Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Legacy Report
# Contents

Convener foreword | 1  
---|---  
Introduction | 3  
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in Session 4 | 3  
Summary and highlights | 3  
Engagement | 7  
Effectiveness and successes | 13  
Lessons learned and future challenges | 19  
Committee processes and procedures | 19  
Budget scrutiny | 20  
Cross-Committee scrutiny | 22  
European issues | 23  
Subordinate legislation | 24  
Media | 24  
Issues/priorities for future consideration | 26  
Petitions | 27  
Rural affairs | 27  
Agriculture and crofting | 27  
Forestry | 28  
Fisheries | 28  
Rural development, communities and economies | 29  
Rural broadband | 29  
Land reform | 29  
Land Use Strategy | 30  
Scottish Rural Parliament | 30  
Scotland’s Rural College | 30  
Crown Estate | 31  
Climate change | 31  
Process and mainstreaming | 31  
Third Report on Proposals and Policies and delivery of climate change targets | 31
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sector reporting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric vehicle charging points</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies and NDPBs</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air quality and pollution</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and circular economy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal welfare</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife crime</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity (including species management and habitats)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neonicotinoid pesticides</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Nature Directives</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 - RACCE Committee work in Session 4
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

This Committee’s work focuses on agriculture, fisheries, rural development, climate change, the environment and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment.

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Convener foreword

Welcome to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee’s Session 4 Legacy Report. The purpose of this report is threefold: firstly it briefly looks back at the Committee’s work in this session and reflects on the effectiveness and successes of the Committee; secondly, it examines lessons learned and identifies challenges for the future, in terms of practical and procedural matters; and, finally, it sets out some of the issues and priorities which lie ahead, and which are likely to tax the minds of whatever successor committees deal with rural affairs, climate change and environment matters in the next session of Parliament.

From the outset in 2011 we were determined that the RACCE Committee would be as accessible and transparent as possible, and would engage with as many people from across Scotland as possible and I think we realised those ambitions. We held public meetings and events from Orkney to the Borders and from Islay to Angus; we published papers, letters and reports on our website and we engaged with people on a daily basis on social media. We have consistently been one of the busiest committees in the Parliament, meeting every week, sometimes twice a week, and have tried to do justice to all parts of our very wide remit. We have taken evidence and published reports on a huge range of subjects.

The start of the session back in 2011 quickly demonstrated the steep learning curve we would be on as we found ourselves scrutinising very important legislation on aquaculture and fisheries, dressed in waterproofs at Fort William and speeding across the water to visit a fish farm. That first piece of legislation set the tone for the session as, whether we were considering climate change, farming, fishing, forestry, biodiversity, waste, species management, animal welfare or land reform, we cast our net for opinions and information as wide as possible.
On a personal note, after thirteen years as an MSP, first representing the people of the Highlands and Islands Region, and latterly the constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, I am standing down at the forthcoming Scottish Parliament elections. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to convene the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in this session and it was a personal highlight to end the session by helping to deliver further and substantial land reform which will hopefully make Scotland a fairer and more transparent country in which all of its people can feel connected to and part of our land.

I have been very ably supported by my two Deputy Conveners (firstly, Annabelle Ewing MSP and latterly Graeme Dey MSP) and the members of the SNP, Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties who have all played such a constructive part in helping to make the RACCE Committee one of the hardest working, effective and consensual committees in the Parliament. I also thank all of the officials who have supported us in our work in this session, in particular the Clerks and SPICe researchers.

It will now be for another committee, or committees, in the next session of the Parliament to take these important issues forward, but with the same overall ambitions in mind: to ensure that the issues that matter to people in all of Scotland’s rural communities are brought to the fore, and that the climate, land and environmental policies and legislation which are required to sustain Scotland and maximise its rich landscape and diverse communities are properly scrutinised and, as a result, are robust and fit for purpose. I wish our successors well.

Rob Gibson MSP
Convener
Introduction

1. On 16 December 2015, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee agreed its approach to its legacy report. Rather than only providing a summary of the Committee’s work in the session, full details of which can be found in the Committee’s Annual Reports, the Committee agreed to use the process and this report to reflect on its experiences throughout session 4, its effectiveness and successes, lessons learned, the future challenges ahead, and the priorities and issues which may engage successor committees.

2. To inform this report the Committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders it has engaged with throughout the session and asked them to give their views on the main priorities and challenges for successor committees. Two roundtable debates were held, and each attendee was asked to submit no more than five bullet points of the priorities they saw for their particular sector, or in general across the portfolio. Details can be found on the Committee’s website.

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in Session 4

Summary and highlights

3. The Committee began and ended the session with two highlights of the past five years. It began by scrutinising the Scottish Government’s Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, which saw the Committee meeting people working in the sectors who would be affected by the Bill, travelling to the North and West of Scotland, boarding boats to visit fish farms, visiting fish processing factories, and walking parts of salmon rivers. The Committee ended the session scrutinising the Scottish Government’s Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which covered issues such as the future of land reform, transparency of land ownership, community ownership and engagement, sporting rates, deer management, and agricultural holdings, and saw the Committee hold public meetings and events in Orkney, Skye, Jura and Dumfries.
4. In between the Committee held many topical inquiries on issues that matter to people in Scotland, such as: the future of the support we pay to our farmers, crofters and land managers; how we should mitigate the effects of, and adapt to, the impacts of climate change; how we improve the reduction and use of waste products and move towards a more circular economy; how we can ensure that Scotland meets its biodiversity targets in the future; and various pieces of work which ultimately examined how we achieve truly financially, socially and environmentally sustainable rural communities, infrastructure and industries. The Committee also secured debates on these and other issues in the Chamber of the Parliament.

5. In addition to its engagement with practitioners and communities (detailed below), the Committee took evidence and/or hosted events with influential Scottish, UK, European and international figures to debate important subjects, including UK
Ministers; Conveners and members of committees from other parliaments; parliamentarians from around the world; MEPs; European Commissioners and senior officials; and organisations such as the Committee on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

6. The infographics and word cloud below highlight the volume of work involved in the Committee’s scrutiny and many of the key issues it examined.
7. The Committee benefitted from managing to maintain a programme of meetings and events outwith its regular weekly cycle of formal meetings. Such events enabled the Committee and other Members of Parliament to engage with and question influential UK, EU and International organisations and individuals. Whilst it is important for committees to be as open and transparent as possible, it is also important that committees continue to meet and engage with people informally and flexibly. In doing so committees should continue to explore how some of these events could be more accessible and transparent, such as through webcasting and increased use of social media.

