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Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
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7 June 2024

Dear Finlay,

A draft outline of what a Rural Support Plan might look like is enclosed and sets out, in broad terms, the proposed structure and content. It is intended to set out our strategic priorities for the plan period and build on what has already been set out in the Vision and the Route Map. It reflects work being undertaken within the Agricultural Reform Programme, which is being informed by continued co-development and the bill process.

As outlined at Stage 2 we are constrained in practice by what currently exists while we develop the details of the new system. The first plan must consider the phased transition from legacy EU CAP schemes to the new four-tier framework. The Route Map sets out the transition period and we are actively co-developing the details of the tiers in the framework with rural partners and stakeholders. The first version of the plan would be a living document and iterative, given the phase and the period of transition we are in.

The details of change, including the support within each tier, will be provided for in secondary legislation using the powers proposed in the bill. This will follow the normal process and include consultation through the associated impact assessments, along with parliamentary scrutiny. I have made clear our approach is always to co-develop with our industry and wider partners to ensure that legislation and regulation are best fitted to work and deliver to outcomes.

Within the outline plan the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is used as a proxy for Tier 1 support to provide an illustrative example of the approach that will be taken for each tier, as they are introduced. The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) is used to illustrate the type of data currently collected under CAP and what could form future reporting.

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I have heard and understand the repeated calls for greater clarity on budgets but the position I outlined at Stage 2 has not changed. There are no UK Government budget guarantees from 2025 and prior guarantees were on an annual basis and not a multiannual programme budget as we had under CAP. It is an issue that will be raised with whoever forms the incoming UK Government.

The outline plan includes details on the engagement that has taken place within the co-development approach of the Agricultural Reform Programme to provide an indication of what could be provided by the proposed statement of engagement on the plan.

The Stage 3 amendments I have lodged set clear requirements for the monitoring and evaluation of schemes, reports on the plan and engagement on the plan, including laying these before Parliament. It provides the assurance on detail that has been requested while retaining the need for future flexibility to determine the appropriate timescale, method and publication to ensure a robust and evidence led approach. This ensures the plan is proportionate, robust and delivers both now and long into the future.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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1. Reporting Period

2. Strategic outcomes

- Delivering the Vision through Bill objectives (context of phased transition from CAP into new framework).

3. Use of powers to deliver strategic outcomes

- Framework overview and timeframe for change (Route Map).
- Indicative budget split and details of support.

4. Support rationale and monitoring and evaluation

- Background research and analysis.
- Monitoring and evaluation framework including reporting.

5. Matters considered

- Regard to statutory duties.
- Regard to Scottish Government outcomes and policies (e.g. National Performance Framework, etc.).

6. Co-development approach

- Co-development process (who, what, when, where, why?),
- Engagement.

7. Parliamentary scrutiny (indicative)

- SSI timetable (indicative),
- Role of Parliament.

8. External reporting

- Monitoring and evaluation of schemes, reporting on the Rural Support Plan and engagement statement.
-

1. Reporting Period

Rural Support Plan 2026-2030
Amendment <insert>

ISBN: <insert>
Laying number: <insert>

Provided to the Scottish Ministers in pursuance of section 2(4) of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 on
day month year.

Amendment description: <insert>

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2. Strategic outcomes

[Vision for Scottish Agriculture](#)¹

The Vision for Agriculture is that Scotland will transform how it supports farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

This commitment will sit at the heart of a robust and coherent framework to underpin Scotland's future agriculture support regime. Scotland will have a support system that delivers high quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, nature restoration, and thriving rural and island communities.

High quality, nutritious food locally and sustainably produced is key to wellbeing – in economic, environmental, social and health terms. The Scottish Government will support and work with farmers and crofters to meet more of Scotland's own food needs, sustainably and to farm and croft with nature.

[Agricultural Reform Route Map](#)²

The initial Rural Support Plan 2026-2030 covers the period of phased transition from legacy EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) schemes into the new four tier framework using the powers of the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#).

The Route Map sets out this phased transition period with indicative dates and information on what will change and when, including when further information will be provided. It is a regularly updated based on the detail within the framework being actively co-developed with rural partners and stakeholders.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/next-step-delivering-vision-scotland-leader-sustainable-regenerative-farming>

² <https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/agricultural-reform-programme/arp-route-map>

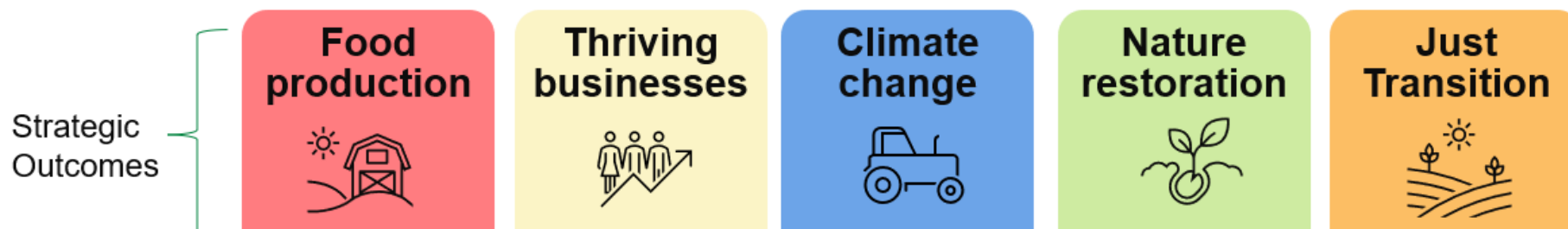
Delivering the Vision through the Bill objectives

The objectives of the **Agricultural and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024** are set out to ensure the use of powers will deliver the Vision for Scottish Agriculture. These objective are:

- the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices,
- the production of high-quality food,
- the promotion and support of agricultural practices that protect and improve animal health and welfare,
- the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaption, and
- enabling rural communities to thrive.

Scottish Ministers' strategic priorities for providing support during the Rural Support Plan period must be set out. It is intended to set out a series of strategic outcomes, sub-outcomes and metrics for success and/or trends to signal progress. Further details are set out within section '4. Support rationale and monitoring and evaluation'.

Note – Work is being undertaken in tandem with the Bill process and Agricultural Reform Programme - references/wording are in draft and under development.



3. Use of powers to deliver strategic outcomes

Support Framework

Each tier will contain a series of support mechanisms designed to enable farmers, crofters and land managers, based on their individual activity, scale and type of operation, to undertake actions that will deliver towards tier outcomes. The tiers do not exist in isolation and will operate as part of a coherent programme approach to future support as outlined in the Route Map, in order to support Scottish agriculture to deliver the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) objectives and the Vision for Agriculture.

Tier 1: 'Base Level Direct Payment' - a universal, entry-level payment for undertaking agricultural activity while meeting minimum essential standards in relation to sustainable farming activities, protecting the environment, animal health and welfare and ensuring Fair Work. These standards will help to make businesses more efficient. Existing cross-compliance conditions will be maintained as a minimum in the new support framework and will apply across all tiers but may be delivered differently.

Tier 2: 'Enhanced Level Direct Payment' - a universally accessible payment that supplements Base. This is for applicants delivering Base requirements and undertaking further activity that delivers outcomes for nature and climate improvement, including recognition of wider land management.

Tier 3: 'Elective Payment' - a competitive or non-universal (criteria dependent) range of payments for targeted actions and undertakings on particular habitats, and for defined species, to deliver nature and climate outcomes included in the Vision for Agriculture.

Tier 4: 'Complementary Support' - provision of support for Continuing Professional Development (CPD), advice, knowledge exchange and linkages to wider land management support from Scottish Government officials and/or public partners.

Further details on the framework is available within the [Route Map](#)³.

³ <https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/agricultural-reform-programme/arp-route-map>

Phased transition (Route Map)

Changes to existing schemes will begin in 2025, with a phased approach to bringing in the new support framework from 2026. Legacy CAP support is anticipated to continue until replaced within the four-tier framework.

