

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

This is an old version of the page

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

AECS news releases can be found in the [news section](#).



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.

The funding available under the scheme will help to:

- deliver the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) 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 [Scotland River Basin Management Plan](#) by reducing diffuse pollution
- control flooding through natural flood risk management
- support organic farming
- preserve the historic environment
- improve public access

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

Full scheme guidance

AECS 2021

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

Before you apply for this scheme, please read the full scheme guidance, the list of guidance changes that have been made for the 2021 application round and the rules and supporting information for individual options and capital items which must be followed over the course of your contract. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions that have been raised in regard to applying to AECS in 2021 are also provided below.

[Full scheme guidance.](#)

Rules and supporting information

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.

[List of guidance changes for the 2021 round. \(MS Excel, Size: 12.4 kB\)](#)

[AECS 2021 FAQ \(PDF, Size: 30.5 kB\)](#)

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

Organic Farming

- Organic conversion throughout Scotland
- Organic maintenance throughout Scotland

Protected Areas (designated sites) i.e. SSSIs and European sites* (*formally know as Natura sites)

Management that will directly benefit the qualifying features of designated sites - these are SSSIs and European Sites (SACs and SPAs). These sites contain a list of qualifying features (which can be found through SiteLink). Your applications must demonstrate how the management proposed will directly benefit these features. The management will normally be within the designated site boundary, but occasionally features such as birds or freshwater may also require works outwith the site boundary.

Please note: You can apply for any options which will directly benefit the qualifying features. However, if an option is not listed below for your holding you can only apply for it if you have obtained an endorsement from NatureScot (formerly SNH) before applying to AECS. If you received a NatureScot (SNH) endorsement for your 2015 or 2016 round contract for the same option on the same land, please submit this with your 2021 application.

You are strongly advised to speak with staff from NatureScot before preparing an application for a designated site.

Management for Priority Bird Species outwith designated sites

Corncrakes and Corn bunting

- Corncrakes – Applications for the benefit of corncrakes are restricted to the corncrake target areas [shown in this map \(PDF, Size: 840.4 kB\)](#) and these options:

Corncrake Mown Grassland, Corncrake Grazing Management, Management of Cover for Corncrake, Creation of Cover for Corncrakes, Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract) and Conservation Management of small units supplement

- Corn Bunting – Applications for the benefit of corn buntings are restricted to the corn bunting target areas [shown in this map \(PDF, Size: 770.1 kB\)](#) and these options:

Corn Buntings Mown Grassland, Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds, Grass Strips in Arable Fields, Beetlebanks, Retention of Winter Stubbles for Wildlife and Water Quality, Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife, Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Birds and Species rich grassland management, Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract) and Conservation Management of small units supplement.

Farmland waders from established grassland wader projects

Applications for wader management (where waders are not a feature of a designated site), are restricted to land within a recognised wader project (a list of these projects and associated map can be found [here \(MS Word, Size: 599.5 kB\)](#)). Applications must include [written support from their project officer. \(MS Word, Size: 2.5 MB\)](#)

The management options and capital items which can be included in applications are limited to: Wader Grazed Grassland, Wader & Wildlife Mown Grassland, Wader management on heath mosaics (land previously managed under AECS Moorland Management is not eligible for this option), Creation of Wader Scrapes, Cutting of rush pasture, Wetland Creation, Wetland Management. Cattle Management on small units (while cattle retention is available to all eligible applicants, the Introduction of cattle is restricted to applicants who have not had an AECS contract) and Conservation Management of small units supplement. No fencing costs will be supported

Slurry Storage

- Applications for slurry storage provision in priority water quality catchments

Improving Public Access

Applications to improve public access can be made for all of rural Scotland, as defined by the Scottish Governments Urban/Rural Scotland land classifications 5 & 6. The capital items that can be included in an application include new and upgraded paths, drainage, gates, signage, seating, bridges, steps, boardwalk and gabion basket retaining walls. All items have a fixed cost payment rate. IPA information can be found on the [Improving Public Access](#) page.

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. You must follow the relevant Coronavirus guidance regarding staying at home and, as and when lockdown is eased you must follow the guidance on working outdoors. 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](#)

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

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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 wish to apply for some of the options listed above for the 2021 round but they are not listed under your holding in the targeting tool please contact your local NatureScot or RPID team to discuss this matter further.

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

2. Farm Environment Assessments

For the restricted AECS 2021 application round the [Farm Environment Assessment \(FEA\)](#) requirement is different to that from previous years.

For the following application types;

- Applications to benefit protected areas (SSSIs and Natura sites)

- Applications to benefit waders, corn buntings or corncrakes

you are not required to complete a whole farm or holding environmental assessment, you should instead provide;

1. **A contextual map** showing the farm boundary and the location of all proposed management. For protected area applications please also show the protected area boundary.

and;

2. Farm Environment Management Map

(on smaller locations these maps can be one and the same e.g. where the boundary and the required management detail can be provided on a single map).

For Slurry Storage, Organic Conversion and Maintenance and Improving Public Access applications please refer to the option guidance for requirements for the respective options.

Slurry Storage

Funding for slurry storage is available.

Slurry Storage

The [scoring criteria for slurry storage \(MS Excel, Size: 14.1 kB\)](#) applications 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.

For further AECS updates from the rest of the year and from previous application windows, please check our [updates page](#).

In 2021 AECS 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 and meet the specific entry criteria.

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 that you must meet the entry criteria for the scheme in 2021 and be in the target area for the options you intend to apply for. 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](#). If you have several holdings, you will need to enter each of these separately.

Further information

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

There are two levels of entry to this scheme and 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.

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](#)

If your application to the scheme is successful, you will be issued with a contract 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 you have received a contract is not eligible for payment.

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

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.

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](#) .

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

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](#)

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](#)

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

[Contact \(NatureScot\)](#)

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**.

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

[Contact \(NatureScot\)](#)

Scheme delivery

This scheme is delivered through:



Recent Changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Updated information for 2021 round

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)