



Up in smoke: Fuel focus

August 2025



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Aims and Objectives

- > Aim to engage audience within Skye & Lochalsh by kicking off the 'Up in Smoke' campaign on local radio, local press to begin the conversations.
- > SLCAB demonstrate by end of campaign we have made a difference. Report on the focus groups / survey responses evidence that there is an over-reliance on fossil fuels and gives evidence of the impacts of these fossil fuels being banned, both listing the pro's and cons.

SLCAB have been successful in securing a £5000 grant from CAS to go ahead with a local Social Policy Campaign which we called 'Up in Smoke – Fuel Focus'

The project will focus on researching the impact of the New Build Heat Standard legislation in Skye and Lochalsh and where appropriate proposing possible suggestions and improvement. We aim to;

- > Run a local event, local awareness raising campaign and advocacy with local politicians and local authority housing department.
- > wish to take action to address solid fuel heating issues which have been raised.



Background

From 1 April new houses in Scotland will not be allowed to use direct emission heating systems such as oil and gas boilers, and bioenergy sources which includes wood and log burning stoves as the primary heat source. This campaign is to delve deeper into how this will affect households in rural communities. People in rural communities do not have the same level of services that people enjoy in urban areas - there may be an assumption that people have log burners 'as nice to have' they look 'pretty and cosy' - but there are people who rely on them. Woodburning stoves / Rayburns / Open fires are often the only source of heat in emergency situations or when extreme weather strikes. Whilst the legislation does make allowance for this under 'emergency heating system' see <https://www.changeworks.org.uk/news/a-wood-burning-stove-ban-in-scotland-changeworks/>, it will be important that this policy is clear to applicants and is applied taking the realities of rural life into consideration.

We will also put to our audience at whether there is an argument that the ban is right, taking into consideration the pollution & health hazards that have been raised. SLCAB carried out successful focus groups under the 'Worried this Winter Campaign', and would use the same model, with targeted audience coming from all demographics of residents within Skye & Lochalsh area. The campaign will be promoted through our local radio station, social media, local press and our local engagement with stakeholders. A survey will be circulated, followed up by focus groups, before a final engagement session. We expect this timeline to take 3 months. Once all data / evidence collated we will run a report with our findings.

Our very own Kate (social policy co-ordinator) and Tony (money/energy adviser) are assisting with this local campaign, as well as getting some support from CAS Policy Manager, Social Justice Team

Social Justice: The project will focus on researching the impact of the New Build Heat Standard legislation in Skye and Lochalsh and where appropriate proposing possible suggestions and improvement. Run an event, local awareness raising campaign and advocacy with local politicians and local authority housing department. SLCAB wish to take action to address solid fuel heating issues which have been raised. From 1 April new houses in Scotland will not be allowed to use direct emission heating systems such as oil and gas boilers and bioenergy sources which includes wood and log burning stoves as the primary heat source. This campaign is to delve deeper into how this will affect households in rural communities. People in rural communities do not have the same level of services that people enjoy in urban areas - there may be an assumption that people have log burners 'as nice to have' they look 'pretty and cosy' - but there are people who rely on them. Woodburning stoves / Rayburns / Open fires are often the only source of heat in emergency situations or when extreme weather strikes. Whilst the legislation does make allowance for this under 'emergency heating system', it will be important that this policy is clear to applicants and is applied taking the realities of rural life into consideration.

Background

Impact on Rural Communities

Defining and identifying the need and vulnerability of households

Government regulations surrounding open fires and log/wood burners have already restricted what class of material can be used within domestic households, which include cleaner alternative fuels such as dry wood and manufactured solid fuels, these steps have already come at a cost to a large rural population as this restricted fuel is not only more expensive, however these alternative fuels are not so readily available to the consumer living in a rural location. Now, with the introduction of the New Build Heat Standard (NBHS) comes the issue of supply and demand factor for this type of fuel, thus making it even harder to source. This is just one knock on effect of the NBHS which is found in the April 2024 version of the Domestic Technical Handbook issued by the Scottish government.

