Parliamentary Bureau – Designation of a Bill at Stage 1

Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

1. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Parliament on 19 February 2025 by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Mairi Gougeon MSP.

Discussion

2. The Bill introduces measures to protect the natural environment. Part 1 provides Scottish Ministers with powers to introduce statutory targets in relation to the restoration and regeneration of biodiversity.

3. Part 2 allows Scottish Ministers to make and change laws relating to the Environmental Impact Assessments regime and the Habitats Regulations. This would replace a power that was lost as a result of the UK's exit from the EU.

4. Part 3 relates to national parks. It adds new considerations to the aims of national parks and includes provision relating to national park authorities and the enforcement of byelaws.

5. Part 4 makes a range of changes in relation to deer management primarily by amending the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. This part includes updating the role of Scottish Natural Heritage ("NatureScot") in deer management, reporting requirements in relation to the Code of Practice, control agreements and control schemes, measures to prevent damage by deer, the authorisation of particular activities such as the shooting of deer, removal of venison licensing, and other related provisions.

6. The Bill falls within the remit of the following committees—

   Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
   The remit of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee includes matters relating to wildlife falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands. The Bill contains a range of provisions relating to deer management and accordingly the remit of this Committee is engaged.

   Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
   The remit of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee includes matters relating to environmental policy within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy. The Bill creates statutory biodiversity targets, makes changes to the Environmental Impact Assessments regime and includes provision relating to national parks. Accordingly, the remit of this Committee is engaged.

   Criminal Justice Committee
   The remit of the Criminal Justice Committee includes matters relating to criminal justice falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and

Home Affairs. The Bill creates new offences in relation to deer management and confers powers to create an offence, amend an existing offence or increase the range of activity which constitutes a criminal offence in relation to modifying or restating Environmental Impact Assessment legislation and Habitats regulations. Accordingly, the remit of this Committee is engaged.

7. It is understood that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee is best placed to be designated as the lead committee in respect of this Bill.

8. We are not aware of any interest of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee or the Criminal Justice Committee in being formally designated as a secondary committee. Lack of formal designation does not, of course, prevent these committees from considering the Bill if they subsequently decided to do so.

Recommendation

9. The Bureau is invited to consider recommending to the Parliament by motion that it agrees, under Rule 9.6.1, that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as lead committee.

10. A draft motion can be found below.

Draft Parliamentary Bureau motion on the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill:

Designation of Lead Committee – That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

Parliamentary Business Team
February 2025