items will be made upon receipt of a valid claim with any relevant supporting documentation and following any inspection or administrative checks that may be required.

You will receive payment by BACS into your nominated bank account. All payments will be made in sterling.

More information on **payments** can be found in the [Claims and payments](#) section of the full scheme guidance.

Inspections

If your application to join the scheme is successful, you will be subject to our inspections programme.

It is a condition of entry to this scheme that you must allow us to inspect your holding to check that the scheme rules are being met.

Inspections to check compliance will be carried out on a percentage of claims, chosen by risk analysis, prior to payment. Inspection visits will be co-ordinated by the relevant organisations to help reduce disruption at your farm or business.

More information on **inspections** can be found in the [Inspections](#) section of this site.

Specific information on **inspections** for [management options and capital items](#) is included on each option or item page.

Breaches and penalties

If we discover that you have not followed the contract terms and conditions, we will call this a breach.

A breach can be identified in a number of different ways for example:

- through the automatic checking we carry out against your applications, claims, your land and allowances
- through an inspection
- following a check of the supporting documentation relating to a claim

More information on breaches and penalties relating to this scheme can be found in the full scheme guidance.

[Breaches and penalties](#)

Further information on why we need to penalise breaches can be found below.

[Disallowance and penalties](#)

Reviews, appeals and complaints

If you are not content with the approval decision relating to your application, you can request that we review the decision.

If you receive a decision to refuse, recover or reduce your payment, you may appeal this decision under the Rural Payments Appeal procedures.

If you are unhappy with our service as a whole, we have a dedicated complaints procedure to help you resolve this.

More information on **reviews**, **appeals** and **complaints** can be found in the following sections:

[Reviews](#)

[Appeals](#)

[Complaints](#)

Contact

If you have any questions about this scheme, please get in touch. Contact details can be found in our Contact us section.

[Contact \(Rural Payments and Inspections Division\)](#)

[Contact \(NatureScot\)](#)

Check which options and items are available on your holding using the Targeting Tool below:



[AECS Targeting Tool 2024 \(MS Excel, Size: 12.2 MB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/AECS-Targeting-Tool-2024-v4.xlsx>

Scheme delivery

This scheme is delivered through:



Recent Changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Information added on AECS 2024 round and removal of certain information related to previous rounds

[Previous versions](#)

[Previous versions of this page](#)