The population of Skye and Lochalsh covers a demographic in both age and wealth. SLCAB research shows that going ahead with the NBHS legislation would have a direct impact on an already increasing poverty crisis. Research continues to show that it will not just be the poorest that are hardest hit by these new building changes, however there is a strong case that the vulnerability of mental health will also be effected, this shows within SLCAB case studies that outline the reason why people prefer to have log/wood stoves within their property, as both a main heating source and as a back up to their main heating system.

Direct contact with people in the community shows that they find themselves in a more relaxed and are more mentally stable when sitting in front of their coal fire and log burners. Although not proven, a written report by Imaginifires examines and explains the mental health benefits of sitting in front of an open fire, which includes calming effect, health and therapeutic benefits. Medical research can also be found on the subject of mental wellbeing and open fires by Meditation Daily and their 5 meditative benefits of staring into a fire.

All this above shows the immediate and long-lasting effect that going ahead with the NBHS regulations will bring to an already vulnerable community.

Housing and energy efficiency

Infrastructure required to sustain a decent quality of living in a rural setting is already years behind that of townships on mainland Britain. Although it is well documented that there are class divisions throughout townships in Britain, with infrastructure being the responsibility of government and local councils, this is even more so when we look at infrastructure in the energy market of rural townships and communities.

This is evidenced with just a couple of insights to the complication that energy companies face when trying to grow their availability to supply households with the correct, decent and cost-effective types of energy. An article by Science Direct [Measuring the energy poverty premium in Great Britain and identifying its main drivers based on longitudinal household survey data - ScienceDirect](#) highlights that high energy prices may lead to “eating or heating trade-offs” among poor households which can have serious health and well-being implications and that the incidence of fuel poverty depends on three central drivers – income, energy efficiency and energy prices. This would then

Background

follow on that taking one source of affordable fuel type away from a household, would ultimately add to the financial and mental wellbeing of people within an already vulnerable situation.

With the evidence above, would it not make economical sense to have an already established infrastructure in place before adding to the hardship.

The lack of infrastructure has become a way of life for most living in a rural setting and although when looking from the outside and inwards at these communities, it may appear idyllic and welcoming to millions of tourists, whom wish to immerse themselves in a more natural way of life, however the reality for these living and surviving tells a different story, as they continue to struggle to heat and feed themselves. The following list shows the type of hardship they have faced over the years regarding the energy insufficiency.

Electricity – Higher costs

Uswitch [Energy prices by region in 2025 - Uswitch](#) explains that there are four reasons for this higher cost.

1. The number of customers the energy company has in your area. If there are relatively few people in your area, then the per-unit cost is driven up
2. The amount of energy the supplier buys from generators in your area. These purchases are made in advance, based on predictions about demand; so, if they need to supply more at short notice, for instance, it can drive overall costs up.
3. The different charges imposed on the energy supplier by your area's distribution network. Local distribution networks help distribute most of the energy that powers homes and businesses in Britain. Energy suppliers pay these local distribution networks a fee for using their services.
4. Energy usage by customers in your area. In regions where it gets colder — for instance in North Scotland - customers on average use more of their electricity for heating purposes than they do in the rest of the country. The network distributing the energy factors this into their costs and explains to some degree why North Scotland has some of the highest electricity distribution costs.

Electricity – RTS

For several years now and after many delayed deadline dates, it would appear that the Radio Telecommunication Switch will finally be switched off on the 30th of June 2025.

With a high percentage of households reliant on their off-peak meters for cheaper electricity, the consequences of this would be financially devastating for the bill payer. Home Energy Scotland [The Radio Teleswitch Service switch-off: what you need to know](#) state that if your RTS meter is not replaced with a smart meter by the time the RTS is turned off, then your heating and hot water will be affected. You may find they are always on or off, or the charging happens at the wrong time of day. Your electricity supplier won't be able to confirm how much electricity you have used for your heating and other electricity use, which means your electricity costs could be much higher than before.

Background

Bottled gas – No gas lines

This has been a long-standing issue and as such, communities have always been at a disadvantage when it comes to heating their homes by means of gas. Alternative fuels have and are being used, like oil, however this is also an expensive way to heat your home and again because of the rural location, it becomes even more expensive as the reason that electricity has the added costs.

