



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 18 June 2014

Session 4

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**Wednesday 18 June 2014**

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**RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2014, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

\*Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)

\*Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)

\*Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

\*Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab)

\*Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD)

\*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

\*Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Andrew Bauer (National Farmers Union Scotland)

Marina Curran-Colthart (Argyll and Bute Council)

Dr Baz Hughes (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust)

Patrick Krause (Scottish Crofting Federation)

Councillor Uisdean Robertson (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

Dr Paul Walton (RSPB Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Lynn Tullis

**LOCATION**

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)



## Scottish Parliament

### Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Wednesday 18 June 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:02*]

#### Petition

##### Control of Wild Geese (PE1490)

**The Convener (Rob Gibson):** Good morning and welcome to the 19th meeting in 2014 of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. I remind everyone to switch off mobile phones; members may use tablets for committee business.

Item 1 is round-table evidence on petition PE1490, on the control of wild goose numbers. The petition was lodged on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation by Patrick Krause, who is the federation's chief executive. I welcome him to the meeting, and I invite the others around the table to introduce themselves.

**Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab):** I am the MSP for Dunfermline.

**Andrew Bauer (National Farmers Union Scotland):** I am from the National Farmers Union Scotland.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am an MSP for South Scotland and shadow minister for environment and climate change.

**Councillor Uisdean Robertson (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar):** I am from Western Isles Council. I chair the council's joint consultative group on crofting.

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch.

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Angus North and Mearns.

**Dr Baz Hughes (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust):** I am the head of the species conservation department at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I am the MSP for Galloway and West Dumfries.

**Marina Curran-Colthart (Argyll and Bute Council):** I am the local biodiversity officer for Argyll and Bute Council.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** I am an MSP for South Scotland.

**Dr Paul Walton (RSPB Scotland):** I am the head of habitats and species for RSPB Scotland.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Falkirk East.

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** I am the MSP for Angus South.

**The Convener:** I am the MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross and convener of the committee.

I refer members to the public papers for the meeting.

I would like to make a proposal on how we should structure our evidence gathering. First, we should look at the science of the numbers. Secondly, we should look at methods of control. Thirdly, we should look at markets. Fourthly, we should think about what the Government is doing. Fifthly, we should think about the way ahead. If we deal with the issues in that order, I think that we will be able to focus better. The issues might overlap—we might need to talk about what the Government is doing in relation to the other issues.

I will kick off on the science. I want to put our discussion in the context of the African-Eurasian migratory waterbird agreement. We cannot talk about numbers and species without thinking about European and international agreements on ensuring that all species have a habitat in which to live. There are different problems in different areas and countries, so if we are to respond to the petition it will not be possible just to consider it in the narrow context of, say, the Uists. We might conclude that a wider solution is needed. That is my starting point. Who wants to talk about the different species of goose and the problems in different countries?

**Dr Walton:** You are right; the issue can be quite confusing when we look down the list of goose species. In essence, two kinds of goose are an issue for agriculture in Scotland. One is the breeding, resident greylag goose population, which has increased markedly in the past few decades. It is a legal quarry species, so greylags can be legitimately and legally hunted in the open season and can be shot under licence during the close season. The RSPB has no problem with that; we are not an anti-hunting organisation in any way.

We have well under 5 per cent of the world population of greylag geese, so in the international context that you talked about Scotland is not hugely significant. The breeding greylag goose is the key issue in the crofting areas—those very high nature value farming areas that we have,

which are of almost uniquely high value for biodiversity in areas such as the Uists.

It is really important to make the distinction between the breeding greylag goose and the migratory species. The principal problem migratory species is the Greenland and Svalbard barnacle goose. The Greenland barnacle goose is the one that causes an issue on Islay. In Scotland, we have 75 per cent of the world population, so we are of very considerable international significance for that species. The species is protected under annex 1 of the birds directive—the greylag goose is not protected—and is not a legal quarry species.

In conservation and biological terms the distinction between those two species is really important. There are other goose species and other quarry species. For example, we have the pink-footed goose, which is migratory, and the Greenland white-fronted goose, which is protected and is declining in number.

There have been big increases in barnacle goose numbers, partly as a conservation success and partly as a result of increased nitrogen input into farmland since the second world war. That population has increased markedly, but on Islay it has stabilised since about 2006.

**The Convener:** Are you saying that the population in Islay has stabilised at a level that is far higher than previous levels?

**Dr Walton:** Yes.

**Graeme Dey:** Roughly what are the numbers? How reliable is the data?

**Dr Hughes:** The data on barnacle geese on Islay are reliable, because there are international counts and monthly field counts. The data on that species are very good.

We have excellent surveys of greylags on Orkney, so we know that there are about 20,000 geese there. There are some concerns about the counts on the Uists, because the numbers and the productivity do not seem to tie up, so there is some more work to be done there. We have good data for Coll and Tiree. We have good data for most of the greylag populations, apart from on the Uists.

**The Convener:** Does anyone want to comment about the data for the Uists?

**Councillor Robertson:** Data have been collected in the Uists for about 30 years; in fact, the Uist greylag goose management committee has been carrying out two counts a year for more than 30 years. One fairly reliable fact is that the numbers have been rising every year. Crofters would argue that the numbers given were not as high as they should have been, but it is clear that the numbers have gone up consistently each year.

Paul Walton mentioned the barnacle goose, which has become a huge problem in the Uists. A crofter referenced them to me yesterday as being like locusts in a field. As I say, they are increasingly becoming a problem in the Uists; we have had the greylag for about 30 years, and the population has been increasing consistently.

**Dr Hughes:** I just want to clarify that the geese on the Uists are mainly greylag; there are not many barnacle geese there at all.

**The Convener:** We are talking about those two main species; the others are in smaller numbers, and some of them are in decline. What does the science say about the methods that have been used to try and control the numbers?

We need to get others into the discussion—the witnesses will know how farmers and crofters have been acting.

**Andrew Bauer:** I will speak specifically about Islay, where there is a long history of trying to minimise the impacts through various scaring techniques, such as Scarey Man scarecrows that pop up in the field and gas guns. You name it—it has been tried. The view of our farming members on Islay is that they are willing to give those things a go, but they find that the geese become habituated to them and their effectiveness declines over time.

