



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Tuesday 21 May 2019

Session 5



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**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE
17th Meeting 2019, Session 5**

CONVENER

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Roseanna Cunningham (Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform)

Sara Grainger (Scottish Government)

Dr Tom Russon (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Tuesday 21 May 2019

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 2

The Convener (Gillian Martin): Welcome to the 17th meeting in 2019 of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee. I remind everyone to put their phones on silent or switch them off, as they may affect the broadcasting system.

Under agenda item 1, the committee will take further evidence on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2. I am delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham. She is accompanied by Dr Tom Russon, legislation team leader, and Sara Grainger, team leader, delivery unit, both from the decarbonisation division of the Scottish Government; and by Norman Munro, solicitor, from the Scottish Government legal directorate. Good morning to you all.

There have been some key developments since we last spoke to you, cabinet secretary. The First Minister has declared a climate emergency and, of course, we have the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change's report and recommendations. As we expected, transformational change will be needed. Is the Scottish Government currently structured to deliver the transformational change that the climate emergency that we face requires?

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Obviously, we are committed to doing what is needed to limit global temperature rises, and that will have to be done responsibly in collaboration with people and Parliament.

In the statement that I made in Parliament on 14 May, I said that climate change is intended to be at the heart of the next programme for government and the next spending review. However, decisions on whole-Government action are ultimately taken by the Cabinet. That will continue, with both the Cabinet and the Cabinet sub-committee on climate change having key roles in deciding our approach.

On the overall structures of Government, such matters are for the First Minister to decide. Members will be aware that, when new Cabinets are appointed, sometimes portfolio responsibilities are changed around and issues are put into different portfolios. That is entirely a matter for the First Minister, and I will not venture into that area, because it is not for me to make those decisions.

The Convener: What immediate actions is the Government taking to address the climate emergency that has been announced?

Roseanna Cunningham: At the risk of rehearsing the statement that I made to Parliament on 14 May—I remind the committee that we are therefore in the very early weeks—I can say that the first step was to lodge the amendments to the targets in the bill, which we did on the day that we received the advice. Those amendments are in keeping with the Committee on Climate Change's recommendations and we have accepted the CCC's recommendations to update the climate change plan within six months of the bill receiving royal assent. We have already announced actions on agriculture, renewables and a deposit return scheme, and we have said that there will be a change to the policy on air departure tax.

We are now looking across the whole of Government to ensure that the policies that are already in place are working, to increase action where necessary and where possible and to identify whether there are areas in which we can take much quicker action. Over the summer, there will be a programme of engagement with the public. A central part of the work is about ensuring that the public are on board when we begin to talk about specific policies that might be required.

The Convener: After receiving the CCC's advice, one of the first things that you did was to contact Claire Perry, from the United Kingdom Government. Have you received a response to the letter asking for a meeting with her?

Roseanna Cunningham: There has been a response from the Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth, but it did not answer any of our questions in any meaningful way. This morning, we have sent back a letter, requesting that the points that were made in the original letter be addressed. We are seeking an urgent meeting to discuss ways in which Westminster and Holyrood can work together. We will also need to work with Cardiff, given that all the targets within the UK are linked. We were given a proposed target of net zero emissions by 2045, but the Committee on Climate Change's advice was explicit that meeting that target would necessitate changes taking place at Westminster level. Our ability to achieve the target is dependent on Westminster doing what is

necessary, which is why I need to speak to the UK Government urgently.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): In essence, the bill is about changing the numbers in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which includes quite a lot of policy initiatives and requirements. Given that you have said that tackling climate change will be at the heart of the next spending review and programme for government, will part of the work for which you will have responsibility be to look at how well we are doing against other parts of the 2009 act, besides simply the numbers?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are already doing some of that work. For example, we are reviewing public bodies' reporting duties, as set out under the 2009 act. However, I do not believe that changes to the act's provisions on climate change adaptation, for example, would be particularly helpful at the moment. We are looking at the aspects of the 2009 act that are appropriate to consider, but we are not looking at it overall. We are re-legislating on the targets, and some other aspects of the act are under review, but we are not looking at the whole 2009 act; some parts of it remain relevant. If necessary, we will go back and do that, but we do not have that planned at the moment.

Stewart Stevenson: The whole thrust of what the Government is trying to do is mainstreaming. Other questions will cover how ministers will respond to that, so I am not asking about that. However, there are policies in the 2009 act—two that I take at random, which I guess lie with Derek Mackay, as finance secretary, are local rates and business rates, but there are other examples—that lie in other areas of responsibility. Are you aware of resources being devoted to looking at parts of the 2009 act that are relevant to other ministers?

Roseanna Cunningham: I recently delivered a statement in Parliament about a huge initiative, which is deposit return. That was flagged up in the 2009 act and so we have been able to use the act's provisions to introduce deposit return by secondary rather than primary legislation. Therefore, things are already being taken forward across a whole range of responsibilities, by looking at what is working and increasing action where that is necessary. Looking at resourcing across the piece is part and parcel of the exercise that we have to conduct now, given the recently changed circumstances. I understand that good work is happening with regard to housing, but I am less across the detail of other people's portfolios.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The Cabinet sub-committee on climate change seems one of the Government's main ways to build that collective responsibility. How many times has it met in the past year?

Roseanna Cunningham: The sub-committee meets as and when necessary. Off the top of my head, I cannot remember how many times it has met in the past year. It met in the past few weeks because of the advent of stage 2 and the amendment process. It is a business committee, not a sitting-around-chewing-the-fat committee. I do not want people to misunderstand its reality. It does not have a regular scheduled programme of meetings as if it was the Cabinet; it meets as and when is necessary in order to take decisions that the Cabinet has delegated to it.

Mark Ruskell: With regard to the bill, have budgets or policies in other Cabinet ministers' portfolios been discussed at sub-committee meetings or changed as a result of such discussions?

Roseanna Cunningham: The most recent meeting was about what could reasonably be expected at stage 2 of the bill, and portfolios were represented. Previous meetings have discussed a range of things, particularly in the early stages of developing the climate change plan and throughout the process for that, with discussions about what was considered to be more or less achievable from portfolio perspectives. That is an important part of the discussion because I am not able to make decisions on behalf of other cabinet secretaries; they need to come to advise on whether a potential target in their specific area is or is not achievable. That is the kind of discussion that happens; it can be wide ranging or narrow, depending on the point at which the meeting is held and its purpose. As I have said, the meetings are not regular discussion meetings; they are called to deal with specific issues.

Mark Ruskell: Is the sub-committee now working on the First Minister's policy review that she announced a couple of weeks ago? How can Parliament scrutinise—

Roseanna Cunningham: No; cabinet secretaries and senior officials in portfolios are working on that, but it is not the kind of thing that the Cabinet sub-committee works on. At this stage, the policy review is a matter for relevant cabinet secretaries, ministers and their senior officials to take forward. At the point at which all of that starts to come in, there will be a decision about whether another Cabinet sub-committee is required, or whether the issue is one that should be dealt with by the full Cabinet. Those are not my decisions, however.

09:45

Mark Ruskell: How does Parliament deal with the outcome of the discussions? With due respect, when I ask you a question about a budget in the chamber, you are not able to answer it. That

presents a challenge to Parliament in terms of our ability to scrutinise the joined-up discussions around policy that are taking place.