Bio Fuel

Another alternative fuel, which local authorities have been pro-active in for a number of years, however, crippled by the cost-of-living crisis, local councils find themselves in a position that their communities have been facing for years, low income and a lack of funding that is required to see these project through.

Overview of Housing and energy efficiency

This is just some of the energy infrastructure that is not up to date or non-existent for some households and shows that it is not only necessary at this time, to allow homes to be heated by log burners, but imperative, for the financial and mental wellbeing of communities to continue to use their own natural resources to heat their homes.

Transition to net zero

The global challenge of climate change has pushed the world into action to reduce carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 and ultimately reach a net zero target by 2050. At the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Kingdom signed the Paris Agreement on the 22nd of April 2016 and thus agreeing to keep global warming to no more than 1.5°C.

The energy sector accounts for around three-quarters of all greenhouse gas emissions and replacing polluting coal, gas and oil-fired energy with renewable sources (wind, solar), would dramatically reduce carbon emissions.

The Scottish Government published their net zero plan in December 2020 which reflects the increased ambition of the new targets set by the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

To follow their net zero plan, the Scottish Government have created the [Home | Net Zero Nation](#) website that allows individuals, communities and organisations to access information and action that all of Scotland should be taking to help with the net zero challenges. The following are just some of the actions that the Scottish Government say we should take on as part of the journey for change.

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a Just Transition to a net zero economy and society, ensuring the journey is fair and creates a better future for everyone – regardless of where they live, what they do, and who they are.

Background

- Engaging the public and encouraging people to move towards low carbon living.
- Supporting communities to tackle climate change.
- Delivering a just transition, by working with communities, business, industry and the people of Scotland to plan for our net zero future.

Delivering a just transition, by working with communities,

Wording used by the Scottish Government must be realised and actioned.

Although we all know our own responsibilities to creating a clear environment throughout the globe. It is evident that net zero targets are being set for the wellbeing of future generations. However, we cannot lose sight of our current generation, especially when it is their wellbeing that would suffer, through forced change and financial hardship. Net zero targets have not only got to consider the lasting effect of climate change but must consider the lasting effect on the households and communities trying to acclimatise to an ever-changing world.

Positive action that could reduce the imposed plan of banning the use of log burners in new builds and ultimately a complete ban on their use, are being pro-active in the approach of reducing their use. This can be done by imposing stricter regulations on energy efficiency within a household, putting the emphasis on local authorities and landlords to ensure that heating systems and insulation within a domestic property is of an acceptable standard, thus minimising the need to use log burners within the home.

The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social housing currently aims to improve the energy efficiency of social housing and reduce fuel poverty. With an injection from the Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund (SHNZHF) of over £200 million available to social landlords until 2026. This fund recognises the different challenges in delivering this to rural and island communities; therefore, the cap will increase by 11% for rural areas. It is imperative that social landlords dealing with properties and homes in a rural area access this funding and work towards maximising the energy efficiency of their properties.

Methodology

The research consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering using information logged by CAB advisers in our case recording system. Additional data gathered through the formation of a CAB adviser focus group; interviews with 6 CAB clients. Their stories reflected their own individual experiences.

Further evidence was collated through a survey, which was publicised on local radio, local press and social media.

The survey was open for 44 days with 27 responses. Survey Questions and Answers below;

Q1: Do you have an oil or gas boiler heating system?

59% NO

41% YES

Q2: Do you have wood/log burner stove?

37% NO

63% YES

Q3: If you have a wood/log burning stove do you use as a primary heat source?

41% YES

30% NO

30% Not applicable

Q4: If you have a wood burner stove why do you have this?



Methodology

Q5: Do you feel your energy costs are affordable?