**Engagement**

8. As mentioned above, the Committee set out with a specific intention to improve and maximise engagement with people in Scotland and beyond. The Committee went about this by—

- seeking a better balance between “usual suspect” organisations/individuals and on the ground practitioners;
• making efforts to improve and widen the Committee’s reach, including seeking to improve the gender balance of witnesses, and engaging with young people and school children;

• updating its website on an almost daily basis, ensuring that all of the business of the Committee was as accessible and transparent as possible;

• launching a Twitter account which, by the end of the session, had gathered almost 2000 followers;

• making use of other social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, by making videos about the Committees work and publishing photographs of events;

• holding several formal meetings of the Committee outwith Holyrood (in this session formal meetings were held in Orkney, Skye and Dumfries);

• regularly visiting organisations, people and communities across rural Scotland, and ensuring that the voices of Scotland’s island communities are heard (the Committee visited Orkney, Islay, Gigha, Bute, Arran, Skye and Jura in this session);

• holding public meetings, both formal and informal, at which members of the public had the opportunity to question members of the Committee and, on one occasion, those giving evidence to the Committee;

• producing summaries of longer and more complex and detailed Committee reports to improve accessibility; and

• improving access for Gaelic speakers by tweeting in Gaelic, encouraging Gaelic speaking at Committee meetings, and producing Gaelic versions of Committee news releases and summaries of reports.
Figure 13 - Visit to Flanders Moss National Nature Reserve

Figure 14 – Visit to Peel Farm, Angus

Figure 15 - Jim Hume on a flying fox on a visit to Laggan Farm

Figure 16 - Glenlivet Estate visit

Figure 17 - Visit to Falkland Palace
ENGAGEMENT CASE STUDY: LAND REFORM (SCOTLAND) BILL— The Committee agreed its approach and the desired outcomes of its engagement programme which would support its scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s much anticipated Land Reform (Scotland) Bill at the beginning of its considerations of its wider approach. This allowed time to consider a wide range of options and to carefully consider practical issues such as timing and scheduling and costs to ensure maximum value for money would be achieved. The Committee was clear that given the subject matter of the Bill (which included private and public land ownership; community ownership and engagement; deer management; sporting rates; and agricultural holdings) it needed to meet and engage with as many people as possible, formally and informally. The Committee was also aware that some of the issues at stake were likely to be sensitive and so engaging with the Committee in a public setting may not work for everyone. The Committee therefore designed a programme which included a tour of Scotland that included many different forms of, and opportunities for, engagement. This took the Committee to many different parts of the country, including several island communities. The result of the programme was a process, and ultimately a Stage 1 Report, which benefitted hugely from the input received, and from the environment of respectful yet lively and challenging debate created by the Committee.

9. The infographics below shows the extent of the Committee’s engagement in this session.
10. It is essential for the reputation and credibility of any future committee responsible for rural matters that it regularly travels to the many and varied rural and remote parts of Scotland, including its islands, to engage directly with those people, organisations and communities who live and work there. The Scottish Parliament is a Parliament for all of Scotland and the committee which scrutinises rural matters must be a key conduit between rural Scotland and its elected representatives and decision-makers.

11. Any successor committee with a specific rural remit should seek to build on the steps taken by this Committee to engage and travel as much as possible and explore new and innovative ways to ensure people have the opportunity to be involved in the Committee’s work.

12. As there will always be financial considerations involved in any committee’s plans to travel and engage, future committees may wish to consider ensuring value for money by splitting a committee into smaller groups to cover more areas and topics, and also to plan visit programmes which make the best use of the available time.
13. The Committee’s use of social media, and Twitter in particular, was a big success, in terms of improving the transparency and understanding of, and accessibility to, the Committee’s work, and also in terms of improving engagement and dialogue with those outside Parliament. The Committee also found this to be an invaluable means of receiving feedback and understanding issues of concern and stakeholder priorities. Any successor committees would be well advised to continue to be proactive in their use of social media and build further on the online community established by this Committee.

14. The Committee made efforts to try to improve the gender balance of witnesses, however, as organisations themselves often decide who should represent them at Committee meetings this is often not something the Committee has direct control over. In the most recent reporting year, 83% of stakeholder witnesses were male which demonstrates the significant challenge which remains in trying to greatly improve the gender balance of those giving evidence to the committee. It is also the case that there could be significant improvements in the age range, ethnicity, and socio-economic background of those who give evidence to, and engage with, the Committee. The Committee recommends that future committees pay particular attention to this issue to ensure that they engage with as diverse a range of Scotland’s population as possible.

Effectiveness and successes

15. The Committee worked with increasing effectiveness as the session progressed which was, in part, due to establishing a consensual working environment very much based on mutual respect and a strong desire on behalf of all of the Committee’s members that party politics should play second fiddle to the core role of holding the Scottish Government to account and scrutinising policy (i.e. being effective parliamentarians). All members were united by the same objective, which was to ensure that rural affairs, climate change and environment issues took priority and that the views of people across Scotland were listened to and investigated.

16. To be truly effective parliamentarians committee members should seek to work as consensually and respectfully as possible to ensure that issues are thoroughly scrutinised on behalf of the people of Scotland. Issues, rather than party politics, should come first.

17. The Committee’s nine member positions were filled by 21 different members throughout the session but benefitted greatly from having three of its nine members remain constant throughout the session, including, crucially, the Convener, and having a further three members present for almost the whole...
session. Having two thirds of the membership remain stable for such a long period enabled it to build up strong knowledge and expertise in many parts of its remit. The Committee also benefitted from having many members with an interest in, and knowledge of, the subject areas. One of the original members of the Committee went on to be appointed Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, and at the end of the session the membership included two former Ministers, a former Presiding Officer, and a former Convener of a rural affairs committee in a previous session of Parliament.

