

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

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News update - 20 February, 2020

News update - 29 January, 2020

News update - 20 December, 2019

News update - 7 February, 2019

News update - 20 December, 2018

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme 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 will also help to improve public access and preserve historic sites.

The funding available under the scheme will help to:

- deliver the [2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity](#) by supporting appropriate management for vulnerable and iconic species and habitats, strengthening ecological networks, controlling invasive non-native species and enhancing the condition of protected nature sites
- contribute to Scotland's world-leading climate change targets by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and securing carbon stores in peatlands and other organic soils
- meet obligations to improve water quality under the EU Water Framework Directive by reducing diffuse pollution
- control flooding through natural flood risk management
- support organic farming
- preserve the historic environment
- improve public access

The scheme will be delivered jointly by the Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID) of the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Full scheme guidance

AECS 2021

AECS will open a restricted round for new applications on the 25th of January 2021 and close after an extended application period on the 30th of June 2021.

The 2021 round will be restricted to the following categories or application types:

Organic Farming

- Organic conversion throughout Scotland
- Organic maintenance throughout Scotland

Protected Areas

- Appropriate management directly (on) benefiting designated sites
- Management contiguous with or associated with designated sites that is appropriate for the direct benefit of the designated feature, habitat or species

Management for Priority Bird Species out with designated sites

- Corncrakes – Applications for the benefit of corncrakes restricted to the corncrake named options only in the corncrake target areas
- Corn Bunting – Applications for the benefit of corn buntings restricted to the corn bunting named options only in the corn bunting target areas
- Waders – Applications for the benefit of wader birds restricted to the wader named options only where the land proposed for management is within a recognised wader restoration project area and is within the wader option target area.

Slurry Storage

- Applications for slurry storage provision in priority water quality catchments

Improving Public Access

- Applications to improve public access provision throughout Scotland

Further guidance is being developed and will be published on the Rural Payments and Services website in January 2021.

2020 application round

One year extension

Eligible contract holders have now been contacted and asked if they wish to receive an extension offer to extend their contract by one year to 31 December 2021. They have until 24 July 2020 to respond and indicate whether or not they wish to receive an extension offer.

For those wishing to receive an extension, AECS case officers will extend the contract by varying the existing contract to end in 2021. Contract holders will then be able to accept or reject the offer with the process scheduled to conclude by 30 November 2020.

The preparatory work for the one year extensions available for AECS contracts that expire in 2020 is currently taking place. We shall be writing to eligible contract holders making an initial offer to extend the period of management for the relevant options until 31 December 2021 once this initial work is completed. Our aim is to commence the issuing of letters from the middle of June. A further update will follow when this exercise is underway.

Ministers have made a decision that there won't be a normal AECS application round in 2020. Instead, there will be one year extensions available for AECS contracts that expire in 2020 to ensure that there is continued support for vital land management required for biodiversity and climate change.

More information can be found on the [Scottish Parliamentary website](#) - the full answer is at the bottom of the page (GIQ question reference number - S5W -25939).

Suspension of muirburn lifted

Paragraphs 32 and 33 of Schedule 7 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 provided the regulatory powers to suspend Section 23 of The Hill Farming Act 1946 which permits 'a person to make muirburn on land only during the muirburn season'.

However, provision has been put in place to enable the 'Muirburn suspension' to be lifted and this took effect from 1 October 2020. As such AECS contract holders with muirburn in their contract can resume muirburn operations from 1 October. Please contact your case officer, if you require to discuss this matter further.

It should be noted that the ability to carry out muirburn may change if the suspension powers of Paragraphs 32 and 33 of Schedule 7 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 are reverted to at a future date. A further update will be communicated, when appropriate.

[Coronavirus \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#)

[Suspension of Schedule 7, Paragraph 32 and 33](#)

2019 application round - (See also News Update - 20 December 2019 at top of page)

A further £34 million has been committed to support environmentally friendly farming practices in the 2019 round of applications

A list of the eligible applications which were successful in whole, in part or in principle and those which were not in the 2019 application round can be accessed from the link below.

[AECS 2019 - Results Table \(PDF, Size: 24.9 kB\)](#)

The 2019 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme application round opens on Wednesday 16 January, 2019 and was due to close on Friday 12 April, 2019. However the deadline has now been extended to **Wednesday 17 April, 2019**.

Supporting documentation should be submitted by the 17 April, 2019 application deadline.

Before you apply for this scheme, please read the full scheme guidance, guidance changes that have been made for the 2019 application round and the rules and supporting information below. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us before completing your application.

[Full scheme guidance](#)

Guidance changes for the 2019 application round (PDF, Size: 12.4 kB)

For collaborative applications involving five or more RPID registered businesses, the application closing date is extended to Friday 31 May, 2019.