33% YES

30% NO

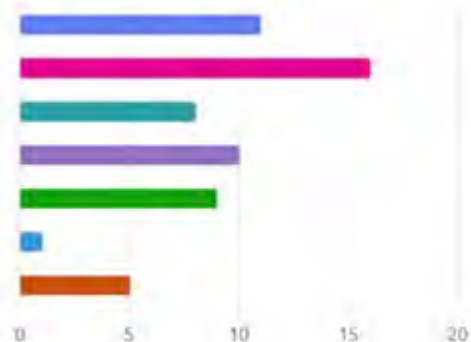
37% SOMETIMES

Q6: Are you able to keep your home warm when required?

78% YES

22% NO

Q7: Do you think your home is energy efficient?



Methodology

Q8: Were you impacted by the ban on log burners in new homes? If so, can you tell us more?



n/a however I would like to get a log burner in my home. I have an oil boiler heating system and when power goes off or if I've no oil, then I have no way of keeping my home warm.

Not personally, although I would love if my flat had a log burner. In a rural area where we do have quite a number of power cuts, that last often for hours, I would appreciate having a log burner for heat and cooking

Yes. Considering building a new home and the ban made us re consider.

Yes, I'd intended putting up an extra bedroom with shower/toilet but it needed another stove at that end of the house, extension is on hold presently as I was foreseeing problems getting planning permission with my proposed heating arrangement.

No as already have our log burner

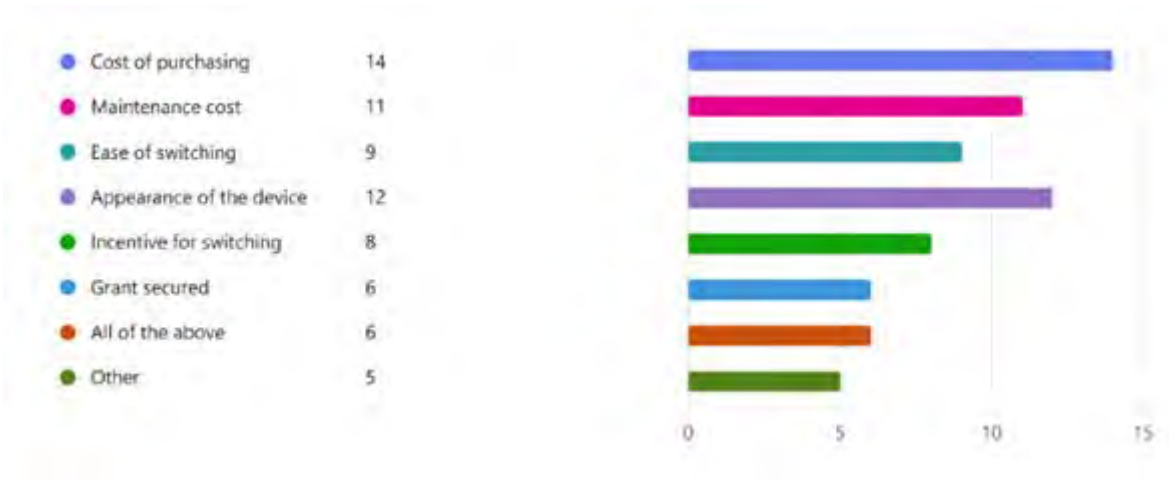
I had planning in for new build and was impacted by the ban on log burners. Was told we weren't allowed one. Thankfully there has been a u-turn but it did have an impact on us going through our new build application.

Q9: Have you considered other heating methods as opposed to open fire / burner stove?

31% YES

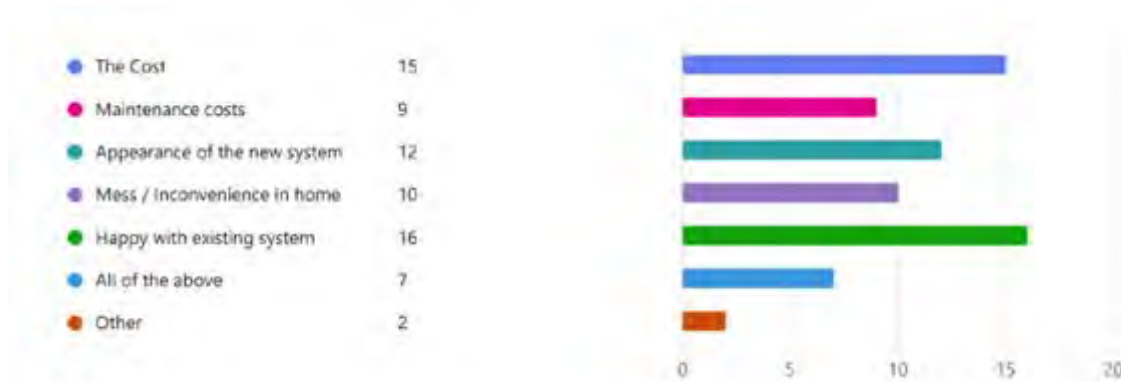
69% NO

Q10: How much do the following points influence your decision to switch to green energy, eg. Heat pump/solar power/biomass?



Methodology

Q11: How much do the following points influence your decision NOT to switch to green energy?



Q12: Do you consider pollution or health hazards when thinking which main heat source you use?

41% YES

37% NO

22% SOMETIMES



Methodology

Q13: Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding this issue?



In very remote rural areas it is almost 'vital' to have a secondary heat source. I remember one New Year we had no electric, therefore no oil central heating for 3 full days. Luckily my parents have an open fire and a rayburn so we were able to go there and cook and keep warm.

I live within a community that provides wood at reduced prices. The wood has less than 20% moisture which reduces the emissions into the air.

It's strange that this was considered when Bonfire nights up and down country went on and Scot Gov have not banned burning off the moors.

Being off grid, no mains gas, astronomical costs of electricity, tonnes & tonnes of wind blown timber to be had yet we're not allowed to burn said timber even when we plant 10X more trees than we burn, make fence posts, garden gates out of the fallen trees.

Although we received a grant for gas central heating about 3 years ago, we still require our log burner in order to keep warm. We are both retired and in the house all day. The log burner has also been vital for us when bad weather / power cuts hit.

Wood stoves provide the ability to heat a single room to a comfortable level. The rest of the property can be colder, I don't want to waste electricity heating the whole property when I am only in one room. Air source heat pumps are noisy and I have seen that they produce very cold air/ice around them. This is not something I want in my garden. I have also heard that they are costly to repair and have doubts as to their long-term sustainability.

I have electric storage heaters and are very expensive to run. Thankfully by having my log burner this keeps my kitchen warm when I'm in there most of the day and then the heat runs through the house. I buy seasoned wood for my log burner and wouldn't be without it, especially in extreme snaps of cold weather and for power cuts.

My home needs upgrading. Old storage heaters.

Case studies

Case Studies. From the campaign period SLCAB seen 55 clients looking for energy efficiency advice, below is two case studies.



SLCAB Up In Smoke Case Study 1

Single lady rents from local authority - they wish to remove her solid fuel heating source (fire which heats up both radiators and hot water) and replace with electric storage heaters. The client is worried about the cost of this and thinks her options limited but wants to know if anyway could keep a fire. As time progressed client was told not eligible for air source heating, her solid fuel heating system (coal fire) was removed by the council and electric storage heaters fitted.

Client contacted her electricity supplier OVO to ask for an Economy 7 tariff, which allows client to have cheaper electricity at night, to have an Economy 7 tariff client needs a second meter which records the low peak usage. OVO advised they are not fitting these meters to new customers, if a customer has an Economy 7 in place it will continue but they are not fitting new ones. Client contacted Scottish Power who advised client will have to change supplier then request the economy 7 but this does not guarantee it will be fitted. Very unfair to client to have the storage heaters fitted without assisting client in obtaining the Economy 7 meter as storage heaters are very expensive to run.

This client has a coal fire and back-boiler system that works. She wants it replaced by wood-burning stove with back-boiler system but has been told this is not eco/low emissions. This does not make sense as wood-burning stoves are renewable as they burn wood. They are especially useful in rural areas that can access local sources/free sources of wood to burn. It is going to have a financially negative effect on client now that has been converted to electric storage heaters as her electricity bills will increase significantly. Also, she would not be able to heat her home during a power cut. Social policy issue is government needs to address different energy/heating needs in remote rural areas.