It has been said that money is a satisfactory method for dealing with the problem. If you had spoken to our members on Islay 10 or 20 years ago, they would have accepted that, albeit grudgingly. However, they have now come to the realisation that money just stores up problems for later on. As the numbers of geese have grown, the budgets have declined, and the budget is now insufficient to compensate for the impacts. Moreover, some of our members now feel that they are not even able to farm—that is, they are effectively farming to feed the geese as very little else comes off the land. From their point of view, money is no longer an acceptable method. They feel that things must move on to a different phase now.

**Marina Curran-Colthart:** Andrew Bauer mentioned Islay and compensation. The farming and crofting community makes a major contribution to the landscape of Islay. From what I have gleaned and researched, there is certainly a will to change management objectives to create a balanced approach to farming—and crofting—on Islay and to make it more or less sustainable. There has to be a bit of tweaking to get that balance, both on the farming side—in terms of land management—and on the goose management side.

**Patrick Krause (Scottish Crofting Federation):** The feeling that I get from crofters

and from discussions within our organisation is that what is being done is not really working. We do not necessarily have all the answers—we probably do not have answers, as such, at all, really—but it is important to recognise that the numbers are just going up and up. That is why we launched the petition.

10:15

A very good point that has been made is that we should look at how other countries deal with goose control—the Norwegian project, for example—and we have been thinking about that. Some people complain that public money has been going into a national goose management programme that has been running for years and years while the numbers of geese have kept going up and up.

From the community point of view, we would argue that the main successes of past programmes—the prime success being the machair life project—have come through the involvement of local people. External, top-down interventions just do not seem to work; indeed, they would work only if there were a massive cull programme that would cost huge amounts of money, and I do not think that anyone wants to go there. The point is that we need to plan a management scheme that is sustainable, and the only way such a scheme is going to be sustainable is if we use the people on the ground who know the problem and the issues associated with the control of geese in local situations.

**Dave Thompson:** Given what has been said this morning, this is obviously a real problem. It would be nice to think that we could get a Scotland-wide solution that would deal with it. However, given what Baz Hughes has told us about the number of greylags on the Uists in the Western Isles and the barnacle geese on Islay, and given that greylag geese are a quarry species and that barnacle geese are protected, it strikes me that the same solution cannot be applied to those two different species. If, as I believe Baz said, Scotland has 75 per cent of the world population of barnacle geese, and a lot of them are on Islay, that in itself creates a particular problem.

I wonder whether we need different methods of controlling and dealing with the situation in different parts of the country. As a layman, I would think that a surfeit of greylag geese, which are, after all, a quarry species, should provide a really good food source that should be utilised to everyone's benefit. Why can we not have a solution that involves the shooting and marketing of such geese? I know that rules and regulations currently prevent that, which I think is a bit daft, but the geese could be either sold for human consumption or turned into, say, animal feed.

There is an issue about recreating markets and so on, but I am sure that we could deal with that. Is that not the pretty obvious answer to the greylag problem? The problem with barnacle geese is different and can be considered separately. I ask people to comment first on the greylag issue and the suggestion that we should be able to let people shoot and sell them.

**The Convener:** I was not going to get into the issue of marketing just yet, but we will most certainly discuss it later. I will take Baz Hughes first.

**Dr Hughes:** I just want to emphasise a point that Dave Thompson made and remind everyone that, with regard to greylag geese and barnacle geese, we are talking about two completely different situations. We all agree that the greylag populations, which are increasing in the crofting areas and are potentially affecting the high nature value farming areas, are a problem; indeed, that is why Scottish Natural Heritage has introduced its adaptive management pilot schemes.

Members will know from their papers that, within those pilot schemes, there are trials of sales. Although we are cautious about those, if they are properly licensed and managed they seem to work pretty well—certainly on Orkney. If sales were to be applied to other common migrant goose populations, such as the pink-footed goose, however, there would be a danger of creating too large a market. Admittedly, the goose population is large at the moment, but such wide, commercial harvesting activities are the reason why many of our goose populations went down to such low levels 30 or 40 years ago. We would not oppose trials of goose sales in the crofting areas, but we would take a very different position if that model were to be applied more widely and to other common goose species, even if it was regulated.

**Graeme Dey:** Like Dave Thompson, I am very much a layman in this. However, I wonder whether we should be trying to think outside the box; here is an outside-the-box suggestion. On the east coast of Scotland, we have a considerable problem with seagulls, and when we looked at solutions to it we looked at the situation in Venice, where pigeon numbers are controlled by lacing feed with contraceptives. If we are talking about Orkney having 20,000 greylag geese, which I presume is the dominant species, I wonder whether we could not combine a measure such as that with a shooting programme. That may be a bit leftfield, but it is a thought.

**Alex Fergusson:** Andrew Bauer said that his members on Islay feel that the situation needs to move to a new phase—I think that is the phrase that he used. Do they have a combined view of what that new phase should be?

**Andrew Bauer:** We are at a sensitive phase in the discussions, so I will try not to open Pandora's box. The Islay sustainable goose management strategy, which is currently in draft form, is being developed by our local members, SNH and the Scottish Government, and we believe that it sets out the way forward for a more sustainable strategy over the next 10 years at least. It acknowledges that there are protected species, which we have talked about, and as well as talking about combining methods, it sets a sustainable population range. It also sets out a programme of monitoring and evaluation of things such as agricultural damage, which is a key consideration.

We are very supportive of the strategy and believe that SNH and the Scottish Government have matured in their understanding of the issues and have accepted that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with in a legally robust way. We hope that, in the near future, the document will be approved and we will start to see real change on Islay.

There is not going to be an overnight fix, though. The geese are a protected species and we need to be comfortable that we are operating within the bounds of the law but without getting ourselves tied in knots about being 100 per cent sure about every last detail. If we wait until we are at that point—or even close to that point—we will still be here in 10 years. The risk is that, if we hang around and wait for every last bit of data to be perfect, there will be inaction and the status quo will remain.