Roseanna Cunningham: As far as I am concerned, you can ask to speak to any cabinet secretary and, if you have specific questions, they will answer them. You have had Derek Mackay and Michael Russell here, and I think that you have had Fergus Ewing here, too. You have the capacity to ask extremely detailed policy questions of cabinet secretaries. If you ask such questions of me without giving me advance notice, I will be able to give you some information, but I will not be able to give you the level of information about some subjects that my colleagues could give you, because I am not the cabinet secretary for everything.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): You referred to the deposit return scheme as an example of what was in the 2009 act. That act enabled the introduction of secondary legislation for the proposal, which is one that my colleagues and I support. Do you agree that there is a case for putting down policy markers in a similar way in the bill that we are scrutinising at the moment?

Roseanna Cunningham: That is a matter for the parties to think about. We will be thinking about other things that we want to include at stage 2; I am aware that other people will have other ideas. I was not directly involved in the negotiations on what was included in the 2009 act, so I cannot speak to that. It will be for members to decide whether a matter is an appropriate one to introduce at stage 2.

On the deposit return scheme, the 2009 legislation did not mandate that there would be one. Rather, it included an opening for one to be established if that was considered, at some point, to be appropriate. A lot of work has been done on the deposit return scheme, and it has been discussed over a long time. The proposal will, probably, have benefited from having been given space in which to develop.

The Government's perspective is that we set out our belief that the bill should, in response to the Paris agreement, be about focusing on the targets. I do not believe that we need to start all over again with regard to the 2009 act. The bill does not repeal that legislation; it changes the targets, which is a different—

Claudia Beamish: I am sorry if that was the implication of what I said; that was not what I was trying to say.

Roseanna Cunningham: Our hope was that people would get on with the bill, in terms of the targets, because it is important that we do that right now. My view is that the climate change plan is probably the best place to deal with individual

delivery mechanisms. As we have already indicated, we are prepared to update the climate change plan within six months of royal assent. That will be the appropriate point at which to discuss all that.

Stewart Stevenson: As we reflected in our report, during our discussions on the bill, committee members were somewhat exercised by the integrated MARKAL-EFOM system—TIMES—model, which the Government has been using. In its response to our report, the Government said that it is working to improve the consistency with which sectors are dealt with by that model. I make the observation that quite a lot of the issues that we had with use of the model concerned the fact that it does not properly address agriculture. John Scott and I will return to agriculture later, so I will not specifically target it at the moment.

The Committee on Climate Change has developed its own scenario and sectoral analyses—essentially, its own multiple models. What is the Government's position on its future use of models? Will you seek to access the CCC's models—if it is correct to describe them as "models", I hasten to add—or will you persist in using the TIMES model, even though the committee has expressed concerns about gaps in its coverage?

Roseanna Cunningham: People need to remember that the TIMES model is not specific to Scotland: it is a well-understood process that is used in a number of places. The CCC does not use the TIMES model: it uses something slightly different that basically provides a similar representation of the whole system and achieves similar results. TIMES is still a key element of the analysis and modelling that underpins our approach to climate change. As I said, it is used not only in Scotland but throughout the world. By using it, we have the benefit of international consistency. If we start randomly to invent our own system, we will not have that.

TIMES is not the whole story; it is accompanied by other analyses, which I suspect might not be so well understood. We have used the Scottish electricity dispatch model, the Scotland heat map, the national housing model, the transport model for Scotland and the Scottish Government heat model, alongside TIMES. With TIMES, we look at the interactions between all of those, and we make sure that we have an overall plan that makes sense.

I recall that there were, a couple of years ago, heated discussions about different models. If we tried to move to a model that, say, would reduce dependence on gas heating, and we set a target for 2025 to do something along those lines, what would be the knock-on effect? What would be the impact on other sectors of doing that in one

sector? TIMES is important because it allows us to assess that impact across sectors. There are implications for what we choose to do. For example, we might go too fast on reducing use of gas central heating: would we have enough gas plumbers to do the work as quickly as we want? There are real questions underlying some of the ideas that emerge, and the process must be thought about and worked through. That goes back to the conversation about what is achievable and what is not, and what timescales might be appropriate.

Sara Grainger (Scottish Government): Mr Stevenson is right that the approaches that have been taken by the Scottish Government and the CCC differ, but they are similar in an important way, which is that they are both based on sector-level analysis and on evidence that is brought together to look at interactions. Within the Scottish Government, they are brought together in TIMES, as the cabinet secretary explained. The CCC uses a different mechanism, with which I am, clearly, less familiar. It is, however, the same basic system of sector-level evidence and looking at interactions.

The point that Mr Stevenson made about agriculture and transport is right. To date, they have not been well integrated into TIMES so that the interactions can be looked at. We are working on that actively and hope that the interactions will be properly established within the TIMES model—if not in time for the update to the climate change plan, then definitely in time for the next full plan.

Roseanna Cunningham: Analyses from the various CCC feeds go into TIMES. There is an interaction between the systems—they do not run completely separately. TIMES is not a static model that is dated to the particular time when it was developed; it is improved and worked on.

Stewart Stevenson: Right; that is fine. I got a description, I think, of what economists would describe as second-level and third-level effects, such as whether there are enough plumbers to redo the gas system if we were to change the gas that we use. Clearly, such things will be important as you develop policy that responds to the agenda.

One difference that the Committee on Climate Change put to us is that while the TIMES model provides a single answer, the CCC's approach provides multiple options. I am unclear—perhaps you can help me—about whether that is the difference between the shorter-term 10-year, say, horizon of developing policy, and the 25-year horizon that takes us to the end targets. Are there different approaches for those two parts of what needs to be done to set targets for 2045, for example?

Sara Grainger: I do not think so, but I cannot confidently answer the question. We would need to have an economist who is much more familiar with the modelling to answer that. Perhaps that is something on which we could get back to you.

Roseanna Cunningham: I mentioned the TIMES modelling and how it shows what one way of doing it would look like. That led to one proposal being rejected and another being run through. TIMES does not come out with one answer—it is not as simple as that. It shows the implications of a decision. If it can be seen that the on-costs—I do not mean just money costs—of a decision would become extremely difficult to manage, a different way of approaching the matter would be chosen. The TIMES model does not just set out a solution and that is that. That is not how it works.

I am not an expert on TIMES, but you do not just feed a bunch of information in at one end and wait five hours for the computer to spit an answer out of the other end. It is not as simple as that. TIMES enables assessment of scenarios. The benefit of the whole-economy approach is that the impacts in other areas are being tested all the time. If you do not do that, how would you know what is required of other areas?

The example that I used was a subject of discussion, and TIMES was used to look at it. However, the idea was rejected because it would probably be physically almost impossible to deliver.

Stewart Stevenson: You have just used the word “scenarios” in the context of TIMES—that is, putting scenarios into TIMES to see what it tells you. The Committee on Climate Change has told us that it has developed its own scenarios. Are you sighted on them? If you are not currently sighted on the detail—

Roseanna Cunningham: I am not across the detail of the Committee on Climate Change's analyses. We use the information that it develops—it is helpful for us to feed it in—but I cannot answer questions about the CCC's analyses.

Stewart Stevenson: No—I was not seeking to have you do that. I share what you have just said as an expectation; I was merely seeking to ask whether you will take further steps—I suspect that they would be at official, rather than ministerial, level—to have sight of the Committee on Climate Change's scenarios, in order to inform the decisions that we will make here.