Case studies



SLCAB Up In Smoke Case Study 2

Client is a full-time carer for her elderly parents and lives with them.

Client has been given tenancy of a croft and has had her application for a croft house to be built approved. Client hopes to start building in Spring of 2025.

Client's Q to CAB is there any energy efficiency grants for a new build property?

Client also wants to know whether she can put in a log burner for her new build. - Has heard conflicting advice on this. Client says she stays in a remote area where power cuts can be problematic and the log burner she feels is a necessity as opposed to being aesthetically pleasing.

Client accepted referral to Home Energy Scotland. Referral done on Partner Portal.

Re Log Burner: Advice now shows "New homes and buildings must install climate-friendly heating systems instead of oil and gas boilers. Wood-burning stoves can be installed, whilst a wider review takes place. "The New Build Heat Standard (NBHS), introduced in April 2024, affects the type of heating system that new-build homes and properties are allowed to use.

Homes and buildings are not allowed to use polluting oil and gas boilers. Instead, they must use climate-friendly alternatives like heat pumps and heat networks.

Scottish Ministers have issued a temporary direction to allow wood burning stoves and other bioenergy (and peat) heating systems to be installed in new homes. However, info on gov.scot website suggest the temporary direction only until the review is complete which is expected to be by Dec 2024.



Case studies



Testimonial

The lead on this Anthony Donnelly was kindly invited to hear a testimonial from Donald and Marion (note not real names).

Both Donald and Marion are retired who live in a house Donald built himself for his family 50 years ago. Donald is in his 90's and Marion in her 80's. They could not participate in the survey online due to accessibility however after hearing that Skye & Lochalsh CAB were working on the 'Up in Smoke' campaign they contacted the bureau, and a Home Visit was arranged.

Donald is now housebound but remembers vividly and talks proudly about the home he built using an agricultural grant. The house has an open fire in the living room, and the kitchen has a rayburn which heats up their water. A family member has returned home to live with them, so preparing the fires and filling the buckets of peat and coal is not an issue.

Donald talks about how the natural heat helps his bones. Both feel seeing the open fire lifts their mood on dark days. They state they have witnessed many a powercut, too many to count, some lasting days and days. Without their fuel heat source and the ability to cook on the Rayburn they say they don't know how they would have survived, adding it would have indeed been very bleak. Instead, Marion would be able to make soup and give this to neighbours who didn't have any electricity and neighbours who didn't have an open fire were always sure to be given a warm welcome.

They disagree with the ban and do not think the Scottish Government have considered households such as theirs.



Conclusion and policy recommendations

We need to see long-term solutions that will enable all of us to heat our homes in a way that's affordable.

Recommend that Scottish Government consider concerns from rural and island communities about the resilience in times of bad weather or power outages, as well as the wider use of bioenergy and peat for other reasons and lift the ban.

The Scottish CAB network gave energy advice to almost 9,900 people in the first three months of 2025. The average energy debt is £2,500 across Scotland and £3,100 in rural areas.



Press articles

Welcome for new guidance on stoves

Plans to ban wood-burning stoves from new-build properties have been scrapped, following a Scottish Government u-turn.

Updated guidance from the Scottish Government has been issued as part of its review relating to environmental stoves at new-build properties.

Earlier this year a new proposed after guidelines brought in as a result of the Bute House Agreement declared that solid fuel and wood-burning stoves were no longer permissible in new-build construction – including as a backup secondary heat source during power cuts.

Days after Kate Forbes MSP became Deputy First Minister, the Scottish Government announced its intention to review the controversial ban – and last Thursday (19th September) the acting minister for climate action Alasdair Allan provided an update to all local authorities.

The new guidance is temporary, but a more binding amendment to legislation is expected to follow at a later date.

Kate Forbes MSP said: “I am absolutely delighted that the review on wood-burning stoves has concluded and there will be a reversal in the guidance

that prohibited wood-burning stoves in new builds.

“On other words, new builds can now have wood-burning stoves as a heat source.