18. Whilst changes in committee memberships are inevitable during a five year term, it is clear that they benefit from consistency of convenership and membership. It is also beneficial if members of committees have a background and interest in, and knowledge of, the subject matter. Future business managers and Parliamentary bureaus would be well advised to take note of this in the next session.
19. The Committee’s influence and successes can be seen in the direct impact it had on Scottish Government policy and in the reaction and engagement of many stakeholder groups on a wide variety of issues.

20. In terms of influencing Scottish Government and wider policy and legislation, notable examples include—

- the Committee’s inquiry into the management of wild deer in Scotland (see case study below for more information) which led ultimately to shaping the Scottish Government’s proposals in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill (and were cited in the Policy Memorandum) and stimulated debate and action in the sector that clarified the improvements required;

- the Committee’s scrutiny of problems in the dairy industry and subsequent report and debate led to the Scottish Government adopting the Committee’s recommendations and using them as the basis for its new Scottish Dairy Action Plan;

- the Committee’s pursuit of action, clarity and resolution on a number of agricultural issues, such as the implementation of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Scottish Government’s new IT system to deliver payments as well as the impacts of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003 Remedial Order 2014. The Committee was at the centre of the public debate on these two issues, with many land managers, farmers and crofters appealing to the Committee to intervene in difficult situations;

- the Committee’s approach to scrutiny of primary legislation resulted in bills being significantly altered and improved as a direct result of its work. On high profile bills such as those relating to aquaculture and fisheries, agricultural holdings and land reform (including community ownership) the Committee built up a bank of knowledge and experience via its many visits and extensive evidence gathering and also ensured that it had sufficient time at both Stages 1 and 2 to do justice to the issues;

- scrutiny of other significant Scottish Government documents, such as strategies relating to biodiversity and climate change adaptation and behaviour change; the National Marine Plan; and the Second Report on Proposals and Policies which led to changes being made to the final documents;

- the Committee’s quick and direct action on the proposed closure of a veterinary disease surveillance centre which resulted in a change of plans and the continuation existence of a centre; and

- the Committee also influenced the debate on issues such as the future and devolution of the management of the Crown Estate in Scotland (as part of the Scotland Bill process) and the monitoring and reporting on wildlife crime by holding annual evidence sessions.
EFFECTIVENESS CASE STUDY 1: AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES (SCOTLAND) BILL: The Committee was relatively new when it began its scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill in 2012 and many members were inexperienced in the details of the policy areas. The Committee therefore quickly acknowledged that it was on a steep learning curve and that it was essential that it developed its collective knowledge as quickly and effectively as possible. The Committee therefore decided to get out and meet with the people at the heart of the industries concerned, and travelled to visit fish farms, processing factories, salmon rivers and hatcheries, and spent time learning from those working in the sectors. The Committee timed the visits so that it then allowed better understanding of subsequent written evidence, and more useful oral evidence sessions as a result. By the end of the passage of the Bill the Committee’s improved collective knowledge and experience of the issues helped inform the amending stages of the Bill.

Figure 20 - Visit to Fort William fish farm
EFFECTIVENESS CASE STUDY 2: DEER MANAGEMENT: The Committee responded to reported difficulties in managing wild deer in Scotland by launching an inquiry in 2013. This inquiry was focussed on stimulating a step-change in the sector and alerting people to the significant challenges ahead. The Committee was clear at the outset that its aim was to gather evidence which could lead to clear and direct recommendations that would bring about change, not just led by the Scottish Government, but by agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and by the various parts of the deer sector in Scotland itself. The inquiry was extremely effective as it shone a spotlight on the sector and clarified what needed to be done and by what timescales. The Committee’s report led to the approach adopted in the subsequent Land Reform (Scotland) Bill and also acted as a benchmark for the Committee’s evidence-taking on the Bill, where it revisited the issue and strengthened its position based on the progress, or rather lack of progress, which had been made following the Committee’s original report. This led to amendments to the Bill which further strengthened the legislation and aligned it to the Committee’s evidence and views. The Committee led the way on deer management issues in the session and ensured that the correct tools were put in place to bring about real and necessary change.

21. The Committee worked by combining major pieces of work with short term inquiries, and by being flexible and agile in responding to quickly developing topical events. It ensured that inquiries were focussed and relatively short in timescale. The Committee also often reported its views to the Scottish Government by way of a letter, rather than the more traditional formal Committee report. It found this to sometimes be a more flexible and direct way of quickly and clearly concluding its views and recommendations on a particular piece of work and recommends this way of working to successor committees.

22. How a Committee presents details of its work is vitally important and often the best results were achieved through focused, direct recommendations for action via a letter. When a more formal report was required, the Committee achieved its best results when it came time to publish its report on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. The Committee ensured that the report included eye-catching infographics and photographs and that a glossy hard copy summary of the report was produced, which was also made available online in Gaelic. Successor committees should ensure that time is spent considering and agreeing the most effective ways of presenting the outcomes of its work in a format which is accessible to the widest audience possible.
Lessons learned and future challenges

Committee processes and procedures

23. The Committee has already noted some lessons learned above, in terms of its membership and approach to working. The Committee was very interested in the report on Committee Reform published by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on 19 January 2016 which reflects many of the RACCE Committee’s views on Committee membership.

24. This was the first time in the history of the Scottish Parliament that a single committee had been given the remit for rural affairs, climate change and environment issues. The Committee found it challenging to cover all of its remit and, despite being one of the hardest working committees in the session and covering a great deal of ground, there were sometimes parts of the Committee’s remit which it simply did not have time to explore, either at all or in detail.

25. The Committee hopes that serious thought is given in the next session to ensuring that the remit and responsibilities of committees are sufficiently matched by the time and resources needed to fully explore the subject areas. Careful thought should also be given as to how to best ensure robust scrutiny of climate change issues (with options including making this part of all relevant subject committee remits; having a dedicated climate change committee; or ensuring that climate issue are considered by the same committee that considers energy and/or infrastructure issues).

26. The Committee also struggled at times to find sufficient time to pursue self-generated inquiries and areas of interest as so much of its time was taken up with statutory requirements, such as the scrutiny of primary and secondary legislation; other Scottish Government policy documents; UK Government consent memoranda; petitions; and European matters.

27. Although the Committee adapted its working methods to try and respond to this challenge, committees in future are likely to face increased pressures in this regard (particularly with new areas of responsibility being devolved from Westminster) and may therefore need to find new and innovative ways of meeting this challenge. This could include making better use of committee reporters and/or considering whether sub committees (of say three members) should be established to consider specific issues.

28. The Committee also found it beneficial to engage in both pre and post legislative scrutiny on key topics which are likely to be much debated during the session. The Committee made sure that it undertook both pre and post legislative scrutiny on issues such as land reform and agricultural holdings given that both would feature so heavily throughout the session. This helped to ensure that the Committee was
sufficiently knowledgeable and aware of current issues when it came time to deal with new legislative proposals, which enhanced the effectiveness of its scrutiny.

29. Any successor committee may wish to consider at an early stage innovative ways of working, which could include use of reporters or possibly even sub-committees, to allow the Committee to balance its workload between referred work and self-initiated work, and to be able to explore all aspects of its remit satisfactorily.

30. Time should be found for both pre and post legislative scrutiny as both are extremely beneficial in the long-term and help to ensure that the legislation passed by the Parliament is as robust as possible and benefits from previous experience.

31. The Committee struggled at times to find its way through extremely polarised debates, especially where those debates became tit-for-tat exchanges rather than collaborative discussions of how to move forward in Scotland’s best interests in the given policy area.

32. Whilst understanding the strength of feeling across the areas covered in the Committee’s remit, it would be for the benefit of Scotland’s people for discussions to be positive, collaborative and constructive rather than sectors retreating to defensive and negative protection of their particular interest.

33. As the session went on the Committee made greater efforts to ensure that it took account of equalities, including health inequalities, human rights and sustainable development issues. It is important that the impacts of any proposed new policy or piece of legislation on these areas are carefully considered and not overlooked in order to ensure that full and robust scrutiny on behalf of all parts of Scottish society is delivered.

34. The Committee’s experience was that it was most effective to ensure that equalities, including health inequalities, human rights and sustainable development issues were considered at the start of every piece of work. This allows the Committee and its supporting officials to carefully consider potential impacts and/or unintended consequences on these areas and ensure that the subsequent scrutiny tests and addresses these important issues. It is recommended that successor committee continue this approach.

Budget scrutiny

35. The annual scrutiny of the Scottish Government's budget remains a challenge for committees in terms of how effective and meaningful scrutiny can be delivered.
The RACCE Committee took a variety of approaches to its scrutiny over the course of the session, including employing the assistance of an advisor; taking written evidence only; taking oral evidence from stakeholders and Government Ministers; and not seeking any evidence at all but reporting based on its recent and historic work. However, all of these approaches ended with the Committee reporting to the Finance Committee, which then published its own report to Parliament which often did not include many, if any, of the points raised by the Committee. It is also interesting to note that the Scottish Government’s draft budget has never been altered as a result of a committee’s inquiries or recommendations.

36. The Committee was responsible for two notable changes/additions to the budget process in this session. As a result of an early recommendation by the Committee, the Scottish Government started to produce a document which showed spending on climate change issues across all portfolios more clearly. This was a welcome development and the Committee very much hopes it will continue in the next session. However, despite repeated calls for the information to be produced in time for committees to be able to make meaningful use of it, the Government continued to publish the document considerably after the publication of the budget and its associated documents. Hopefully, this can be improved in the next session to ensure appropriate rigorous scrutiny of a very important issue.

37. The other initiative of the Committee was to try and mainstream consideration of climate change issues across all relevant subject committees. The Committee quickly realised at the start of this session that it would not be able to effectively scrutinise all of the Scottish Government’s spending that impacts climate change, given that there is spending across the remit’s of many other committees. It was also clear that the Scottish Government and many public bodies were starting to understand that to tackle climate change challenges effectively requires joined-up thinking and strong inter-departmental discussion and response.

38. Whilst several committees did make some efforts to positively engage with the mainstreaming exercise, and also whilst acknowledging that committees often have heavy workloads and multiple competing priorities (particularly during the short time available for budget scrutiny) it is clear that improvements need to be made in terms of committees engagement with climate change issues.

39. On 8 February 2016 the Committee received a briefing from COSLA on the local government settlement for 2016/17. Whilst a generic briefing for all committees, the version sent to RACCE included some comment specific to its remit, stating that the Committee may wish to consider the impact of the local government settlement on the delivery of climate change targets.
40. Whilst thanking those who advised the Committee in this session, for the first two years of budget scrutiny, the Committee is not convinced that employing the services of such an advisor is the best use of resources given the likely outcome of the process.

41. The Committee is also not convinced that the budget process as traditionally operated delivers sufficient outcomes relevant to the amount of time and effort the Committee (and stakeholders) spends on the issue. Successor committees should think carefully about how to approach scrutiny of the draft budget in a way that can make a genuine difference and be of real value and does not simply detract from time which could be spent on other issues which may deliver greater outcomes.

42. The failure of some relevant committees in the Parliament to meaningfully engage with climate change issues in the budget process was one of the more disappointing aspects of the session. The Committee does not regret initiating and championing the mainstreaming and hopes that a successor committee continues with it. However, there is clearly work to be done to get the message of the importance of the work across to other committees and members and to stimulate a step-change across the Parliament in the next session.

43. Future committees may wish to consider the issues raised by COSLA regarding the impacts of the local government settlement as part of any future work on the budget, in terms of the impact of cuts on rural communities and/or climate change. Consideration could also be given to other related issues and their impact on rural Scotland, such as the future of the Council Tax and local government funding of rural communities in general.

Cross-Committee scrutiny

44. The Committee learned a great deal from two experiences of cross-committee working in this session. Firstly, and as noted in the case study below, the Committee joined forces with three other committees to scrutinise the Scottish Government’s Second Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP2) climate change document. The same four committees repeated the approach to a large extent when they scrutinised the Scottish Government’s Third National Planning Framework (NPF3).
CROSS-COMMITTEE WORKING CASE STUDY: RPP2: In advance of the Scottish Government publishing RPP2, a document which would set out how the Government intended meeting its climate change targets, lessons were learned from the scrutiny of RPP1 in session 3. RACCE developed and then led a new process which saw four committees join forces to scrutinise the document. Given that it was the first time such coordinated scrutiny by four committees had ever been attempted, the process worked remarkably well, and saw innovations such as a chamber debate on a motion lodged by all four conveners, on behalf of all four committees, with speaking times for each Convener in the debate. The four committees also collaborated on the call for views, managing of written and oral evidence and reporting.

45. The Committee’s experience of cross-committee working in the session (mainstreaming of climate issues in the budget aside) was largely a positive one. The best examples of this, seen in the scrutiny of both RPP2 and NPF3, saw four committees working innovatively and constructively together to avoid repetitions and/or duplication of effort and maximising the Parliament’s scrutiny of two very important documents (which would agree the approaches to both tackling climate change and planning respectively). Successor committees should look to collaborate with other committees on a case-by-case basis as there are likely to be times when doing so would be hugely beneficial to the Parliament in terms of delivering beneficial and effective scrutiny.

European issues

46. Following changes to the Parliament’s approach to scrutinising EU issues, the Committee followed the new European Strategy by annually agreeing specific EU priorities; considering and reporting on any European document on which the Scottish Government raised subsidiarity concerns (the procedure for this was changed mid-session so that committees were no longer required to follow a set procedure but had more flexibility); and appointing an EU reporter. The Committee had two EU reporters during the session, Aileen McLeod and Jim Hume.

47. The Committee’s experience was that, as much of its work had a naturally strong EU focus it did not need a process designed to ensure that EU issues were not overlooked. The Committee began the session by intending to travel to Brussels and, whilst the EU Reporter did visit Brussels on one occasion, the Committee unfortunately did not find time in its schedule to undertake the visit.
48. The Committee was supportive of the amendment to Standing Orders which gave committees more flexibility in approaching how to handle subsidiarity issues. The Committee is also supportive of the EU Reporter model in principle. However, the Committee believes that there should be flexibility in the approach to EU matters, rather than it being process heavy and driven, depending on the issues at hand. Much of the RACCE Committee’s work originated in EU legislation, such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, and it was therefore part of the Committee’s work in any case. This will inevitably continue to be the case for its successor(s).

49. The Committee recommends that successor committees consider the merits of visiting the EU institutions in Brussels early in the next session to build contacts and gather information which could underpin work throughout the session. It is also recommended that committees, perhaps via their EU Reporters, regularly monitor and interact with the EU institutions.

Subordinate legislation

50. The Committee had issues with the quality of drafting of subordinate legislation throughout this session. The Committee raised this issue with the Scottish Government on more than one occasion and, despite occasional short-lived improvements, the examples of poor quality drafting have continued. The Committee saw countless examples of instruments being withdrawn and re-laid (sometime multiple times) or subsequently corrected due to drafting errors. Not only does this negatively impact on the Committee’s work schedule and time available for other work, it also does not help improve the accessibility and transparency surrounding secondary legislation and its scrutiny, and affects public confidence in legislation and the legislature.

51. The Committee was disappointed by the not infrequent drafting errors which led to instruments being either revoked or subsequently amended. The Committee wrote to the Scottish Government on this several times and yet saw no consistent improvement of quality. This led to time being taken in Committee which could have been avoided. The Committee hopes that the Scottish Government takes steps in the next session to greatly improve the drafting of subordinate legislation and also its communication with committees regarding the timetabling and effects of secondary legislation.

Media

52. The Committee established and maintained a strong media presence in this session, including national and regional print and broadcast media, and online and social media, which was aided by the Committee’s decision to hold topical
focussed inquiries and to often conclude by writing clear, direct and concise letters to the Scottish Government.

53. As the session went on, the Committee began to consider its approach to the media aspects of each piece of work more strategically at the outset, as part its consideration of its overall approach. This proved to be more effective than later consideration of such issues, and enabled the Committee to integrate its desired media approach and outcomes into each piece of work from the outset.

54. In particular, the Committee’s work on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, and its letters to the Scottish Government following inquiries into climate change issues, wildlife crime and the dairy industry, delivered excellent media results. The visits the Committee conducted on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, focussing on issues of local interest, resulted in very strong local and national media coverage, which were aided by initiatives such as Convener authored articles and resulted in the live streaming of one external meeting and targeted coverage from BBC Radio Scotland’s Out of Doors and the BBC’s Landward programme. Successful coverage of the other pieces of work were achieved by initiatives such as negotiating a media exclusive with the environment correspondent of a leading Sunday newspaper followed up by a wider news announcement.

55. The Committee also tried several other new approaches (each on one occasion) including—

- giving selected media an advanced embargoed copy of a report in advance of a press briefing with invited journalists;
- launching a report visually with a photocall; and
- issuing region specific media releases on behalf of individual members of the Committee, in addition to a general release in the Convener’s name.
56. It is advised that future committees give strategic consideration to media issues at the start of each piece of work in order to agree objectives, target audiences, target media, potential key messages and desired outcomes.

57. Future committees may wish to consider experimenting with new and innovative ways of engaging with the media in all its forms. Reflecting on the Committee’s experiences, before arranging media briefings or conferences careful thought should be given to what the purpose and desired outcome of any such event is.

Issues/priorities for future consideration

58. The Committee held an evidence session on 9 March 2016 at which 15 individuals and organisations that have engaged with the Committee throughout the session took part in two roundtable discussions about possible priorities for the years ahead. Those who took part were also given the opportunity to send in advance up to five bullet points of the priority issues as they saw them (and obviously pertaining in the main to their particular areas of interest). These were published together with other submissions received from organisations to inform the Committee’s legacy process.\(^5\)

59. It is worth noting that any successor committees are likely to still be in place in 2020 which is a milestone year for several targets and measurements of progress, including: EU biodiversity targets; various EU 7th Environmental Action Programme (EAP) objectives; the first review of EU air pollution targets; and the Scottish Government’s interim climate change target (of at least 42% emissions reductions). 2020 also sees the final year of the current CAP and SRDP. These milestones may give successor committees a steer in terms of focussing and prioritising work in the next session.

60. It is also the view of the Committee that future committees should ensure that issues are not considered in isolation and that the integrated nature of land and marine use is fully considered and recognised.

61. It should also be noted that it would be strongly advisable for successor committee’s work to be underpinned by reference to the sustainable development and climate change goals agreed and adopted by the United Nations.

62. Following the discussions on 9 March, and given the Committee’s work throughout the session and knowledge of issues which are likely to be to the fore in the months and years ahead, the Committee highlights the following issues to any successor committees.
Petitions

63. The Committee has one petition still open: Petition PE01490 by Patrick Krause on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation, on the control of wild goose numbers (lodged 2 September 2013). It is recommended that a successor committee continues to scrutinise this petition by examining the outcomes of the review of wild goose management by Scottish Natural Heritage and continuing to press the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish Natural Heritage has the required levels of funding for goose management schemes.

Rural affairs

Agriculture and crofting

64. The Committee spent a great deal of time scrutinising agricultural policy, including the development and implementation of the new CAP (which included significant changes to both pillar 1 and pillar 2), the future of the tenancy sector, and close examination of the Scottish dairy sector. The Committee would recommend that any successor committee continues to monitor and scrutinise these issues at the start of the next session, particularly in relation to very time specific shorter term issues, such as the agricultural holdings remedial order mediation, problems with the new CAP IT system and delivery of payments, and also issues such as the future of the dairy sector.

65. Successor committees may also wish to pay particular attention to the European Commission’s review of greening, the review of the CAP convergence dividend, and the move from Less Favoured Area payments to Areas of Natural Constraint payments. Later in the year, 2016 will also see a mid-term review of the EU budget and an opportunity to simplify the CAP. Discussions at an EU level about the future of the CAP post 2020 are set to begin as early as 2017 and, as the Committee has seen with the difficulties in implementing the last CAP agreement, it is important to try and influence those discussions as early as possible.

66. The EU is also developing a long-term strategy for agricultural research and innovation, which it is expected will be published in April 2016. The strategy will focus on how investments can be made to support three objectives: ensuring long term food security; addressing the environmental sustainability and resilience of land-based primary production (food and non-food systems); and boosting the sustainable growth of rural areas. All of these priority areas are likely to be broad themes which successor committees will wish to engage with.

67. It seems likely, from the debate surrounding the agricultural holdings parts of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill that further legislation will come forward in the next session relating to agricultural holdings. The Scottish Government has indicated its intention to consult on the issue of tenanted small landholdings later in 2016 which could lead to legislation being brought forward. The Government has also stated that it is going to research farm housing issues with a view to then consulting and possibly bringing forward legislative changes. The next session will
also see the establishment of a new Tenant Farming Commissioner, as part of the new Scottish Land Commission, and a new committee may wish to pay close attention to the work of the new commissioner.

68. A future committee may also wish to consider the future of agriculture in Scotland in the round, scrutinising documents such as the Scottish Government’s discussion documents *The Future of Scottish Agriculture and Becoming a Good Food Nation*. This could encompass consideration of many key areas, such as food production and security, the concept of public money for public goods, supply chains, exports and markets, and food poverty and quality.

69. Much of this session saw discussion and debate on the future of crofting law, stimulated by the Crofting Sump, a gathering of crofting experts who published a report on possible options for future change. Future committees may wish to engage on crofting issues such as the support crofting receives from the CAP, the affordability and provision of croft housing, and the availability of crofts.

70. In scrutinising both agricultural holdings and crofting law in this session it is clear to the Committee that serious consideration must be given to consolidating and, perhaps more importantly, codifying and simplifying the law in these areas as a priority.

**Forestry**

71. The Committee scrutinised forestry issues as part of its land use, budget, and climate change work. Throughout the Committee remained concerned that the annual tree planting targets set by the Scottish Government were not met at any point in the session and retained reservations as to whether the budget for the Forestry Commission was sufficient and also whether there were sufficient measures in place to resolve competing land uses. A successor committee may wish to continue to pay close attention to tree planting rates in the coming years, and particularly when considering RPP3. It would also be useful for a successor committee to examine the role of communities in forestry.

**Fisheries**

72. With regard to fisheries issues, the impacts of the implementation of the National Marine Plan and the establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas on sea fisheries; reviewing the effectiveness of the current Common Fisheries Policy (particularly the discards ban); the management of Scottish fish quotas; and the expected review of wild fisheries are among the key issues a new committee may wish to examine.

73. On 8 February 2016 the Scottish Government launched a consultation on a draft Wild Fisheries (Scotland) Bill and a new Wild Fisheries Strategy. The closing date for responses is 2 May 2016 so scrutiny of both a Bill and a strategy seem likely to take up a significant proportion of a successor committee’s time.
74. At its last meeting of the session, on 9 March 2016, the Committee considered SSIs relating to the conservation of salmon stocks in Scotland. At that meeting the Cabinet Secretary gave a commitment to report to the successor committee before the summer recess in 2016, setting out a timetable for moving to a river-by-river system and for considering re-categorisation of individual rivers. It is recommended that the successor committee scrutinises this report closely.

Rural development, communities and economies

75. The SRUC launched some very interesting work in this session, led by Professor Sarah Skerratt, the Director of the SRUC Rural Policy Centre, entitled “Rural Scotland in Focus”. The first report was published in 2010, with plans to publish every two year. The next report is due to be published on 7 June 2016.

76. The report provides a fascinating combination of both evidence and commentary regarding rural Scotland, presenting facts and analysis. The timing of the new report in 2016 would seem ideal for new committees to use in terms of information and knowledge gathering, and in setting initial work programmes.

77. Future committees may also wish to examine crucial related rural issues, such as the depopulation of rural areas and how to improve local democracy and decision-making.

78. The Scottish Government has also noted its intention to bring forward an Islands Bill in the next session to further empower Scotland’s island communities and future committees may have a role in scrutinising that bill.

Rural broadband

79. The Committee scrutinised the roll out and quality of rural broadband through its budget scrutiny throughout the session. Broadband provision and speed is absolutely vital to ensuring the survival and sustainability of Scotland’s remote and rural communities and it is clear that the current provisions and speeds are nowhere near acceptable levels. The Committee therefore recommends continued scrutiny of this important issue.

Land reform

80. The implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, with all of its constituent parts relating to transparency, communities, sporting rates, deer management, and agricultural holdings, will need to be carefully monitored and scrutinised to ensure that the effect of the provisions is as the Parliament wants and expects. The next session will see the establishment of the new Scottish Land Commission. This Committee made several recommendations in terms of the approach of that Commission, and there are various duties imposed on it by the legislation in terms of consultation and Parliamentary involvement in its working processes and delivery. A new committee is therefore likely to be heavily engaged in scrutinising the work of the new Commission.
Land Use Strategy

81. The Scottish Government’s first Land Use Strategy was published in March 2011, just before the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections. The strategy was intended to initiate a step change towards a more integrated and strategic approach to land use. It is a requirement of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 that the Strategy be reviewed every five years and that a revised Strategy is laid before the Scottish Parliament.

82. The Scottish Government has published a consultation draft Land Use Strategy 2016-2021 which is intended to build on the first Strategy and retains the strategic vision, objectives and principles for sustainable land use. The consultation closed at the end of January 2016 and the Scottish Government intends to analyse responses before bringing forward a final Land Use Strategy 2016-2021 which will be published shortly before dissolution. As the publication of the strategy documents has fallen very close to the dissolution of parliament there has not yet been a thorough scrutiny of the document by a parliamentary committee. Therefore, a new committee may wish to prioritise engagement on the new strategy for 2016-2021. The next Scottish Government may also which to consider whether it is appropriate for such a significant document to continue to be laid in Parliament just a few days before dissolution.

Scottish Rural Parliament

83. The Committee monitored the progress and work of the Scottish Rural Parliament and held an informal briefing with the group’s secretariat. It is perhaps too early to determine whether the purpose of the group is suitably clear and how effective it can be in terms of debate and influencing policy. It is also not clear how the group can or should interact with the Scottish Parliament and its rural affairs committee in particular. The next full meeting of the group is in October 2016 in Angus and Brechin City.

Scotland’s Rural College

84. The Committee spent time towards the end of the session scrutinising the governance and management of Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) following some serious concerns raised with the Committee. The Committee followed up evidence taking on the issue by writing to the SRUC and received a response on 5 February 2016 which it discussed on 24 February 2016, agreeing to write again to the SRUC and also to the Scottish Government.

85. The Committee was clear in its most recent letter to the SRUC that it is vital that it appoints a new Principle/Chief Executive as soon as possible, and that that person quickly works to establish a clear and deliverable strategic vision and plan for the organisation. It is important that scrutiny of the future of the SRUC remains at the forefront and the Committee therefore encourages a successor committee to maintain close scrutiny and monitoring of the governance and management of the SRUC in the months and years ahead.
Crown Estate

86. The Committee held annual evidence sessions with the Crown Estate in Scotland and also scrutinised the devolution of the management of the Crown Estate to Scotland as part of the UK Scotland Bill in collaboration with the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee. On 8 February 2016 the Devolution (Further Powers) (DFP) Committee wrote to the UK Government, the Scottish Government and the Crown Estate, asking a series of questions regarding the planned devolution for the management and revenues of the Crown Estate in Scotland, including consideration of the draft Memorandum of Understanding and the transfer scheme. The DFP Committee received and published responses to all three of those letters in late February 2016. The most recent letter from HM Treasury confirmed that both the MOU and the transfer scheme require to be agreed with the Scottish Government (which will likely take place after the election) before a statutory instrument is brought forward in the UK Parliament.

87. Over the coming months, and should the Scotland Bill be passed, successor committees may wish to monitor and potentially scrutinise the devolution process and the management of the newly devolved Scottish Crown Estate, including any further devolution to local authorities and others.

Climate change

Process and mainstreaming

88. Notwithstanding the challenges of scrutinising climate issues in the budget, it is clear to the Committee that, particularly given the global climate agreement achieved at the UNFCCC COP21 climate conference in December 2015 there needs to be a wider mainstreaming of climate issues across committees, and that committees take responsibility for scrutinising climate impacts within their respective remits.

Third Report on Proposals and Policies and delivery of climate change targets

89. In this session the first four annual climate change targets were not met for various reasons (including changes to the baseline data and challenging weather conditions) and the scrutiny of the progress being made to meet the emissions targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 will continue to be an issue for future committees, as will scrutiny of the leading strategies which underpin the delivery of the targets, including the next National Planning Framework and RPP3 (see below). The Committee on Climate Change is also expected to shortly advise the Scottish Government on the next set of greenhouse gas annual targets which will no doubt be of interest to future committees.

90. The next session will see the publication of the Scottish Government’s Third Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP3). The Committee scrutinised RPP2 earlier in this session in an approach detailed elsewhere in this report. The Committee believes that collaborative working between all committees with a
significant stake in climate change policies is essential if robust scrutiny of RPP3 is to be delivered by the Parliament.

Public sector reporting

91. The Committee also considered the duty on public sector bodies to report on emissions. Shortly before the end of the session the Committee wrote to all the bodies named on the recent order to ask for an update on their progress to date and plans for complying with the new requirements. 67 responses were received and published. The Committee also had an observer position (filled by Claudia Beamish) on the Scottish Government led Public Sector Climate Leaders Forum. However, the Minister wrote to members of the Group, copied to the Committee, in February 2016, to stand the group down and confirm that work will be taken forward in future by the Scottish leaders Forum. In her letter, the Minister states—

"I am of the view that more than ever at this time, climate change needs to be embedded and mainstreamed on all that we do."

92. The Committee couldn’t agree more with the Minister’s comments and calls on all relevant committees in the next session to scrutinise public sector emissions.

Adaptation

93. The Committee scrutinised the development of Scotland’s first statutory Climate Change Adaptation Programme and the Scottish Government is required to publish an annual update on the progress being made in implementing it. The Committee on Climate Change is also due to publish its first independent assessment of progress being made later in 2016. Therefore a successor committee may wish to consider any issues raised by the review and the annual progress report.

94. Later in 2016, the Committee on Climate Change is also due to publish its next climate change risk assessment. This will consider the risks and opportunities in the UK associated with climate change and may also be a document that successor committees may wish to scrutinise further.

Electric vehicle charging points

95. Following a visit to Orkney wrote to Orkney Islands Council for details on when electric vehicle charging points would be operational at the ferry terminal at Tingwall. The Committee was keen for Orkney Council to update it once this work has been completed and would ask its successor committee to follow-up on this issue. Subsequently, on 27 January 2016, the Minister for Transport and Islands wrote to the Committee with an update on the provision of electric vehicle rapid charging points. In that the Minister confirmed that the ChargePlace Scotland network operator (which covers around 95% of the current infrastructure) is going through a tendering process and may change in the next nine months. The Committee would welcome a successor committee asking for updates from the
Scottish Government on this issue, and to ensure that the network continues to improve issues such as ensuring that online information is kept up to date.

Environment

Marine

96. In terms of marine issues, the implementation of the National Marine Plan and the establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas are likely to remain key issues for a new committee to examine. The process which finally led to the Committee supporting the establishment of a network of MPAs in Scotland’s waters was hotly contested and far from ideal. As a result of this, and concerns which remained about the impacts of MPAs once in place amongst stakeholders and the Committee and Parliament, the Cabinet Secretary committed to providing Parliament with a progress report about MPA impacts before the end of 2016. The Committee would strongly advise that its successor committee pays close attention to that progress report, perhaps taking evidence from those involved and affected. It is also likely that early in the next Parliament there may be management measures brought forward for a second tranche of MPAs. The Scottish Government is also negotiating management measures for offshore MPAs with other Member States as part of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Agencies and NDPBs

97. Whilst the Committee managed some scrutiny of Scottish Government agencies, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the National Park Authorities, through evidence sessions, informal briefings and budget scrutiny, there has not been an in-depth consideration of the purpose, structure and performance of these bodies for some time. The start of a new session may provide the ideal time to consider these issues.

Air quality and pollution

98. Some elements of the environment part of the Committee’s brief did not receive as much scrutiny as the Committee would have liked during the session due to competing pressures, and the Committee would therefore recommend that a successor environment committee prioritise scrutiny of urban environment issues such as air and water quality and pollution.

99. On 24 February the Committee considered and supported an SSI on air quality which emphasised the need for future committees to consider reviewing the air quality plans that local authorities have in place.

Flooding

100. The Committee scrutinised flooding issues through its budget scrutiny throughout the session and would recommend continued scrutiny of this issue, perhaps via a stand-alone inquiry or collaborative work with other committees (such as those covering local government issues).
Waste and circular economy

101. The Committee examined the opportunities for Scotland to improve its recycling and use of waste and move towards a more circular economy. At an EU level, there are both circular economy and waste packages due to enter co-decision later in 2016, with a circular economy monitoring framework scheduled for discussion in 2017. Following a consultation, the Scottish Government published its first Circular Economy Strategy in February 2016. The Committee did not have time to scrutinise the strategy and it is recommend that successor committees examine the contents and potential impacts of the strategy closely.

102. At the end of the session the Committee became aware that the UK Government had some subsidiarity concerns relating to the associated waste legislation. The Scottish Government was asked for a view but, at the time this report was agreed, is still considering the matter. A future committee may wish to follow up on this potential subsidiarity issue.

103. A future committee may also wish to monitor progress towards forthcoming Scottish Government waste targets, including those to: reduce waste arising by 7% by 2017 and 15% by 2025 (compared to 2011); to achieve recycling/composting/reuse of 60% of household waste by 2020; to send no more than 5% of all waste to landfill by 2025; and to recycle/compost/preparing for re-use 70% of all waste by 2025.

Animal welfare

104. The Committee would welcome continued scrutiny of the issues surrounding the provision and resourcing of veterinary surveillance laboratories.

105. With regards to animal welfare, there are two issues which may require attention from a successor committee: use of electronic training devices for cats and dogs and tail docking of working dogs. On the latter issue, the Scottish Government published a consultation document, Proposal to permit tail docking of working Spaniels and Hunt Point Retrievers, on 10 February 2016 with a closing date set for submissions of 3 May 2016. The consultation states that legislation on the issue could come forward in 2017.

Wildlife crime

106. Another issue the Committee prioritised was that of wildlife crime with the Committee holding annual evidence sessions on the issue which involved taking evidence from the Minister, Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. It will be for future committees of course to decide their approach to wildlife crime issues, but it may be time to widen the evidence sessions out on this issue to include other stakeholders involved in the prevention and investigation of wildlife crime. It may also be interesting to spend time out in the field with wildlife crime officers.
107. There is also a Scottish Government initiated review, led by Lord Bonomy, around hunting with dogs and whether the current legislation provides the necessary level of protection for foxes and other wild mammals while allowing for the effective and humane control of these animals where required. The Committee drew the attention of the review to its most recent work and letter to the Scottish Government on wildlife crime. This could be a significant issue in the next session and one which a successor committee may wish to scrutinise in detail.

108. In February 2016 the Scottish Government responded to the recommendations made in the Wildlife Crime Penalties Review Report, which resulted from a review led by Professor Mark Poustie of the University of Strathclyde. The Government’s response indicates a number of areas which it intends to progress in the next session of Parliament and which a successor committee may wish to engage on.

**Biodiversity (including species management and habitats)**

109. The Committee did a great deal of work in this session on biodiversity issues, including scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s biodiversity strategy, and pieces of work on related issues such as the management of both wild deer and geese populations, and continued monitoring of issues relating to Invasive and Non-Native Species (INNS).

110. These issues are medium to long term in terms of improving progress and outcomes and any successor committee may wish to keep a watching brief on them. In relation to deer management, and following agreement of the provisions in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage are committed to completing a review of deer management in 2016 in time for any necessary action to be taken by the end of the year. It is recommended that a successor committee pays close attention to this to ensure that the processes and progress initiated by this Committee are developed further and robustly scrutinised.

**Neonicotinoid pesticides**

111. The Committee scrutinised the position with regard to the restrictions on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides throughout the session and received its last update on the issue from the Scottish Government on 5 February 2016. The letter confirms that the EU is currently reviewing the current neonicotinoid restrictions and that the European Food Safety Authority will publish its conclusions by the end of January 2017. A future committee may wish to consider the conclusions by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Commission.

**EU Nature Directives**

112. Another key issue in the next session is likely to be the EU’s plans to reform the Birds and Habitats directives (known collectively as the Nature Directives). The European Commission has recently consulted on this and a successor committee may wish to pay close attention to this issue. The nature directives have strong
links to several issues the Committee looked at in this session, such as biodiversity, species management, and the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy.

1 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Annual Reports 2012-2015.
2 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, Official Report, 2 March 2016.
3 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, Legacy Process
5 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Written submissions on legacy issues.
6 SRUC. Rural Scotland in Focus.
7 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, public sector climate reporting responses.