**Councillor Robertson:** We have a pilot scheme in Uist under which the goose meat can be sold. The people who shoot the geese have to be licensed, of course, and must have completed hygiene training, and the premises that sell the meat must be licensed. However, the meat is allowed to be sold only in Uist, and demand for it is absolutely huge. We would like to see more open sales, with people being allowed to sell the carcasses off-island, which they are not allowed to do at the moment. Cartridges and shot are very expensive, but the scheme allows for some return to those who take part in it. There is definitely potential there.

**The Convener:** Indeed. We will bring you back in on marketing.

Paul Walton wants to talk about the science and the methods that have been adopted.

**Dr Walton:** I want to refer to Dave Thompson's point about the idea of locally appropriate solutions evolving. That is exactly what has been happening since the 1990s. As has been mentioned, we have had seven local goose management schemes in Scotland with Scottish Government support and funding, and often with

secretariat functions being provided by SNH. Each one has been different; the Uist scheme is different from the Islay scheme, and the scheme in Strathbeg in the north-east, for pink-footed geese, was very different.

We are here because the Scottish ministers decided to cut the budget for goose management. Do not get me wrong. It was not done for spurious reasons; it was done post the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009 when constraints on ministers were exceedingly tight. Ministers decided that the amount that they would spend on goose management had to change. Cuts were made to budgets and then things started to fall apart.

A situation had carefully evolved as a balance between the three main aims of goose policy, which are to take account of agricultural interests and agricultural damage, to take account of conservation interests, and to get value for the public purse. The current debates are interesting because the same debates have been running for quite a long time, but because of the turnover of officials, people cannot quite remember that. It is important to point out that the issue is complex and requires locally adapted solutions.

**Alex Fergusson:** The RSPB Scotland submission says clearly that the science is not sufficiently robust. If we are to have effective local management schemes, I presume that you would argue that there needs to be more robust science behind them. Do you have any suggestions on how we could increase the quality of the scientific evidence, given the constraints on budgets?

**Dr Walton:** I apologise for being fairly strong on that point. The answer depends on the situation. For example, a lot of sport hunting of greylags in Orkney goes on, but the gathering of data on hunting bags is exceedingly poor in Scotland compared with other European countries and beyond, in places such as America. We have no idea how many geese are shot by people coming from places such as Italy on sport-hunting visits. We argue that that really ought to be addressed.

During the passage of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, there was discussion of that matter. There was exploration of whether there should be a system of voluntary bag recording, but there is no science on how accurate that is. I suggest that if you are going to go for the adaptive management approach, which is scientifically underpinned and which involves managing populations to pre-ordained levels, you really need to know that additional mortality. That is one example of how the science could be improved.

With the barnacle goose on Islay, another huge gap in our knowledge relates to the efficacy of lethal scaring versus non-lethal scaring. If you tell

a farmer who has thousands of geese on his or her land that they have 75 per cent of the world population, he or she will not necessarily mind—that will not be the first thing on their mind. However, there is a legal question under the European birds directive that relates to the idea of a viable alternative solution. Unless we understand what lethal scaring, or shooting, can do to reduce agricultural damage, compared with what non-lethal scaring can do, we do not have the basic picture. We have been calling for that for 15 years, but the research has not been done.

**The Convener:** Right—that is in the pot. You mentioned Dave Thompson, so I will let him come back in, before I bring in others.

**Dave Thompson:** Thank you, convener. I am aware that various schemes have been running for a number of years and that there have been pilots. The point that I was trying to get at—I probably put it very badly—is that we have not got very far. I do not think that that is purely down to the Government cutting cash.

You could keep throwing ever-growing amounts of cash at the problem, as Andrew Bauer said in relation to Islay, but what does that actually achieve? Uisdean Robertson made a point about allowing geese to be sold off-island. I suppose that what I am asking is this: have we not done enough in the pilot—certainly in Uist—to allow us to broaden the sale of the geese, instead of restricting it to Uist?

10:30

We could go on for ever pulling together data. Dr Walton said that we do not have nearly enough data and that we should have been collecting it 15 years ago, but we have a real problem, and I think that there is probably enough evidence. I do not think that you need to wait, as Andrew Bauer said, to get every last i dotted and t crossed in the data before decisions can be made. Decisions have been made in the past with less data than we have now.

It strikes me that a simple and straightforward solution would be to broaden the pilots in Uist and allow the geese to be sold so that we can begin to create a market. Why do we need to wait so much longer to do that? If people have answers to that question, I would welcome hearing their views.

**Claudia Beamish:** I am glad that that aspect of the local goose management schemes has been raised. Initially, it seemed to me, as a lay person, to be an interesting way forward. I hope that, when we come to discuss the Scottish Government's involvement, we will be able to talk about funding implications, but I shall hold back on that until we reach that point in our discussion.

I would like to make two points. The first is about whether lead shot is used and what alternatives there are for culls. The second is about tourism, which has been highlighted to me in relation to Islay. I am not advocating that as a way forward, but there are issues around tourists' interest in seeing the geese flying, which is obviously a dramatic sight.

**The Convener:** They would not know the difference between 5,000 and 10,000 geese, though.

**Nigel Don:** Alex Fergusson went in the direction that I was going to go in about the science, and I would like to come back to Paul Walton with a couple of thoughts. I agree with Dave Thompson that you never get complete data; the obvious lesson of life is that you just have to work with what you have got and always try to explore what you need.

If I understood Dr Walton aright, he suggested that a few years ago the balance was about right. I am not trying to over-egg the matter, but I think that he also said that we do not have enough science, so we do not know. I am just a bit confused as to how those two statements tie together. However, my real question is this: what do we need to do to improve the science, without spending megabucks, because we know that the money is not there? Can somebody put some priority on where we need to do the science?

**The Convener:** Paul Walton will have a chance to respond in a minute, after Andrew Bauer's response. Perhaps Mr Bauer could also say something about the fouling of the soil that farmers are concerned about, with the large number of geese.

**Andrew Bauer:** Dave Thompson made a point about markets, and that may well be part of the solution. We have found in Orkney that there are so many geese that we can scare them off one part of the island and we might cull a few, but they move to other islands and stay there, where dealing with them is more difficult and costly. There are logistical problems; more money might solve them, but I doubt it.

I turn to the situation on Islay. Paul Walton said that we were in balance a few years ago, and I think that that money had, in effect, bought people's silence and their acceptance of the problem at a certain level. We are now in a completely different sphere.

The goose population may have stabilised, but it has stabilised at a level that is unsustainable, so we need to take action now. The imperfect data need to be improved on. On Islay, there are plans to establish 26 exclosures—plots from which geese are kept out. What practical help could we provide? I know that I have just said that money is

not the solution, but the farmers on whose farms those exclosures will have a practical impact might find it easier and more acceptable to get on board with a substantial piece of monitoring of agricultural damage if help were to be offered to deal with the impacts on their farms of those exclosures. Because of how farming on Islay operates, it will be difficult to find land with the right type of crop in the right rotation for those 26 exclosures.

That is a short-term problem. More money might help, but we know that, overall, money will not necessarily sort out all the problems. The Islay project will deliver more science, even if it will not deliver perfect science or perfect data. I absolutely agree with Nigel Don that it is necessary for us to proceed on the basis of the best available evidence and to improve as we go along. We cannot stand still.

**Dr Walton:** It seems to be being suggested that, somehow, I am being excessively pedantic to delay things, and that I am dotting every i and crossing every t.

I say again that the current Islay plan relates to a migratory species. No approach has been made to Greenland and Iceland, which are the other countries where the species occurs, to ask them what they think about us halving the population—that is in the range that Andrew Bauer mentioned—of the geese. That is not a detail; it is pretty fundamental. We have not measured the agricultural damage and what impact the proposed measures might have on that agricultural damage. That is the whole point of the goose management schemes. That is not just a detail or an example of dotting an i. There are pretty fundamental gaps in data and there is quite a long way to go. We are part of the discussions.

Mention has been made of the Norwegian scheme for the pink-footed goose. I remind people that that is a quarry species, which means that, unlike the barnacle goose, it can be hunted legally. What sets the Norwegian scheme apart is that, right from the start, all parties—conservationists, hunters and farmers—were engaged in devising it. That has not been the case with the Islay scheme. The Scottish Government, SNH officials and the NFUS visited the European Commission together, hatched their plan and put it in front of us, although there are clear gaps in the knowledge. I stand by what I said—those gaps in the knowledge are quite important.

**The Convener:** Nigel, does that answer your question about the science that we need to do to gain more knowledge?

**Nigel Don:** I do not think that it answers it completely. Paul Walton has made the point that there are in the data large gaps that ought to be

filled if we are to model things properly. I think that that is a fair comment.

**Marina Curran-Colthart:** When it comes to farm management, there are certain farming interests on Islay and there are research models that have been extremely successful in encouraging geese. I have been looking at some of the opportunities that exist for a legal derogation under article 9 of the EC birds directive to allow a certain number of geese to be shot

“To prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water—Agriculture and Crofting affected.”

A short-term solution to get things back on an even keel would certainly be worthy of consideration at Government level.

I also want to discuss the tourism aspect, which Claudia Beamish referred to. Even though Islay has wonderful biodiversity—some of the best examples of biodiversity in Britain are in Argyll and Bute—people do not go there just to see the wildlife. People also want to get a flavour of the island’s culture, which is dominated by farming and crofting. Again, that has to be rebalanced, because the fields look different when they have been eaten down by the geese. There is modelling to be done to regain that balance, but there is also a legal aspect that can be engineered to suit, even on a short-term basis, to get things back in kilter.

**Dr Hughes:** I want to make three points. On the science needs with regard to barnacle geese, there are also legal implications because we need to try non-lethal solutions before we can legally get a derogation under the birds directive. As Paul Walton has just said, scientific evidence might be needed to allow the process to be legal. Obviously, birds have been killed, but there are questions about whether the current culling of barnacle geese is legal.

Another gap in the science is evidence of economic damage and the economic impact on farmers. Having visited Islay and knowing the people up there, I am very clear that the payments that the farmers are getting are not as high as those calculated by the model used by SNH. Furthermore, the figures that are being used have not been updated since 2008, which might be another issue.

For me, though, the main issue is that we have not seen evidence of the economic impact on farmers, although it probably exists. The only study on this subject, which was carried out by Kev Bevan in 2012, contains case studies of three farmers, two of whom were undercompensated by £17,000 and £21,000 a year respectively and the third by £1,000. However, there are 100 farmers on Islay. The best thing that could be done to help would be an economic analysis that would allow

us to put all our cards on the table and let us know whether what was being said was true.

My final point is that the science with regard to the barnacle goose is very complicated, and a lot more science is needed. If it would help, we would be very happy to table a paper on that. The adaptive management greylag pilots in the areas that Dave Thompson mentioned can be easily fixed by the science, and the few minor tweaks that are needed would cost a few tens of thousands of pounds. In short, the greylag situation can be fixed easily, but the barnacle goose situation is a lot more complicated.

**Andrew Bauer:** Just to clarify Baz Hughes's comment about getting a derogation, I note that we as a country can choose to derogate; in other words, if the Scottish Government is confident in what it is doing, it can choose to derogate from the birds directive. There would be a legal challenge from the European Commission or the decision would be called in if somebody complained, and the obvious groups that might object are the RSPB and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

It is therefore not the case that a derogation would have to be approved by the European Commission. We have sat down with people from the Commission who said, "This is something that Scotland needs to sort out itself. We're not going to sit here, doing the Big Brother thing. You get on and sort it out. If there's a major problem, we might look at it, but then again, we might not." We must not get paranoid about applying for derogation. Yes, we need good science and to improve things as we go along, but it is important to bear in mind that the solution is in our hands.

**Dr Walton:** I would just remind everyone that the precedent that is set tends to be quite important. The birds directive is one of the most effective pieces of conservation legislation in human history, and its massive and positive impact on the annex 1 species is measurable and demonstrative. Given that Scotland has 75 per cent of the world population of the annex 1 species, any decision to reduce their numbers is likely to attract some scrutiny. However, Andrew Bauer is quite right that we cannot say for sure.

The flavour of the discussion seems to be that Scotland is full of people who are chomping at the bit to get out and shoot the geese and thereby solve the problem. The big issue is the feasibility of doing that, because it is not that easy. Indeed, in alluding to the situation in Orkney, Andrew Bauer made it clear that it is just not easy to shoot very large numbers of geese.

On Islay, barnacle geese are shot under licence, and a couple of years back the minister doubled the bag limit there. We did not agree with that, but we have not pursued our opposition. When the

limit doubled, the RSPB got complaints from visitors to Islay that the shooting had become more visible. They might not have noticed a difference between 5,000 and 10,000 geese, as the convener said, but they noticed the shooting. If we increase the bag limit further, the shooting will be obvious, because it will be difficult to do and a lot of people will be involved. The whole business of adaptive management—that is, actively controlling the population, which should not be confused with what happened in previous schemes—has for the past couple of years been trialled for greylags on Orkney, but in this context the assumptions are entirely untested.

10:45

I want to get back to the spirit of the petition, which is about the crofting areas in Uist. The machair life scheme has been mentioned; the RSPB was integral to getting that scheme off the ground and running it. The scheme took over from the Uist goose scheme, in the knowledge that the budget for the previous scheme was going to be cut.

The application of £75,000 to £80,000 a year meant that the crops in Uist were, in effect, protected. Under the machair life project, there was an increase in the total area of late-harvested arable crops in Uist, which deliver a huge biodiversity value; the number of crofter complaints went down to zero; and the number of geese shot under licence decreased. We used non-lethal scaring methods—for example, we had children build scarecrows—and a goose-plucking machine was bought as part of the project in an attempt to build a locally sustainable industry. The RSPB has been really involved in such activity and is supportive of that sort of thing.

**Councillor Robertson:** I have lived with this issue in Uist for the past 30 or 40 years and have seen the damage that geese have done over that period. Crofting practices have changed to adapt to the problem, and certain areas have been given up to the geese because they cannot be protected.

To be fair to Paul Walton, I think that the EU machair life scheme worked, because there was a heavy emphasis on croft protection. That is the big issue in Uist; after all, a fair income comes into Uist on the back of the work that is done on the machair. However, the worry now is about what will happen after the end of the project.

We have the evidence about what can happen to the crops in Uist when there is no protection. Crofters just give up. I have been told that clearly in the past few days; crofters are not going to keep putting in hours and hours of work to protect the crops for no return. When the geese have been

through a crop, it is as though a road roller has been through it.

**The Convener:** We have talked about the science and methods of control. I now want to draw that part of the discussion to a close, so that we can consider other issues.

**Andrew Bauer:** May I make a quick point? NFU Scotland's members on Islay, Orkney and other affected areas understand that they—and indeed Scotland—have legal obligations and that the birds are here to stay. We are not calling for the eradication of the species; we are simply calling for a more sustainable number.

This is all about people's right to farm. Yes, people receive direct support, which comes with an obligation to deliver public goods. At the same time, it is only fair that they should be able to run their businesses in the most sustainable way possible and that they should be able to produce food, which is primarily what they are there to do. For some farmers, particularly on Islay, that is becoming almost impossible.

**Angus MacDonald:** Can Councillor Robertson update us on the funding situation for the machair life project? Is there any prospect of the project continuing?

**Councillor Robertson:** I do not think so. Paul Walton might be able to answer that question.

**Dr Walton:** I can. Machair life was a four-year project that not only looked at geese, but did lots of other things, such as provide the machinery needed to spread traditional seaweed fertiliser. It has just ended.

We were keen to have a second EU LIFE+ funded project, which the European Commission tells us is quite normal. However, SNH was unable to assist with the cofinancing, which was essential; it just did not work financially. That is the situation that we are left with.

We then said to SNH, "This adaptive management route you're going down for the geese on Uist might be managing the population down, but it is untested and is not about active crop protection in precious small areas of globally unique arable machair." We figured out that it would cost £75,000 to £80,000 a year just to do a bit of crop protection, and SNH very generously found £40,000 to fund it. It would be an extremely useful and positive output of the discussion if we managed to get the extra money to run a full crop protection scheme for the next few years until we see whether adaptive management and population regulation work to protect those crops.

We are talking about a globally unique biodiversity resource that is based on the extensive cattle crofting system of the Uists. There are 35 unique races of small oats, rye and barley

on the Uists alone that will be lost if people switch to the mainland varieties. For a few tens of thousands of pounds we can really protect them, which will be good value for money.

**Angus MacDonald:** Perhaps we can raise that point with the minister next week.

**The Convener:** Indeed. The point of gathering this evidence is to allow us to quiz the Government. I ask Baz Hughes and Patrick Krause to wrap up this section before we move on to the issue of markets.

**Dr Hughes:** Andrew Bauer highlighted the information gap and suggested that many farmers on Islay and Orkney are really on the wire and might be put out of business by the geese. Let us collect the evidence so that we can see what proportion of farmers are in that situation. We need that information to put whatever level of goose control might be discussed into context.

**The Convener:** I have questions in mind about what crops those farmers are trying to grow and whether they are trying to grow them for the local industry. I do not know the details of that, but I guess that such a discussion could become very technical indeed. We can probably follow up those matters after the meeting.

**Patrick Krause:** I have a quick question of clarification. Our petition focuses specifically on the crofting areas. Islay has few crofts and lots of barnacle geese, and the Uists have lots of crofts and few barnacle geese, although people on the Uists are saying that barnacle geese are starting to become more of a problem. The greylags are the serious problem; we have gone on and on about the fact that they are the residents. Baz Hughes said a minute ago that the answer to controlling the greylags is very easy. It is not for me to ask a question of another person who is giving evidence, but if you do not mind, convener, I would like him to clarify that.

**The Convener:** Okay.

**Dr Hughes:** As we have been pointing out all the way through this discussion, the barnacle geese situation is very different to the greylag situation. The barnacle geese are causing problems for the farmers on Islay, although I do not know for how many. Perhaps some of them or quite a lot of them are fairly happy with the payments that they get. It might well be that a small number of farmers are getting paid quite a lot of money for having geese on their land, but I do not know. Again, that is why we need more information.

As for the greylags, the pilots are largely working well. In the Orkney pilot, for example, the number of birds shot in the current season has exceeded the 5,500 target; the figure was 5,900.

The numbers are being properly monitored. Because of the surveys that we do every summer, we know exactly how many birds are there. If we had a little bit more information on the age ratios in the bag, we would have a largely fit-for-purpose monitoring scheme on Orkney. The other pilots are moving in a similar direction. The proposal for the Lewis and Harris pilot, which came to the national goose management review group, was excellent. The schemes are working very well, but the complications arise when we shift the discussion away from the original petition to Islay.

**The Convener:** But we are all trying to find ways of getting a steer from the Government on how it is going to handle all of these local situations. The petition is a means to an end; this is an issue for people not just in the Uists but in other places, too. We have to take that into account.

We will move on to the issue of markets, which Jim Hume is going to talk about.

**Jim Hume:** First, I want to say that this is not just a problem in the crofting areas. As Alex Fergusson and Claudia Beamish know, down in the south-west, in sunny parts of the Solway, there are problems with both of the varieties that we are talking about.

I want to ask about markets, which have been touched on briefly. With every threat, there might be an opportunity. We have talked about sport hunting and wildfowling opportunities, but are they being explored enough? Are there any barriers at the moment? Might the situation be similar to that for deer, in that hunting or wildfowling is restricted perhaps to those who have the largest purse and who are simply encouraged to shoot a couple of geese and that is it, or are we missing an opportunity to control the geese in a controlled way? Andrew Bauer's point about someone shooting a couple of geese—if they are a good enough shot—and the geese then disappearing to the next island is fair enough, but if there was someone on the next island or in a certain position, we could control things better. It would be interesting to know whether those opportunities have been explored enough and what the barriers are that are preventing that from happening at the moment.

As for exploring the uses of the goose as a product, once it is shot, I know that there have been some small programmes, but are we missing opportunities to use the bird as food for humans or for other animals, such as fish?

**Andrew Bauer:** Orkney would certainly be the example that I would look to, because it has a very large population of greylag geese, and it already has the sale pilot. It would help even more if we were able to free up new markets, because sales

are currently restricted to the market on the islands. People are expected to go out there. They might get modest support for shot and such things, but the limit on the number of geese that can be shot depends on people's good will, time and the cost to them. If we create new markets and if people know that they will be able to sell somewhere, they will obviously be more inclined to go out and do more shooting. The challenge, particularly on Orkney, is to find enough people who are willing to do enough shooting to bring the numbers of geese down from their current very high levels.

**Jim Hume:** You mentioned freeing up the market. It would be interesting to find out what you mean by that. I know that Italian shooters, who were mentioned earlier, are keen on shooting wildfowl. Is it simply a case of finding people, perhaps on Orkney, to shoot geese and encouraging others to visit Orkney, say, as part of a shooting experience?

**Andrew Bauer:** As far as I am aware, many groups already come to Orkney from places such as Italy. However, that brings its own challenges. They obviously want the geese on tap, but if somebody has already done some shooting for control purposes, they might not get the experience that they are looking for. We need to find a balance, with perhaps more emphasis on controlling numbers.

When I talked about freeing up the market, I meant that we need to open up the mainland market. There are currently very strict conditions on what can be done. We are not suggesting that those conditions be removed and that the market be turned into a free-for-all, but if people were able to sell into the mainland Scotland and United Kingdom markets, we would suddenly have a completely different situation.

**Jim Hume:** What are the strict conditions that you mentioned? Who imposes them?

**Andrew Bauer:** I think that Councillor Robertson described them earlier. They relate to the data that are collected, who is doing the shooting, where the birds are processed and how and where they are being sold. A lot of that would remain in place, but the key thing would be the ability to tell people, "You can sell." Instead of being able to sell only through, say, the butcher in Kirkwall, people could suddenly sell to the fine establishments of Edinburgh, Glasgow, London or wherever else. The demand is there, and people would obviously put more time and effort into the shooting on Orkney.

**Dr Hughes:** If that happened, there would of course be demand for goose meat. That is where we start to get into possible population level impacts.

I want to make a related point to follow up on what Claudia Beamish said. We need to be mindful that some birds are being shot with lead, which raises human as well as wildlife health concerns. A couple of years ago, the Food Standards Agency issued advice that was based on a study in Scotland showing that people who consume a lot of game are at risk of human health effects. Other people at risk include pregnant women and children.

In the next couple of months, the lead ammunition group is due to report on a wildlife health and human health risk assessment. The issue for markets would not arise if all the birds were being shot with non-lead or non-toxic shot, but some are being shot with lead.

11:00

**Jim Hume:** I know that not all the geese affected will be above water, but it is illegal to use lead over water.

**Dr Walton:** On hunting and shooting, I reiterate that we are really not good at collecting data on the number of birds that are shot in this country. I urge the committee to consider that.

As for the suggestion that there are thousands and thousands of geese, I make the point that, post-war, the Solway barnacle goose population—those geese are completely separate from the Islay ones, and they breed in Svalbard, not Greenland—was down to 500 birds. Goose population sizes naturally go up and down, but that number put the goose at the edge of extinction and was the result of commercial hunting. I therefore suggest that taking a gung-ho attitude to opening up the sale of carcasses would be wrong. At the same time, I find the idea that geese would be shot and wasted abhorrent. Something ought to be done about that.

The key point is that we must take a careful and controlled approach. That is why we are fine with the pilots of the sale of goose carcasses in the Uists and Orkney, but we want to see whether the regulation that SNH has put in place, which we agree with, is effective before we open up a situation in which demand rather than science might drive the number of geese that are culled. Indeed, that danger has arisen around the world.

Before the scheme is made fully commercial, we need to tread carefully. We must test things and get the right data, particularly on hunting.

**Councillor Robertson:** Returning to licensing, I point out that specific licences are issued to the people who shoot the geese as well as to premises. People who shoot must have a licence and must have done the hygiene training. Licences can be issued to others, but they can

only give the birds away. If they intend to sell to premises, people must use a special shot; they cannot use lead shot.

The pilot in Uist has been successful. In fact, one company in Uist—MacLean's, which has a bakery and a butchery—is talking about extending on the back of the pilot's success.

On a point that Paul Walton made, it is difficult to involve the number of people who would affect the number of geese. This year, a number of crofters have already applied for licences. A number of them are concerned about having to do the hygiene course, but those who have done it have quite enjoyed it and found it not as onerous as they had expected.

The potential is there to expand Uist's economy, and the company that I mentioned is experiencing demand. Extending the market outside Uist would be a big help.

**Claudia Beamish:** I have a quick question. Is there any concern about shooting among mixed flocks that graze together?

**The Convener:** I am sure that we will get an answer to that.

**Dave Thompson:** I will follow up the market aspect of the pilots. Does anybody have a good, sound reason why the markets should not be opened up more widely than Orkney and Uist? It strikes me that, if we are going to encourage the development of shooting and marketing during the pilots, we need to allow folk who are creating a market, such as those in Uist that Uisdean Robertson mentioned, to develop that so that they can justify whatever investment they need to make in processing.

To me, this is a perfect example of where we should have local processing in the place where the birds are shot so that the jobs and the added value stay in the islands. If the pilot is restrictive in that the legislation does not allow selling outwith Uist, that will hinder the pilot and we will not get a true scientific assessment of the effect. If the market was opened up, we would have a much better situation, I would have thought, and it would help to speed up the process.

How long does the pilot need to run for before folk will be happy that they know what it has led to? Is a year plenty of time? This time next year, will we be able to say that the pilot has been a success and that we should extend it, or are folk going to look for a five-year or a 10-year pilot?

**The Convener:** Indeed. People who live on the Uists can only eat so many geeseburgers. The question about markets and so on would be dear to any economist's heart.

**Dr Walton:** On a point of clarification, the greylag goose can be shot without a licence during the open season. In the close season during the spring and summer, people need a licence, although that is not necessarily a problem.

I defer to Patrick Krause's and Uisdean Robertson's greater connections, but an issue that has arisen in crofting areas and one that I have discussed several times is that, if a deer causes damage on a croft, the crofter can shoot it, but if a goose is causing damage on a croft, it is all about who holds the sporting rights. The estates get money from geese shooting in the open season, so during the period when the crofters want to protect their crofts, which is the late summer—that is the critical period when the seed matures, not just of the grain but of the wild flowers that are so important as well—there has been an issue with estates being reluctant to give that permission. That is perhaps an issue that the committee could consider, because crofters do not feel as free as they might. I do not know whether Uisdean Robertson wants to comment on that.

**Councillor Robertson:** It is clear that community-owned estates such as Stòras Uibhist are much more proactive in terms of shooting geese than privately owned estates. I will leave it at that.

**The Convener:** Indeed. I think that we understand what you are talking about.

**Jim Hume:** That is interesting. We have talked about using the geese as a shooting target, if you like. There are problems with that, obviously, because a couple of shots and they are all off, flying away. Are there other methods that can be used or are used in other parts of the world? I am thinking of nets being fired over them to collect larger numbers at a time. Has anything been done with that? Is it legal?

**Andrew Bauer:** A range of things is done. On the specific question of nets, I am not sure, but others in the room might know the answer.

The point that I was going to make is a reflection on the markets. Some comments have been made about a free-for-all and opening things up, but we are not proposing that at all. That is not what we are describing. At the beginning of the discussion, Paul Walton said that we have less than 5 per cent of the world's greylag population, and Baz Hughes said that if we are not careful with the shooting of greylags, we will have population level decline. That is what we are aiming for here—the objective with the greylags is population level decline.

So long as controls remain, we see no problem with selling to mainland markets. It would not be a free for all. There would be a bigger market, people would be incentivised and income would be brought in. We would not suddenly be throwing

open the floodgates and wrecking the vast majority of the global population; we would be bringing down the level of a quarry species of which we hold a small proportion of the global total. There is no reason why the mainland market should not be available.

**Councillor Robertson:** On the point about nets, the guidance says:

“you cannot use the following methods to kill or take birds: traps, snares, hooks, nets, bird lime and similar substances”.

There is a whole raft of methods that cannot be used, and nets are one of them.

**Dr Hughes:** Andrew Bauer has set me up perfectly for what I was going to say, which is that anything that is done needs to be done with the same process that the Norwegians have used. As Paul Walton said, the development of the plan there involved all stakeholders from the start. They came up with an agreed population, which is something that we have never done in this country.

My concern about the demand is about how many birds we have to offer. For example, market demand for the Orkney birds might be increased, because the target is to shoot 5,500 birds a year for three or four years to get down to the target population level. After that, many fewer birds would be available to be shot, so we might get into a situation in which there was a big demand but no product to provide.

**Dave Thompson:** I understand exactly what you are saying but, if the populations drop, which is what we are looking to achieve with the greylag, and there are fewer birds available to come on to the market through licensing—or whatever method we use—the value of those birds will increase. Therefore, the income for those shooting a smaller number would stay at a reasonable level, which would encourage them to continue to shoot that reduced amount. There would then be a quality product that was of high value, and even greater value could be added if the product was processed locally. That could only be a good thing.

**The Convener:** Indeed.

**Marina Curran-Colthart:** There seems to be a sort of gung-ho attitude. It is not easy to shoot a goose—you have to be a pretty good shot to do it. I do not believe that there are that many people on the islands who are particularly good at dispatching a goose. We have good examples of specialists who are involved in the control of fox numbers prior to lambing. There is an opportunity for collaborative working to meet market demand so that it is not just one croft or farm that benefits. Surely it would be a better idea to work as a collective. We would be better able to manage and monitor that. If we work on a collective basis to

meet market demand, that would be much fairer all round.

**Patrick Krause:** I was going to ask whether more consideration could be given to alternative methods such as netting. The idea of using contraceptive in feed is well known—I do not know whether it works with geese, but it certainly works with the control of other species. It has been used to try to interrupt breeding cycles. Another way of doing that is through egg oiling, for example. I do not know whether it is hugely successful, but I certainly know that geese are much cleverer than one would expect and start to work out when their nest has been tampered with. The idea of interrupting breeding cycles is good, because it could achieve the objective of reducing goose numbers but, as Dave Thompson keeps saying, if we can reduce the numbers in a way that involves using the resource and using local people to manage it so that the approach is sustainable, that would make a lot of sense.