Sara Grainger: I can put that question to the Committee on Climate Change, but my understanding is that the scenarios are set out in the reports that it has just published.

Stewart Stevenson: Okay. I will need to read that more carefully. I apologise.

Sara Grainger: With respect, you may not realise that, crucially, there are two reports: there is the main headline report and an additional 300-page report, with the technical detail.

Stewart Stevenson: I have them both.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I have a supplementary question about the TIMES modelling. I was interested to hear Sara Grainger say that the modelling will—or you hope that it will—take in agriculture and transport in development of the climate change plan. Will that take into account peatland and its restoration? That seems to be a huge—or yet another—variable, or wild card, in all this.

Sara Grainger: Yes. I think that I am correct in saying that restoration of peatland is already part of the TIMES model. If you are referring to the forthcoming revisions to the peatland data, it will be important to incorporate those into the analysis, when we update the plan.

10:00

John Scott: Is the modelling capable of that?

Sara Grainger: Yes.

Mark Ruskell: That leads us on nicely to some of last week's evidence from the UK Committee on Climate Change, in particular around interim targets for 2030. There seems to be continuing uncertainty, specifically in relation to peatland emissions. Given that it is clear that some of that cannot be bottomed out until the UK Government looks at the issue in relation to its next carbon budget, would not it be sensible to set interim and longer-term targets now, based on the current inventory, on the basis that those could be revised down if estimations of what peatland contributes are revised in the years ahead?

Roseanna Cunningham: What are you suggesting? We have already accepted the CCC advice on the interim targets for 2030 and 2040. Are you suggesting that we depart from that advice?

Mark Ruskell: Useful clarification came to the committee yesterday in a letter from the CCC that suggests that the targets would be different, were they to be based on the inventory as it stands today—for example, a 76 per cent by 2030 target. Obviously, if we were to change the inventory, the targets would be lower. Have you seen that analysis and thought about it? There are clearly two options.

Roseanna Cunningham: I have not seen that letter. Tom Russon has.

Dr Tom Russon (Scottish Government): I have, indeed. As the cabinet secretary said, the CCC recommendations on targets were set out in its advice report. As I understand it, the letter from the CCC secretariat explores how expectations around future inventory revisions will be factored into its advice, but the letter does not in any way change that advice, upon which the Scottish Government has acted. On the substantive question whether we follow the CCC's advice, I defer entirely to the cabinet secretary.

On what I understand is being suggested as a potential alternative, I further observe that the Scottish Government is certainly of the view that it is important that targets offer clear and stable signals and are not changed more than is necessary. When we were preparing the bill, we heard a lot from stakeholders, especially businesses, about the importance of the signalling function of targets. To our mind, it is important that we use the best available evidence now in setting the targets. The CCC has been clear in its advice that it considers the best evidence to be the inventory as it now stands, plus the factors that we know will come into play in the next couple of years.

For example, we know as a matter of certainty—in so far as anything around the inventory can be certain—that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wetlands supplement, which is the peatland provisions, will be implemented within the next three years, because the UK Government has made international commitments. It has published a substantial scientific report on the implications, in numerical terms, for the inventory, of that implementation.

The CCC has reflected those expectations in its advice on the targets. As Chris Stark said to the committee on 14 May, in terms of all the targets, the CCC has offered us the best assessment of the evidence as it now stands. The Scottish Government's view is to follow that best assessment. Does that help?

Mark Ruskell: It helps a little. Does that represent a shift in the CCC's thinking? Back in 2017, it recommended that the targets be set on the basis of current inventories and that the inventories be frozen for five years in order to allow assessment against the targets. There is still uncertainty.

Roseanna Cunningham: You are asking me about the CCC's thinking. We have the report that it delivered to us, and we have accepted the advice in it. If you are asking me to somehow go behind that report into what the CCC might, internally, be thinking about things, I cannot go there. I cannot answer questions on anything other than what is written down, so you are asking me a

question that I do not believe that I or any of us can answer.

Mark Ruskell: Okay.

John Scott: Notwithstanding what you just said, cabinet secretary, and the fact that you have apparently not seen yesterday's letter from Chris Stark, he said that the 70 per cent interim target means, in essence, 76 per cent and that the 90 per cent interim target equals 96 per cent.

Roseanna Cunningham: There is some dispute here.

John Scott: It is certainly open to interpretation. Were you aware of the likely contents of that letter when you lodged the amendments that proposed the new targets?

Roseanna Cunningham: I clean forgot my crystal ball. So, no, I was not aware of a letter that would be delivered on 20 May when I lodged my amendments on 2 May. There is not much more that I can say about that. It is unfortunate that the letter appeared after the committee had the CCC in front of it to answer your questions. It also arrived quite late for us to be able to go back to the CCC and clarify that what we were reading was what we believed we were reading, which might now be the issue. Those are not questions that I can answer at the moment. I have not read the letter, but, as far as I understand it, the CCC basically says that it has already taken into account the future revisions in assessing the 70 per cent target that it advised for us for 2030, because it is already aware of the conversation.

We are also aware of that conversation, of course, because the bill that we are talking about, which will be passed, has a section that deals with the fact that the revisions will have a pretty significant impact on our results. There is a handling mechanism in the bill that is designed to do precisely that. The CCC is saying that, if it sets us the 70 per cent target and we accept it, it is the equivalent of a reduction of 76 per cent if we were sticking to the current way of land use accounting. We know that we will not stick to the current way of accounting and that big changes are coming, and my guess is that the Committee on Climate Change has already taken that into its thinking, which is how it came up with the 70 per cent target, which would look like 76 per cent if none of the revisions were going to happen. No doubt, if it had had no idea about those revisions, it would have set us the target of 76 per cent for 2030. However, we all know that the revisions are taking place, and sections of our bill deal with that very issue. Prior to introducing the bill, we thought that those sections would be controversial, but they have turned out to be not controversial at all, perhaps to the point that everybody has forgotten about them. Nonetheless, they are there in the bill.

We are working on that basis, as is the Committee on Climate Change.

John Scott: I am still a little unclear on that. Perhaps, if you have further reflections on the letter, you might write to the committee, explaining your views more clearly. It is just too complicated for me.

Sara Grainger: We can happily provide a letter. The key issue is that the CCC considered all the relevant evidence in advising on the targets. The letter that it provided in response to a specific question said what it would have advised had it excluded some evidence. It is right that it considers all the evidence, that we set targets that are based on its advice—based on all the evidence—and that we do not decide to remove some sections of the bill to get a different result, knowing that we will have to amend the targets with secondary legislation within three years, if not sooner.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I will turn to the less complicated issue of cross-departmental approaches. Last week, Chris Stark told this committee that it is not acceptable that the CCC is the only organisation addressing decarbonisation in detail at a UK level. What discussions have taken place with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and other UK Government departments about mainstreaming climate change policy?

Roseanna Cunningham: Since most of this policy is devolved, our interactions with the UK Government tend to be about specific issues, and there is detailed interaction around the UK emissions trading scheme rather than a bigger conversation about mainstreaming climate change policy. As the committee is aware, I wrote to the BEIS on the back of the CCC advice to Westminster and the devolved Administrations, because we now urgently need to begin to have the kind of conversations that might be subsumed under the idea of mainstreaming climate change policy. If we do not have everybody in the UK working to the same ambition, we will not achieve what we hope to achieve. I remain optimistic that the Government at Westminster—whatever it looks like over the next few weeks and months—will regard this as a continuing and major issue that needs to be discussed.