This is in recognition of the additional time involved to facilitate collaborative action with many businesses.

It must be noted, however, that such collaborative applications submitted in the extension period (13 April, 2019 to 31 May, 2019) which, on assessment are not considered to be collaborative, will be rejected and will need to be re-submitted for consideration in a future application round.

Therefore, if you have any concerns about the collaborative arrangements of five applications or more we strongly advise you to submit your application by 17 April, 2019.

Further information on collaboration can be found [here](#) .

Applications for [Slurry Storage](#) can be made during the main AECS window (Wednesday 16 January, 2019 to Wednesday 17 April, 2019), however, the deadline for stand alone slurry store applications is Wednesday 26 June, 2019 - see Support for Slurry Storage below.

Note

For those of you intending to apply for Improving Public Access, please be aware that following a record number of high quality applications in 2018 we will not be reopening this element of AECS in 2019. Therefore, **no** applications should be submitted for Improving Public Access in 2019.

Rules and supporting information

A wide range of management options and capital items are available under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme. There are rules and management requirements for each and they must be followed over the course of your contract.

[Management options](#)

[Capital items](#)

Also, supporting information is available 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.

If you need any help or assistance to use this guidance, you can book an appointment at your local area office.

[Book an appointment](#)

Please note the following elements which have been introduced to increase the effectiveness of the scheme.

1. Targeting of support under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

To maximise environmental outcomes and ensure value for money, support under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme is geographically targeted. This means you need to check which options are available in your area before applying.

If you find your location code is not appearing on the targeting tool, this may be connected to the ongoing mapping and land change work taking place following the introduction of the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). Please contact your local RPID to discuss this matter further.

[Check which options and items are available on your holding](#)

2. Support for Farm Environment Assessments

Most applications to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme will need to include a Farm Environment Assessment. This is a tool to help you take stock of the important environmental features on your holding and plan what to include in your application. Funding is available to help you to complete the Farm Environment Assessment.

[Farm Environment Assessment](#)

[Funding for the Farm Environment Assessment](#)

Also, please be aware of the following:

Support for Slurry storage

Funding for slurry storage is available.

[Slurry Storage](#)

The [scoring criteria for slurry storage \(MS Excel, Size: 14.1 kB\)](#) applications has now been agreed with SEPA. It takes account of priority catchment type, age of existing store and volume of additional storage to be provided at applicants own cost in order to bring the total storage capacity up to 6 months.

A simple [search tool \(MS Excel, Size: 192.8 kB\)](#) is available to identify the relevant catchment type/name for a given farm code. Before using the catchment tool you must check that slurry storage is available on the farm code where the work is proposed by checking on the [AECS targeting tool](#).

Note that some farm codes around the boundary of designated NVZ areas may be incorrectly showing as eligible for slurry storage.

If a farm code is known to have land in a designated NVZ area the eligibility for slurry storage should be checked with the relevant area office before commencing an application.

2017 application round

A list of the applications which were successful and those which were not in the 2017 application round can be found in the document below.

[AECS applications 2017 \(PDF, Size: 307.3 kB\)](#)

[AECS application 2017 - IPA \(PDF, Size: 19.9 kB\)](#)

2016 application round

A list of the applications which were successful and those which were not in the 2016 application round can be found in the document below.

[AECS applications 2016 \(PDF, Size: 176.2 kB\)](#)

2015 application round

A list of the applications which were successful and those which were not in the 2015 application round can be found in the document below.

[AECS applications 2015 \(PDF, Size: 151.0 kB\)](#)

Updates

Updates in the last month

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme - deadline extended

The decision has been made to extend the AECS application window deadline from Friday 12 April 2019 to **Wednesday 17 April 2019**.

For further AECS updates from the rest of the year and 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 and 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 [here](#). 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:

- level one – this is for applications up to a value of £250,000. Applications for this level will be assessed and approved locally by the relevant delivery body (Rural Payments and Inspections Division and / or Scottish Natural Heritage)
- level two– this is for applications above £250,000. Applications for this level will be considered nationally. Funding decisions will be made by an expert panel of government departments and appropriate agencies, with stakeholders invited to sit on the panel as observers

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.

Most applications will need to include a [Farm Environment Assessment](#). This 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.

Funding will be available to help you to complete the Farm Environment Assessment, where this is required in your application.

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 five-year contract 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 2017 payment will be made in 2018.

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. This is based on the European Commission's regulatory requirements.

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 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 European Commission's 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 \(Scottish Natural Heritage\)](#)

Scheme delivery

This scheme is delivered through:

