

Conveners Group  
Wednesday 18 June 2025  
4th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## Co-ordination of Scottish Government business

### Introduction

1. The Conveners Group is invited to consider correspondence from Finlay Carson MSP, Convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, who has written to the Group regarding the co-ordination of Scottish Government business (see **Annexes**). This follows a [response from the Minister for Parliamentary Business](#) (22 April 2025) to the Convener's [original letter of 1 April 2025](#).
2. Mr Carson MSP has also included correspondence from the Scottish Food Coalition, which relates to the Committee's correspondence with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and parliamentary scrutiny of the good food nation plan.

### Action

3. The Group is asked to consider the matters raised in the correspondence for information.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**June 2025**

## **Annexe A: Letter from Finlay Carson MSP, Convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, to the Conveners Group**

Thursday 29 May 2025

Dear Liam,

I am writing to draw your, and my fellow conveners', attention to [correspondence from the Minister for Parliamentary Business](#) relating to the co-ordination of government business. This was in response to [my letter](#) highlighting the Committee's concerns that more oversight is required to ensure government business is spread across the parliamentary session to avoid overloading committee work programmes, thus protecting effective parliamentary scrutiny.

This follows the RAI Committee taking the decision not to scrutinise some government business – the second islands plan (despite our work earlier this session on this issue and which was intended to feed into scrutiny of the second plan) and the first good food nation plan (provided for under framework legislation the Committee considered at the start of this session and a strong area of members' interest) – in order to make time for our current legislative work programme.

Neither of these laid documents require parliamentary approval, which is why the Committee has been able to take these decisions. It does lead to a very real risk of a scrutiny deficit, however, whereby there's no detail to scrutinise during the passage of the primary legislation and limited or no time to scrutinise effectively, or at all, the secondary legislation or laid documents at the implementation stage. As an aside, I would like to flag up the different and inconsistent approaches taken in legislation in relation to laid documents, with a huge variation in the length of time provided for after a draft document is laid and before being finalised and whether a laid document is required to be approved by Parliament or not.

I welcomed the DPLR Committee's report into framework legislation and Henry VIII powers. As I said during my contribution to the DPLR Committee debate, however, whilst the report very properly considers the issue from the DPLR Committee's role and perspective, there is an opportunity to build on the report by further and wider consideration of the impact of framework legislation, or legislation which provides for laid or other statutory documents, on subject committees and overall parliamentary scrutiny. Regardless of the question of whether there is more framework legislation than previously, it feels like there is an increasing amount of government 'output' – taken broadly to mean primary and secondary legislation (including significant packages of implementing subordinate legislation), laid documents (including plans and targets, etc), codes of practice, guidance, etc. Just looking within the RAI Committee's remit, work is currently ongoing on the first good food nation plan, first rural support plan, second islands plan, second national marine plan, updated climate change plan, along with various codes of practice and guidance documents which implement the detail of recent legislation.

I would appreciate it if you could schedule this correspondence for discussion at a future Conveners' Group meeting as I would welcome other conveners' views on this issue. The recent correspondence from the Scottish Food Coalition relates to my above correspondence with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and parliamentary scrutiny of the good food nation plan.

## **Annexe B: Letter from the Scottish Food Coalition to the Minister for Parliamentary Business**

16 May 2025

Dear Minister Hepburn,

As Chair, and on behalf of the Scottish Food Coalition, I am writing to you today in relation to parliamentary scrutiny of the first National Good Food Nation plan, which is due to be laid before Parliament by the 30th June 2025.

Passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in June 2022, it has taken almost three years for this first draft National Good Food Nation plan to be brought forward for parliamentary scrutiny. Secondary legislation setting out the 'specified functions and descriptions' pertaining to the Act have still not been laid before parliament.

Due to a heavy legislative workload, alongside other statutory obligations, the RAI committee has recently indicated that they do not have enough time in their work programme to be able to conduct effective scrutiny of the proposed 1st National Good Food Nation plan. This comes in the context of the wider parliamentary aim of providing effective scrutiny of cross-cutting policy areas, as recognised in the 2023-24 Annual Report of the Conveners Group. In this report, the Conveners Group proposed 'championing innovative forms of scrutiny', yet if this is being frustrated by unrealistic statutory workloads driven by the Government's legislative programme, which is undermining the statutory scrutiny intended in, and required off, this innovative, framework legislation, not to mention the intention of the cross-policy collaborative spirit of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act.

We note in your recent correspondence with the RAI Committee that you indicated that committee workloads are "a matter for the Parliament" and that your "principal priority is to take forward [y]our policy programme". Whilst this may be objectively true with regards to the Scottish Parliament's Standing Orders, it completely disregards the reality of the situation we find ourselves in where a parliamentary committee(s) is/are unable to discharge their legal obligations due to the inundation of the Government's legislative programme. Both Government and Parliament are at the service of the people of Scotland and should work cooperatively in order to collectively discharge their legal obligations to the highest standard. Rigidly adhering to rules without acknowledgement of the role, and impact, one plays within a given situation is not only a disservice but could be argued to be an obstruction of scrutiny and accountability.

As Chair, and on behalf of the Scottish Food Coalition, I write to you today to ask you to reconsider your position and consider your role in helping to improve and facilitate parliamentary scrutiny of legal obligations. In this specific legislative context, it is essential – particularly as the Scottish Food Commission does not yet have full formal powers of oversight and scrutiny – that this first National Good Food Nation plan is effectively scrutinised by Parliament, in line with the recommendations of the recent report of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

The National Good Food Nation plan is required by law to read across multiple areas of interest and political portfolios to many of the Parliament's Committees, including Economy and Fair Work Committee; Education, Children and Young People Committee; Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;; Health, Social Care and Sport Committee; Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee; Rural Affairs and Islands Committee; and Social Justice and Social Security Committee (The convenors for all these committees have been copied into to this email).

Given the broad scope of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act and the 1st National Good Food Nation plan, we argue that this is an opportunity for an innovative form of parliamentary scrutiny – for example analogous to the special inquiry committee of the House of Lords - bringing together MSPs from a number of existing Scottish parliamentary committees to undertake a bespoke, combined scrutiny of this 1st National Good Food Nation plan. This approach could provide for effective participation by civil society, academic experts and children and young people (whose engagement is a requirement of the Act and would be expected in the spirit of the UNCRC).

Representatives from members of the Scottish Food Coalition would be keen to meet you as well as the relevant representatives from the Scottish Parliament, and where appropriate convenors of the associated committees, to discuss these proposals.

We strongly believe that it is incumbent on all those with responsibility to ensure the highest levels of scrutiny and accountability are adhered to.

Best wishes

Professor Mary Brennan

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