“This is a brilliant move for the Highlands and Islands, especially, as areas which have a lot of homes with wood-burning stoves already installed. It’s also brilliant news for businesses like Stork, in Inverness, which supplies stoves.

“Lastly, it’s great news for the construction industry which had built advanced plans for housing some, some of which included stoves as a heat source.”

Scottish Conservative deputy rural affairs spokesperson Jamie Halsey welcomed the move. “There was particular anger and concern from communities across the Highlands and Islands at a time which totally ignored the unique challenges those living in our region experience. It was policy made in Edinburgh with no consideration for rural or island life.

“However, with the lifting of this ban and only temporary, the Scottish Conservatives will continue to urge the SNP to do the right thing and make it permanent.”

Wood-burning stoves ban is lifted

BY JACKIE MACKENZIE

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A controversial ban on wood burning stoves in new build properties has been lifted following concerns from rural communities.

In a major u-turn, the Scottish Government said a review of the New Build Heat Standard means that wood-burning stoves, bioenergy and peat heating will now be permitted in new homes and buildings.

The ban was introduced as part of the now scrapped Bute House Agreement between the SNP and the Scottish Greens and was intended to help achieve net zero by 2045.

The government said an amendment to regulations permits the installation of bioenergy and peat main heating systems – and any type of secondary heating systems – in new buildings from 1st January 2025.

However, the prohibition on mains gas and oil boilers as a central heating system in new build homes remains.

Announcing the move on Friday, Western Isles MSP Alasdair Allan, the acting minister for climate action, said: “The New Build Heat Standard is crucial to help reduce emissions from new buildings, preventing the need for retrofit in the future and ensuring a cleaner and greener Scotland.

“Heat from our homes and buildings

makes up almost a fifth of Scotland’s carbon emissions so we must tackle the most polluting forms of domestic heating to reach net zero.

“We have listened to concerns from rural and island communities about resilience in times of bad weather or power outages, as well as the wider use of bioenergy and peat for other reasons. These changes address these concerns whilst retaining the spirit of the original legislation, which aims to eradicate polluting gas and oil boilers from new homes and buildings.

“I would like to thank all of those who submitted evidence and views, particularly those from rural and island communities – their input has been vital in delivering this positive outcome.”

Luke Fraser, vice-chairman of the Scottish Islands Federation, said he was “delighted” that views of rural communities had been taken into account.

“We believe there is a need to help sustain and support the resilience of households in rural and island communities through the use of wood-burning stoves and burning of peat, and the changes to the NBHS announced today have taken this on board,” said Mr Fraser.

“While we are in support of the need for climate action, progress must be made in tandem with developing and enhancing the resilience and sustainability of our communities, not at their expense. This change is a positive step in that direction.”

Benefits accounted for 1,714 queries, followed by debt – 810, utilities – 553, finance – 491, and housing – 323.

Anthony Donnelly of SLCAB said in his energy report that there continued to be a fallout from the extremely high energy costs, as clients struggle with both rocketing power bills and the cost of living crisis.

Mr Donnelly said: “In dealing with debt within CAB, more and more debt clients are now experiencing a very high level of energy debt.”

In the last year the bureau saw a rise in utility cases, but also recorded 180 successful outcomes and client financial gains of just over £106,805 by way of utility grants and write-offs.

Reference sources

[Net Zero Coalition | United Nations](#)

[The Paris Agreement | United Nations](#)

[Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 - update - gov.scot Home | Net Zero Nation](#)

[Energy efficiency in social housing - Home energy and fuel poverty - gov.scot](#)

[Building standards technical handbook April 2024: domestic - gov.scot](#)

[5 Meditative Benefits Of Staring Into A Fire](#)

[Psychology and Fire: Why Do We Find Fire So Calming?](#)

[Measuring the energy poverty premium in Great Britain and identifying its main drivers based on longitudinal household survey data - ScienceDirect](#)

[Energy prices by region in 2025 - Uswitch](#)

[The Radio Teleswitch Service switch-off: what you need to know](#)



www.slcab.org.uk

Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau
Scottish charity (SC022578) and company limited by guarantee (SC229160)