From our perspective, the difficulty is that the UK Government can choose simply to go on doing whatever it is doing without much reference to us. It is clear from the UK Committee on Climate Change's advice that, if we want to achieve our ambition, we need to work in concert with the UK Government and that it needs to take actions that I am not sure it is ready to take. My guess is that, at a UK Government level, minds are not on this right now. We have a bill in place and all this process is

under way, but the UK Government is not currently there. I cannot force it into a position that it is not, at present, ready to take.

Angus MacDonald: Is there any way that the Scottish Government can influence the integration of climate change policy?

Roseanna Cunningham: When we talk about the integration of climate change policy, we should remember that most of it is devolved. I do not want to set up a situation in which Scotland loses accountability, control and responsibility for decision making. We must be careful what we wish for in using the word “integration”. Nevertheless, we have to work alongside Cardiff and Westminster to ensure that we are all heading in the same—and in the right—direction.

On the question whether I can bounce Westminster, I do not think that I can. The CCC and Lord Deben frequently make it clear that we are being more ambitious, that we are in the lead on this and that we are a model that Westminster and Cardiff should be looking at. However, I cannot mandate other Governments; I can only do what I have done, which is invite these early conversations so that we can take the matter forward much more urgently than has been the case up until now.

The Convener: Does John Scott have a question on that theme?

10:15

John Scott: I have a question on that theme. I will then move on to the question that I had intended to ask, with the convener’s permission.

I appreciate what the cabinet secretary says about the awkward situation. Notwithstanding the devolved responsibilities, how dependent is the Scottish Government on the UK Government coming to a view?

Roseanna Cunningham: In my parliamentary statement, I laid out the decisions that are being made—or not being made—at the UK Government level that will hinder us. The Committee on Climate Change highlighted that carbon capture and storage will continue to be a huge issue if it is not taken forward, because it is clear from the CCC’s advice that developing it now is absolutely necessary.

On the day of the statement, I flagged up that I had picked up that VAT on solar panels is to be increased from 5 to 20 per cent. I knew at that time only about solar panels, but further investigation has shown that the jump in VAT from 5 to 20 per cent, which will be brought in on 1 October, will apply not just to solar panels but to a host of renewable technologies including other solar equipment, wind power, biomass and heat

pumps. We want people to take up such technologies in domestic and other settings, but a jump in VAT from 5 to 20 per cent will have the opposite effect. That is another example of something that we have no control over but that will have a distinct impact on decision making by ordinary people who hope to do the right thing.

There are a load of other specific points—I do not know whether the committee wants me to go through them all. Vehicle taxation is reserved, so that is another area in which we cannot effect change. We are limited in what we can do and how we can do it. Decarbonising the gas grid is entirely a matter for the UK Government. I go back to the discussion about how to manage, in practical terms, the heating issue in domestic and business properties. The other side of that is decarbonising the gas grid. If that does not happen, there will be a big blockage.

The CCC is talking about such issues, which inhibit us from reaching our 2045 target. If we got the UK Government to deal with them, we could achieve our target. There are more issues, but I am sure that the committee does not want me to list them all.

John Scott: That is enough to be going on with, although you could send us an exhaustive list if you want.

Roseanna Cunningham: We could try, but I do not know how exhaustive the list would be.

Stewart Stevenson: I note press comment that British Steel has applied to the UK Government for £100 million to cover payments from 29 March to 31 October because it cannot participate fully in the emissions trading scheme. That is nothing particularly to do with Scotland, but I gather that the scheme represents at least a quarter of what goes on with the numbers, and the uncertainty about the scheme’s operation is an example of a policy and a practical lacuna. There might be other reasons, such as business performance, why British Steel has asked for £100 million, but it is hanging its request on that hook. Are Scottish Government officials looking at that issue in general?

Roseanna Cunningham: The European Union ETS is under active discussion and is subject to consultation, which the committee might wish to look at. The matter is devolved, but Scotland is not big enough to be an emissions trading market in practical terms. That is why we think that staying in the European Union ETS is the best approach and that, if that is not going to happen, we need a UK ETS that is linked to the EU system.

At the moment, there is an active and live consultation that we are, in effect, a part of. It is clear that the uncertainty around ETS is causing more people than British Steel some concerns; the

fact that the future is so uncertain is a real concern for a lot of businesses. If there is a no-deal Brexit, we will, overnight, switch to a carbon tax, and the whole devolved system of accountability and scrutiny will be removed from us, because that will be an entirely Treasury-led exercise. On the face of it, that is intended to be only a temporary fix, but I fear that, once the Treasury gets hold of it, it might end up being a very long temporary fix.

John Scott: I realise that I should have declared an interest as a farmer and landowner. I do so now.

My question is about agriculture. How can a truly multifunctional land use strategy be put in place? In other words, how can we get from the Committee on Climate Change's advice to detailed policy delivery in agriculture?

Roseanna Cunningham: With a lot of very hard work and a great deal of talking to a variety of interests to ensure that they come along with us. Obviously, some of the agriculture proposals will require to be revisited when we revise the climate change plan, as we have agreed to do. I have already had conversations with NFU Scotland, because I wanted to ensure that it had seen the Vivid Economics research that WWF Scotland commissioned, which I thought was very helpful and constructive and which perhaps gave rather more comfort to the agriculture sector than it might have been feeling up to now. The sector is very much aware of its role in this, but we need it to understand the enormous contribution that it has to make. The Committee on Climate Change foresaw a continuing healthy livestock sector in Scotland, which I know has been a matter of concern for several areas of our agriculture sector.

John Scott: Absolutely, and I again declare an interest in that regard.

What can be done to ensure that trees are planted and peatlands restored at the necessary rate and to the required levels, and how can that be done without affecting too much traditional land use?

Roseanna Cunningham: That is always the question. The analogy that I often use in different quarters is that, if you have an acre of land, you will be expected to grow trees and produce food on it, provide flood protection on it, put a house on it and so on. We put an enormous burden on land, and there are a massive number of competing priorities.

The issue, therefore, is in establishing the best use for particular land. The majority of Scotland's land is not necessarily poor—I do not want to use that word—but we are not going to be able to use it for a great many other things. Hill farmers, for example, cannot suddenly switch to arable

farming—that is just not within their gift. We must make the right decision for each area.

These are tricky matters, because there are other aspects at play, and I am conscious of the concern in the agriculture sector about land going out of agricultural use and being planted with trees instead. There are all sorts of issues in and around that. There is also the question of how far a Government can prohibit or mandate certain uses of land. There are other restrictions in that respect, because that is the point at which lawyers become concerned about how far we can or cannot intervene in specific decisions about a specific piece of land.

John Scott: Quite.

I do not wish to blindside you, but a suggestion that came out of discussions that I have been involved in is that you might consider developing a new class of land. At the moment, we have land class 1 for arable land, land class 2, land class 3 and so on. Maybe, as an innovative way of approaching the problem, you should consider developing a climate change mitigation land class. At the top of that class would be peat bog restoration, and subsequent to that would be forestry. Such a land class might have value for those who wish to use it to meet their organisation's responsibility for carbon mitigation. I just offer you that thought—I am happy to discuss it further.