11:15

**Dr Walton:** I would agree with that.

Contraception has been used in a couple of instances, but the problem that we have is a technical one: we do not yet have contraceptives that are species specific. If you start chucking oestrogen about in the environment, there can be all sorts of unintended consequences. It can be really tricky for non-target species if they somehow get access to and consume it. That does not mean to say that it will not be possible to use contraception in the future. We should all encourage research on species-specific immunocontraception. It is probably a bit of a non-starter at the moment, although it has been used in Venice—I have seen the effects of it.

Egg oiling has been trialled in Scotland. Scientists have said that it will not really work because the goose populations are largely dependent on the adults, rather than their breeding success, if you see what I mean—that is just the biology of it. However, some people on Tiree thought that it was quite effective. There are question marks around some of the other methods.

I want to pick up another point that was made before it vanishes. I am sorry if I am stepping back a bit, but Claudia Beamish raised the issue of mixed flocks. There are mixed flocks. The barnacle geese on Islay mix with the threatened Greenland white-fronted geese. The current proposal says that we are not going to shoot at roosts, where the species separate out, but it also acknowledges that the two species occur together. We feel that one of the problems with the current proposal for Islay is that the Greenland white-

fronted goose would inevitably be disturbed by massively increased shooting, which is an issue that has not yet fully been addressed.

**The Convener:** Graeme Dey has a question about the science. I hope that we can think about the way forward in a minute or two.

**Graeme Dey:** This is something that we should maybe have touched on earlier. We have talked about the impact of the geese on the local economies and on food production. Is there any science or data about whether their presence has an impact on human health and animal health? Given the issue that we encounter on farmland where dogs are allowed to roam wild and do their business, it strikes me that if we have 10,000 geese doing their business, as it were, that could have an impact. Is there anything to say that that has an impact on watercourses or the interaction with animals? Is there anything there that we should be concerned about?

**Patrick Krause:** I can only give a non-scientific answer to that, which is that crofters find the fouling of pasture to be a huge problem because the cattle need to eat the grass and, if it is fouled—if, as you say, it has had thousands of geese doing their business on it—the cattle do not want to eat it.

**Andrew Bauer:** In addition to the health impacts on the cattle, there are potential environmental risks. In its evidence, Orkney Islands Council talked about the potential impacts on drinking water supplies in Orkney. We are also aware that there are exceedingly high levels of nitrates in and around Loch of Strathbeg in Aberdeenshire, which has a large goose population. As with any living thing, there are inevitable consequences, not just for the animals but for the wider environment.

**Dr Hughes:** We know that geese carry some bacteria that can cause food poisoning in humans, but I do not think that any link has been proven. It could hypothetically be an issue, but I do not think that it is.

**Councillor Robertson:** Vets on Uist have said that it has caused a problem with sheep at lambing, but they have not put that in writing.

The other issue that we should have mentioned earlier is that greylags have had an impact on other bird species, such as the corn bunting.

**The Convener:** Indeed. We have quite a lot of questions to ask the minister when we see him. Therefore, we have to think about the way ahead. We have had quite a lot of hints from many of you about the way you think we should go. It is up to us to try to treat the petition as a means to get better solutions from the Government, not just in relation to questions about how much cash goes

in, but in relation to science and many other things. Do the witnesses have any final thoughts about how we should proceed, to guide our contemplation of the way ahead?

**Andrew Bauer:** I suggest splitting it down for the quarry species and the protected species. For quarry species, we are talking about large numbers of a population that is not globally significant, although that does not mean that there should not be care and consideration over what is done. We could proceed in a more robust manner with those species, and we see the opening up of mainland markets for greylag goose carcasses as the best way to achieve that in the short and medium term. For protected species, Islay has been at the forefront of suffering the impacts, but because of that it is much further down the road than other areas are.

We are therefore keen for the committee to give its whole-hearted support to the Scottish Government, to SNH and to local farmers for the implementation of the plan. If we are to have any chance anywhere else with protected species, and if we are to find a sustainable balance, the effort that has gone into the strategy document is the best way of getting there. If the process stalls and we hang around navel gazing for another 10 or 15 years, I do not like to think about what the consequences would be for places such as Islay. It would not be good at all.

**Marina Curran-Colthart:** The document for Islay promotes the adaptive management approach, but I think that we must recognise that one size does not fit all. There are different issues on different islands.

Biodiversity in the broader sense involves other species. Where there is a population explosion of geese, other bird species such as chough, corncrake and corn bunting will suffer, as will their habitats. We rate our species-rich habitats on hill ground and in other areas, and we need to take an approach that redresses the balance, so I think that the minister's approach is a good start.

**Dr Walton:** First, one of the main points for RSPB Scotland is that the Government needs to increase the level of support for crop protection on the Uists. That is a terribly important map for biodiversity.

Secondly, the draft strategy is evidently incomplete in terms of fundamentals such as how numbers of geese relate to goose damage, how we relate to other member states on the flyway of those species and how they react to how Scotland acts, and the economics of the situation. Those fundamental issues need to be addressed before we can charge ahead with what I think is an incomplete strategy.

**The Convener:** I have to say that I have not discussed many of the areas that are beginning to be affected in my constituency, which stretches from crofting areas in the west to areas where Greenland white-fronted geese are being conserved by the RSPB and other groups under agri-environment schemes. Also, at Loch Eye in Easter Ross, a lot of grain farmers are beginning to complain about the number of geese, so you can understand why we need horses for courses—to mix metaphors—but the way forward needs to take into account the circumstances and the species.

We have got to a stage where most people have provided us with a range of information that will allow us to take the matter forward. The petition opens a door to quite a lot of opportunities for us to get better schemes, better science and better support, but it is a matter of seeing how we can lever those out of the current system. I hope that there will be room in the rural development part of the new common agricultural policy to help with the issue, as well as with the basic development of science, which is protected in the Scottish Government's budget for SRUC—Scotland's Rural College—and for other institutions.

I thank all the witnesses for their input and their pertinent contributions. Before I bring the public part of the meeting to a close, I would like to point out that, at its final meeting before the summer recess, on 25 June, the committee will hold its final evidence session on the petition on the control of wild goose numbers with the minister, as well as handling other business.

11:24

*Meeting continued in private until 12:20.*



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