Roseanna Cunningham: It would not be a conversation just for me; it would be one for Fergus Ewing, too, and we would look at all ideas. I will go back to some of the issues that such an idea might run into, whether people like it or not. There are European convention on human rights issues around ownership. You are presuming that a landowner—a farmer or whoever—might consider that a field would attract more value if it was designated in that way, but that farmer might be thinking, "I'd rather sell that field for housing, so—sorry—your offer isn't going to cut it." There are lots of conversations to be had around that kind of reclassification, and you would need to work carefully through its unintended consequences. That conversation would be worth having, but whether it would result in what you are suggesting is another matter entirely. After all, we already give money to things such as peatland restoration and what have you—it is not as if we are not already doing some of that.

John Scott: No. I agree. I think that we could develop a hierarchy of sub-classes within that climate change mitigation land class. Nevertheless, I appreciate what you say about the ECHR—I am well aware of the pitfalls of that, which Parliament has fallen into. We would not necessarily want to go down that road.

The Convener: We are getting on fine with our questions. Cabinet secretary, would you welcome a five-minute break after Mark Ruskell's question?

Roseanna Cunningham: If you are happy that we have the time, convener, that is fine.

Mark Ruskell: John Scott makes a very interesting suggestion, but there may be a broader point here about making sure that climate change mitigation is at the heart of farm subsidy and financial support going forward. Have you discussed that in the Cabinet sub-committee, in Cabinet or in bilaterals with Mr Ewing?

Roseanna Cunningham: As you would expect, I have a lot of discussions with Fergus Ewing about all aspects of both portfolios, and we are well aware of some of the issues that might emerge. There has not been a meeting of the Cabinet sub-committee since the one to prepare for stage 2, and that is not necessarily where the discussion would be located. As we speak, our senior officials are probably thinking along some of the lines that are being discussed here, at least in so far as those ideas need to be considered before they can be discarded—if they have to be discarded. We are now trying to consider absolutely everything, but such decisions will ultimately be made by the Cabinet.

10:29

Meeting suspended.

10:37

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back. We move to questions from Claudia Beamish.

Claudia Beamish: Let us turn our minds to the co-benefits and multibenefits that are possible from the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions. As you know, the committee said in its stage 1 report that we would

“welcome a model that highlights the significant additional and secondary benefits to, among other things, health, industry, and employment.”

We made a few requests in that regard, and I was heartened that the Scottish Government said in its response:

“The Scottish Government would be happy to engage in further discussions with the Committee and the CCC about the potential to further develop the analytical approach to assessing the impacts of mitigating and adapting to climate change, and the additional and secondary benefits to, among other things, health, industry, and employment.”

Will you update us on developments in that area, including the on-going University of Strathclyde research project and, more broadly, the Scottish Government's engagement with the CCC?

Roseanna Cunningham: As I indicated in the letter that I sent to the committee last week, we will lodge stage 2 amendments that will require future climate change plans to include cost benefit estimates for each policy that is set out. I need to make clear that I am talking about future climate change plans, because the methodologies will not be available to do that in the six-month rehash of the existing climate change plan. The timescale for that would be too short, because a fair amount of work and thinking will have to be done.

It will be vital for all Governments to do such analysis, because most of the actions that have got us to where we are on climate change mitigation have not impacted directly on ordinary people, but we are now moving into a scenario in which that will happen. All Governments will have to be able to outline clearly the co-benefits and tie those to the action that people take. A number of conversations have taken place with enterprise agencies and the investment bank to consider the state of low-carbon investment, to identify future funding interventions and to look at innovations. In some areas, quite deep conversations are taking place, and the investment bank is one of those areas.

Some of that work is already taking place, but it will take us a little time to develop common approaches and methodologies. Some of the co-benefits, such as the health benefits, are more obvious than others. People are already drawing the lines between air pollution and health. Sometimes, the co-benefits can easily be explained. That does not always mean that everybody agrees on what the solutions will be, but it is important that people can make such links. At the moment, we are running a campaign on food waste, which makes a direct link between food waste and climate change emissions. A lot of work is being done on that. We are already doing work explicitly on the co-benefits in a number of areas, but it will take us a little while to assess the impact of that and to understand how to cost it.

Sara Grainger: You asked specifically about the University of Strathclyde project. It is under way and making progress, but it will be at least 18 months to two years before we get the results from it. It is a massive undertaking to explore fundamentally new and quite profound methodologies to look at how the actions that are necessary to tackle climate change will impact on gross domestic product and economic growth, as opposed to the economic costs of the actions, if you see what I mean. The work is progressing, but it will be 18 months to two years before we have any results.

Claudia Beamish: Could you provide a little more detail on what discussions there have been in relation to the Scottish national investment

bank, how the discussions are developing and which stakeholders have been involved in them? It would be helpful to find out more about that, even if you cannot give us the information today.

Roseanna Cunningham: Officials in the programme team and in my portfolio are already in frequent discussions to ensure that the Government's climate priorities are well reflected in the work of the bank. The bank team has been engaging directly with the just transition commission. A workstream is already emerging in that area, and I believe that a workshop is to be held quite soon with environmental groups via the just transition commission and the bank.

As I understand it, the bank team has commissioned a report to look at investment in low-carbon and climate change initiatives in an effort to assess which markets are the most well developed, but I do not have a timescale for that. That report is still in development, and I cannot say when it will be available, but it will try to identify the existing availability of finance.

Quite a lot of work is therefore going on with the bank team. The bank is still a new part of the scenery, but it is becoming integrated into all the conversations that we need to have. That work is already under way.

10:45

Claudia Beamish: I will deal with the just transition commission in a bit more detail shortly, but I wonder whether you have any further details on what the CCC highlighted in oral evidence to the committee when it said:

"The issue is not just Government integration:"—

you have, of course, already highlighted that—

"we have to get better at taking integration out to the community".—[*Official Report, Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee*, 14 May 2019; c 39.]

You have already highlighted one example of that. In what other ways is the Scottish Government—through your department and other departments—able to communicate and ensure public buy-in in achieving net zero emissions?

Roseanna Cunningham: I have already flagged up that, over the summer and into the autumn, we will embark on a programme of engagement that is explicitly designed to get out there and look at the 60-odd per cent of the population who think that climate change is a problem but do not necessarily yet have a sense of what that realistically means for them, and to try to reach the third of the population who do not regard climate change as a problem. We have to think about them, as well. That work will start, and its outcome will give us a better sense of where

people are in reality when they are confronted with decisions that might have to be made.

Claudia Beamish: Can you give us any more details about how that will be shaped?

Roseanna Cunningham: No.

Claudia Beamish: I know that it is early days—

Roseanna Cunningham: It is early days, so the answer is no.

Claudia Beamish: Would you be able to write to the committee to let us know how that is developing?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are looking at focus groups and a variety of different methods to get out there and do that work, but I cannot give you the details at this point.

Claudia Beamish: Could you write to the committee to keep us informed about that? Obviously, engagement is very important. We have engaged considerably, and it is important to be able to liaise with you in this context.

Roseanna Cunningham: We will let the committee know when there is a formal programme, and it can decide how it will go about interacting with that.

Claudia Beamish: Right. That is helpful.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell has a short supplementary question on that issue.

Mark Ruskell: The Committee on Climate Change highlighted dietary change and dietary trends towards eating less meat that already exist in society. Those trends may increase over time. Is that a bit of a taboo subject in Government, or are you considering what actions you can take to encourage that dietary choice on public health and climate grounds?

Roseanna Cunningham: I hardly think that that is a taboo subject. As far as I can see, the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing regularly discusses it and looks across the board at food-related public health initiatives and the issue of obesity.

That is an example of moving from the general, which everybody would agree with, to the particular and people becoming very exercised. The level of connection that people might or might not be making to bigger issues is an issue. If we start to tell people what they will and will not be allowed to eat, we will run into considerable resistance. One has to have some care about that conversation. In theory, all of us here would probably want to encourage people to eat a lot more fruit and vegetables, because Scotland has a very poor record of doing that, which results in all sorts of issues, including health issues, but we

cannot force people to eat a lot more fruit and vegetables. That is why we must have a conversation to try to fill that space.

Claudia Beamish: Before we move to questions about the just transition commission, do you have any comments on where the issue of intergenerational justice fits in the bill?

Roseanna Cunningham: Scotland is one of the countries that have accepted and declared the global climate emergency; it is clear that part and parcel of that message is about safeguarding the planet for future generations. We are doing that through the bill because it legislates for world-leading targets, which are in line with what the CCC calls “highest possible ambition”, as called for by the Paris agreement. That is how, in a very practical sense, we are trying to ensure intergenerational justice. Scotland has focused very much on practical actions rather than just rhetoric, which is what we should be doing. Intergenerational justice will be met by countries that act in a similar way to Scotland, because the issue is global.

Claudia Beamish: Would it not be appropriate to recognise intergenerational justice in the principles in the bill?

Roseanna Cunningham: Legislation is about making law, and drafting such a principle into law is different from including it in a policy statement. I am not clear about that and would not want to venture an opinion, because legislation is about the practical side of things rather than rhetoric. We do not usually legislate rhetoric in this country—in fact, most countries do not.

Claudia Beamish: Surely the principles would contextualise the purpose of the bill.

Roseanna Cunningham: I have not seen a list of principles, so it would be helpful if you could outline what it might look like, to make it easier for the legal directorate to give an initial sense of whether it could be legislated.

Claudia Beamish: You know as well as I do—and probably better—that bills often include near the start principles that contextualise them. The word “include” is very important, because otherwise such a list could be exclusive rather than inclusive. Would intergenerational justice not be an important principle?

Roseanna Cunningham: The bill as introduced is about target setting.

Claudia Beamish: I understand that.

Roseanna Cunningham: In effect, what you have suggested would pretty much change the long title of the bill. If that were to be done, it would change the bill completely. There are issues with doing the bill in that way.

Sara Grainger: The principles for target setting are not so much there to contextualise the bill; there is a specific requirement on ministers and the CCC to consider them when deciding what the targets should be. They have played an important role in recent discussions. In response to stakeholder requests, we have looked at a couple of minor amendments to the principles to better reflect the fair and safe emissions budget and the Paris agreement. If I recall correctly—Tom Russon will correct me if I am wrong—we were not asked or encouraged to add the issue of intergenerational justice. As the cabinet secretary has said, the whole purpose of the bill is intergenerational justice—to end our contribution to climate change for the benefit of future generations. It is unclear how an additional principle of intergenerational justice would have any different practical effect.

Claudia Beamish: As the cabinet secretary will know, the committee recommended that the Government

“keep an open mind”

in relation to

“establishing a Just Transition Commission with statutory underpinning”

or consider

“an independent parliamentary commission.”

The Government has stated that it is “giving this further consideration”. In her recent letter, the cabinet secretary states:

“Having carefully considered it, we remain unclear why a statutory basis is needed. We remain open to further discussion with the Committee on these matters, but would wish to be convinced of the positive case before bringing forward additional amendments.”

In that context, what work has the Government and your department done on the options and merits of pursuing a statutory route for the just transition commission? Has there been consultation with relevant stakeholders on the issue?

Roseanna Cunningham: Our position is as stated: we do not see the necessity for creating a statutory body. In previous sessions, I have outlined the implications, including those relating to cost, of giving such a body a statutory basis. We propose to lodge amendments to the bill that would mean that the principles of a just transition would need to be considered when preparing climate change plans. Those principles are fairly well rehearsed.

Stakeholders are involved in our conversations about the options and the pros and cons of giving such a body a statutory basis, but I am still not convinced that that is necessary. The just transition commission that we have set up is

already working well, and I fail to understand what putting it in statute would achieve. The Government is talking to stakeholders to try to understand why the matter is thought to be so important, but the way in which the just transition commission is working ought to give people some comfort that what is in place will do the job.

Claudia Beamish: The stakeholders that have spoken to me—I am sure that they have spoken to you and others—have found it puzzling that the just transition commission has been set up to last for two years, given that the net zero target is for 2045 and that the just transition principles should underpin the whole process. I find it difficult to understand why a commission that lasts for two years is seen to be appropriate. Governments can change.

Roseanna Cunningham: Governments can change, but a new Government could change the law, so I am not certain that creating a statutory body would protect it from a future Government that might be hostile.

I have indicated that we will lodge amendments at stage 2 to ensure that the principles of a just transition are integral to the development of climate change plans, so that such plans will need to take those principles into account.

The just transition commission was set up to last for two years, initially, but I have said on a number of occasions that when the commission reports to us after the two years, we will consider the best way to take forward the just transition issue. We are not saying that the only way to do that is by creating a statutory body. It is important that there are strong arguments and a clear rationale for the Government setting up a statutory body, and that those aims cannot be met in any other way. That is not clear yet.

Some stakeholders might take the view that you have expressed, but not all do. There is a wide range of stakeholders, and the position is by no means unanimous.

11:00

Claudia Beamish: I hope that I did not imply that it was.

Roseanna Cunningham: No, but there is a variety of voices out there. I would just ask members to give the just transition commission some time to do its work and then consider the best way of taking this matter forward.

Claudia Beamish: Perhaps I could take a different position on one of the points that you have made. You have said that future Governments might disagree with this approach, but surely one of the reasons for enshrining a

provision in statute is that it is harder to repeal than something that is not set out in a bill.

Roseanna Cunningham: That is why we are putting the principles into the bill.

Claudia Beamish: Finally, can you set out for the record the Government's view on establishing an independent parliamentary commission?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am not very sure what that would be designed to achieve. Parliament's role is to scrutinise progress, and I am not entirely certain what a parliamentary commission would achieve or what value it would add.

Claudia Beamish: I am sure that some stakeholders will inform you of their views in that respect.

Roseanna Cunningham: They might very well do, but with the greatest of respect, I do not necessarily think that littering the entire landscape with various bodies and commissions is going to do the job for us. We need to take a step back and be certain that we are not cluttering things up. With a global climate emergency, one of the jobs of Government is to consider whether we can declutter, not how we add clutter. I am just a little bit uncertain what a parliamentary commission would bring to this issue, what role it would have and what it would mean for what we were doing. After all, whoever forms the Government will be the Government.

John Scott: I have just one question on the just transition commission. I should say first of all that I share the cabinet secretary's view that it does not need to have a statutory basis, but it has been suggested to me that agriculture and land use interests are underrepresented on it as it stands. Do you share that view? If so, is there anything that you can do about it?

Roseanna Cunningham: I specifically made sure that land interests were directly represented on the commission. When people were first talking about just transition, they probably were not thinking about such interests, and that conversation has been embedded in the process. I cannot off the top of my head tell you the names of the people who are representing those interests on the commission, but they are there.

Sara Grainger: Land use and agriculture are very much on the minds of those on the just transition commission, and they form an important element of its work programme. It will be exploring the issue; in fact, it will be holding a specific meeting on the matter to which people from the sector and community interests will be invited. The issue is definitely being covered.

John Scott: I am very grateful for that reassurance.

My next series of questions brings the discussion back to agriculture. Is introducing a SMART—that is, specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely—target for our nitrogen use efficiency feasible? How do you see that matter evolving?

Roseanna Cunningham: Our view is that it would be difficult to set any kind of target, because we would need to be absolutely aware of all the benefits, impacts and future implications. However, we are doing work directly on this matter and we are directly funding research on it, because we see it as something that we have to get right.

An analysis of the current accounting tools is being done at Scotland's Rural College, in collaboration with the centre for ecology and hydrology. That is the kind of thing that we need to be clear about. Our knowledge and understanding of the accounting for and management of nitrogen emissions are not yet in a place where it would be sensible to set a specific target. It is something that needs to be worked on and actively considered, and we are doing that.

John Scott: That is a work in progress. With regard to researching and publishing more detailed information on emissions in the wider agricultural sector, what are the key risks and threats? What are the benefits of providing that information?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are exploring alternative methods to provide further estimates of emissions from the wider agriculture sector. I know that there is a considerable degree of unhappiness in the agriculture sector that it is not credited with a lot of the good work that it does. Unfortunately, the method of accounting is by global agreement, and we are not allowed to change things for our own greenhouse gas inventory. However, there is some benefit in trying to come up with a better means of assessment. Even if the information will not sit in the GHG statistics, it can nevertheless be a tool to help identify with farmers the good work that is being done and get that out to the wider community, including the research community. It is a difficult issue, and I understand why that is so.

We will report to you on potential approaches to reporting and the likely accuracy of estimates as soon as we have progressed the work so that it is sufficiently substantial for the committee. The work is on-going, and we are looking at the wider agriculture sector and thinking about how its work can be better reflected. What we cannot do is make that part of GHG statistics, because those are pinned to an international standard that is set for us, rather than one that we invent for ourselves.

That is some of the work that is being done. There is a lot of work out there, and I would always want to credit land managers for that work, even if they are not seeing it reflected directly in the official statistics. However much they may wish that to happen, it is not in my gift.

John Scott: I welcome what you have said and the response to the points in the committee's stage 1 report. It is real progress. Will there be a point where the data on that parallel system might be robust enough to be included in annual statutory reports, in a parallel universe?

Roseanna Cunningham: We hope that we can get the data into a place where we could do a parallel report. Information is available on the climate exchange website that relates directly to emissions intensity figures for agricultural products, so we are already doing some public-facing work. Obviously, there are other areas that the Government supports, such as the carbon positive project, which is led by industry.

We are continuing to try to refine the data to ensure that it can accurately reflect what is going on in farms. However, at this point, it is not yet mature and it is not capable of being brought together in the kind of way that I believe that you and other farmers might want. A lot of work needs to be done before we get to that stage. However, it is our intention to get to that stage.

John Scott: I appreciate what you say about the direction of travel and understand why you cannot say more at the moment.

The concept of what is essentially on-farm offsetting is interesting. At the moment, if an airline wants to offset its carbon emissions, it can plant 1,000 acres of trees but, apparently, a farmer cannot offset the methane that is produced by his cows by planting 50 acres of trees on his own farm. It just seems—

Roseanna Cunningham: I understand the argument. Obviously, a farmer can plant the trees, but they do not get credited to the farmer.

John Scott: That is exactly the point. Perhaps on-farm offsetting, as it were, is another concept to explore. I just leave that thought with you.

Roseanna Cunningham: That would involve taking a whole-farm attitude to emissions.

John Scott: A holistic approach. Thank you for articulating it for me better than I could.

Stewart Stevenson: I have a question that might be more for Fergus Ewing than for you, cabinet secretary. However, given that the agricultural emission that causes most concern is methane, I draw your attention to an Australian peer-reviewed paper from 2015 that concerns the anti-methanogenic effects of Asparagopsis

taxiformis in vitro. In essence, there is something in seaweed that, in a Petri dish, prevents methane emission. There was a 2018 study in the United States—an extremely small study, and I cannot see a peer-reviewed paper on it—that involved feeding seaweed to 12 Holstein cows and found that that reduced the methane produced by 99 per cent. That reduction sounds implausibly large.

Are Government scientists and others tracking such research so that we can get to a point at which farmers get support from public resources that have an understanding of those issues? I note that Scotland is quite a good place for seaweed, even if—apologies to Mark Ruskell—it means harvesting kelp.

Roseanna Cunningham: That was a very long question, to which the answer is that we are already doing such research here. I invite the committee to go to the facility that is run by Scotland's Rural College on the outskirts of Edinburgh, where there is an active programme of testing. It is not only seaweed that has the impact that you describe; if I recall correctly, coriander does that, too. I am looking at my officials, but they are not the ones who were with me on that visit. There are a variety of natural substances that, if added to the feed, appear to have a direct impact on emissions.

Work is being done around the world on this issue because, obviously, it is something that needs to be addressed. Not only is Scotland looking at what other people are doing, but we are doing work that, I dare say, other people are looking at. That is about as far as my technical understanding of the issue goes. As far as I am aware, Fergus Ewing is actively pursuing the issue from his policy perspective, too.

Mark Ruskell: We heard some immediate policy announcements the day after the Committee on Climate Change's report came out. What other areas is the Government working on? What do you think are the big challenges with regard to meeting the targets? When might we expect to see some conclusions?

I appreciate that, earlier, you said that the UK Government has a role to play in various areas, including the decarbonisation of the gas grid, and we put similar questions to Michael Gove last week. Clearly, there is a policy process that is now in train. However, what can we expect to see coming out of your policy process, and by when?

Roseanna Cunningham: I cannot tell you what you can expect to see coming out of it, because that would be pre-announcing what is coming out of it, and I am not in a position to do that. As I indicated, work has begun in the portfolio areas—at cabinet secretary, minister and senior official level—to consider and identify continuing ways in

which we can make the achievements that we want to make.

11:15

I have already flagged up that it will be a central part of the programme for government. Please do not ask me what that will look like. That is a matter entirely for the First Minister—what does and does not appear in the programme for government will be her decision. Historically, it is an enormous concession to be told this far in advance that climate change will be an integral part of the programme for government.

The work is happening right now; we are already doing it. For example, I am identifying anything in my portfolio area that can be done differently, more quickly or brought forward without—here is the thing—having to go through the usual panoply of consultation, impact assessments and such like. I remind everyone that the processes of governance do not go away; I do not have a magic wand that can make all of that go away.

The issue is what we can identify that does not require to go through all of that; I do not know what we will be able to come up with—which would be much shorter term—or what changes and policy proposals there might be into the more medium and long term, which will nevertheless require to go through the sausage machine.

Mark Ruskell: I hear that the programme for government will be key. What key broad subject areas—I will not ask you to identify policies—is the Government considering in relation to the CCC?

Roseanna Cunningham: All portfolios have been asked to look in their areas, even those that have not hitherto regarded themselves as being on the front line. There is a handful of portfolio areas—such as the rural economy, transport, housing and energy—that people see as being part of that wider front-line team. However, I have flagged up that all portfolio areas need to consider what they can do; even if they have not necessarily viewed themselves in that way before, they must do so now. That will be happening across the whole of Government. We are not picking out areas—we are saying that it has to be an all-Government approach.

Mark Ruskell: One area that is in your portfolio—and on which there is currently a consultation—is the climate challenge fund and the question of its future. The cabinet secretary will obviously recognise the important work that has taken place and the thousand projects that have blossomed across Scotland. What do you see as the vision for its future? Should its budget continue to expand, or is there a different way of

engaging with communities, hard-to-reach individuals and the public?

Roseanna Cunningham: The review that has been on-going is not yet out there; I have not yet made any decisions in respect of it. However, as I said, everything—and that means everything—in my portfolio has to be up for scrutiny. All funding for community action on climate change has to be considered to ensure that we are doing the right thing, and that consideration is on-going.

There has been a lot of discussion about numbers and the reality is that, in relation to community projects, the fund has been incredibly successful in supporting communities across Scotland to take action. It is also the only fund of its kind in the UK. However, it is the right time to consider whether the approach that we have been taking over the past 10 years is the right one to deliver the step change that we all agree is needed. That is what we are thinking about, and that is happening across my portfolio in the same way that it is happening across everybody's portfolios.

John Scott: Cabinet secretary, given that climate change plans largely collate and present information and commitments that are set out in other strategies, will the revised climate change plan present a truly integrated approach? I certainly hope so. What is the timetable and process for the new climate change plan?

Roseanna Cunningham: May I be really clear about what we are discussing here? We have committed to a review of the existing climate change plan within the six months after the passing of the bill. If you are talking about a brand new climate change plan, you are talking about a different animal entirely. It would be advisable for the committee to think about the difference in that regard: six months is not a long time, so we are not talking about starting from scratch and completely renewing the whole plan.

John Scott: I am talking about the current plan.

Roseanna Cunningham: We have agreed to review the current plan within the six months after the bill is passed, which is what the committee asked for. Our doing that in a much shorter timescale than we would have done if we were producing a whole new plan means that what is produced will not be as detailed as a new plan would be—it cannot be; it is impossible to manage that in a timescale of six months.

We will do that renewal and revisal—I can see that Sara Grainger is worrying about my using a phrase—

Sara Grainger: Do not do it.

Roseanna Cunningham: Because we have a set timescale for the work, it cannot be as if we

were doing a whole new plan. That is an important thing for people to understand.

John Scott: I appreciate that, of course. Notwithstanding that, will the work involve stakeholders and industry? Will it be open to the general public to contribute? I understand very well the constraints of time, which you laid out in your response to our report, but will you comment on how widely you will consult?

Roseanna Cunningham: Some of the engagement over the summer will feed into the work. Although the six months will not be triggered until the bill gets royal assent, which now will not happen until autumn, the public engagement that we do over the summer will feed into the revision of the plan. We will have as much engagement as we can have, and I have indicated that I will let the committee know as soon as we have a formal timetable for that engagement, so that you can see which areas you might want to engage with.

That work will involve all stakeholders, and because it is pinned directly to the target of net zero emissions, it will then feed into the six-month revision of the climate change plan.

Angus MacDonald: What discussion is there with the Committee on Climate Change prior to the finalising of climate change plans?

Roseanna Cunningham: The CCC has a statutory role. It is our independent adviser, and that is what informs our engagement with it. It has set out its views on the most recent plan. That engagement takes place while a plan is in draft, and we then give consideration to the CCC's advice when we prepare the final version. I remind members that the final version of the current plan was published only in February last year.

Seeking the CCC's views on draft climate change plans will not change, but I am not certain about its ability to operate within the timescale that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee has recommended for the revision of the current plan. We will ensure that the CCC is aware of what we are doing, and, if it wishes to comment, it can. As committee members know, the CCC does not provide immediate advice, so how actively it can be involved in the revision is unclear. That is a challenge, which takes us back to the phrase that I am not allowed to use—I will tell you privately afterwards, when the microphone is switched off. The six-month timescale is tight for everybody, including the CCC.

Mark Ruskell: On the proposed scrutiny of the climate change plan, will the 120-day period take into account recess or dissolution?

Roseanna Cunningham: I do not think that a final decision has been taken on whether the

scrutiny period should be 90 days or 120 days. I think that we had said that there should be a 90-day parliamentary scrutiny, but my official tells me that we are prepared to accept 120 days. My view is that, if we start to build in recesses, how long will all this take? We have a climate emergency, so why would we want to make things even longer and more difficult?

Angus MacDonald: Will the Government lodge amendments at stage 2 to require the use of carbon credits to be subject to an enhanced affirmative procedure? What more could the Government do to ensure the adequate scrutiny of the use of carbon credits?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are still exploring the possibility of lodging amendments in that regard. However, I am not clear what is meant by the term “enhanced affirmative procedure”. If that is a reference to the superaffirmative procedure, things are more straightforward. Perhaps the committee has some other new procedural form in mind, but I am not clear what that might be. To clarify, do you mean the superaffirmative procedure?

Angus MacDonald: Yes.

Roseanna Cunningham: Okay. Obviously, carbon credits have never been used, we have set out clear policy commitments not to use them and the legal limit for their future use is zero, unless Parliament agrees to change that. I am not 100 per cent clear what amendments to that would make a difference, or what you would want that is not already there.

Angus MacDonald: Okay; that is fair enough.

John Scott: I was in Ireland last week, where there was much talk about climate change. Ireland is going down the route of using carbon credits as a mitigation tool. Would it not be a pity to close the door on the ability to use carbon credits, should a need arise? It is without dispute that the carbon emissions are entirely linked to the growth of the economy—the Irish have proved that to their own satisfaction on three occasions.

Roseanna Cunningham: There are two big issues to do with carbon credits. First, if you use them all that you are doing is exporting your emissions. Secondly, they are incredibly expensive and will probably get even more expensive. Ireland may theoretically be talking in those terms, as Sweden does, but whether they will use them when it comes to it is a different matter entirely.

From our perspective, we are talking about domestic effort to tackle the issues and not just exporting them. Carbon credits just let somebody else do the emitting for you, which does not seem

to me to be a particularly moral way to approach the issue.

John Scott: Finally, given the Government's lodged and planned amendments, does it intend to lodge a new financial resolution? We were told at the outset that the bill would cost £13 billion. Do you see there being any change to that figure, which, from the committee's perspective, seems to lack reliability? I would be interested to hear any comments that you have on that.

Roseanna Cunningham: There is no financial resolution at present, because the direct costs of the bill are well below the £400,000 a year threshold. The only current thing that might change that is the discussion about the just transition commission. As I said, there would be a cost to that. The figures that you are talking about are those for 2045, which cannot really be reflected in a financial resolution for a bill going through Parliament in 2019.

The Convener: I thank the cabinet secretary and her officials for their time today. At its next meeting, on 28 May, the committee will take further evidence from stakeholders on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2.

11:31

Meeting continued in private until 11:56.

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