Note - Further information can be provided through Rural Support Plan amendments, as the detail and timing of the co-developed phased transition from legacy CAP schemes into the new framework, including proposed secondary legislation, is scheduled.

2025 – Initial changes to existing support.

New conditions will be introduced to the Basic Payment Scheme in 2025 through the foundations of the Whole Farm Plan and new Cross Compliance conditions:

- introduction of the first Whole Farm Plan conditions with farmers and crofters required to complete two baselining activities from a list including carbon audit, biodiversity audit, soil analysis, animal health and welfare plan or integrated pest management plan.
- new conditions for peatlands and wetlands under GAEC 6 of Cross Compliance to help protect vital carbon stores.

New conditions will be introduced to Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) in 2025 linked to calving interval performance:

- a new calving interval of 410 days measured on an individual animal basis added to the SSBSS, to help cut emissions intensity and make beef production more efficient.

2026 - Basic Payment Scheme will become Tier 1 (Base), and Tier 2 (Enhanced) will be introduced.

2027 - New Tier 3 (Elective) and Tier 4 (Complementary) support will be implemented.

Indicative budget split

Note - There are no UK Government budget guarantees from 2025. Prior guarantees were only made on an annual basis.

Year	Tier One	Tier Two	Tier Three	Tier Four	Yearly Total
2026	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)
2027	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)
2028	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)
2029	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)
2030	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)
Plan Period Total	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)	% (£ million)

Note:

- The funding for Tiers 1 and 2 will constitute at least 70% of the overall funding envelope to support farming, crofting and land management from 2027⁴.
- A further announcement about the proportion of funding between Tiers 1 and 2 will be made in June 2024⁵.
- Budget decision are subject to the Scottish Government budget process.

⁴ <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-25463>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/climate-change-action-policy-package>

Note - Basic Payment Scheme used as proxy for Tier 1. This approach will be replicated for each tier as it is introduced.



Tier 1 (Base)

Support mechanism Description

Base Payment

Underpinning support payment linked to adherence to conditions.

Outcomes

Strategic Outcomes	
	<p>High Quality Food Production The primary food production sector is a productive sector of the economy and ensures we meet more of our own food needs more sustainably</p>
	<p>Thriving Agricultural Businesses Profitable and resilient agricultural businesses support local livelihoods, supply chains and the wider rural economy</p>

Requirements Eligibility

Applicants must be a, b, c and undertake d, e or f. For more details and guidance see RP&S.
Applicants must meet a, b, c. For more details and guidance see RP&S.

Reporting

Indicative budget
Area supported (ha)
Whole Farm Plan

£282 million
n hectares
Options uptake

Anticipated uptake
Area Office (location)

17,400 BRNs
Location proxy

4. Support rationale and monitoring and evaluation

Support Rationale

The approach taken in the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) was informed by the [Supporting Evidence and Analysis](#)⁶ report that outlines the current position of the Scottish agricultural sector, with evidence aligned to the objectives in the Vision for Agriculture, and provides information on the approach to assessing new policy proposals as they are taken through secondary legislation.

It was further informed by the [New Rural Support Scheme Development – evidence](#)⁷ synthesis report that covers twelve written reports providing evidence reviews, analysis, summaries and expert briefings on agriculture in Scotland to shape future policy to help deliver sustainable food production that tackles climate change and nature restoration.

Design of support mechanisms (schemes) will also consider the range of existing (or planned) evaluations of different legacy CAP schemes alongside that of the entire SRDP through the mandatory ex-post evaluation.

These will then be scrutinised during the co-development process and will be subject to further analysis through impact assessments during secondary legislation and scrutinised by Parliament.

Indicators/Metrics/Outcomes

The Supporting Evidence and Analysis report proposed an approach that distilled the Vision for Agriculture into four clear objectives and outcomes and outlined a range of proposed metrics that could be used to assess whether policy proposals deliver on objectives. It was further proposed to supplement this with further qualitative analysis to capture other key aspects of the Vision. This initial approach has been taken forward in the development of the Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP) monitoring and evaluation framework.

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/agriculture-rural-communities-scotland-bill-supporting-evidence-analysis>

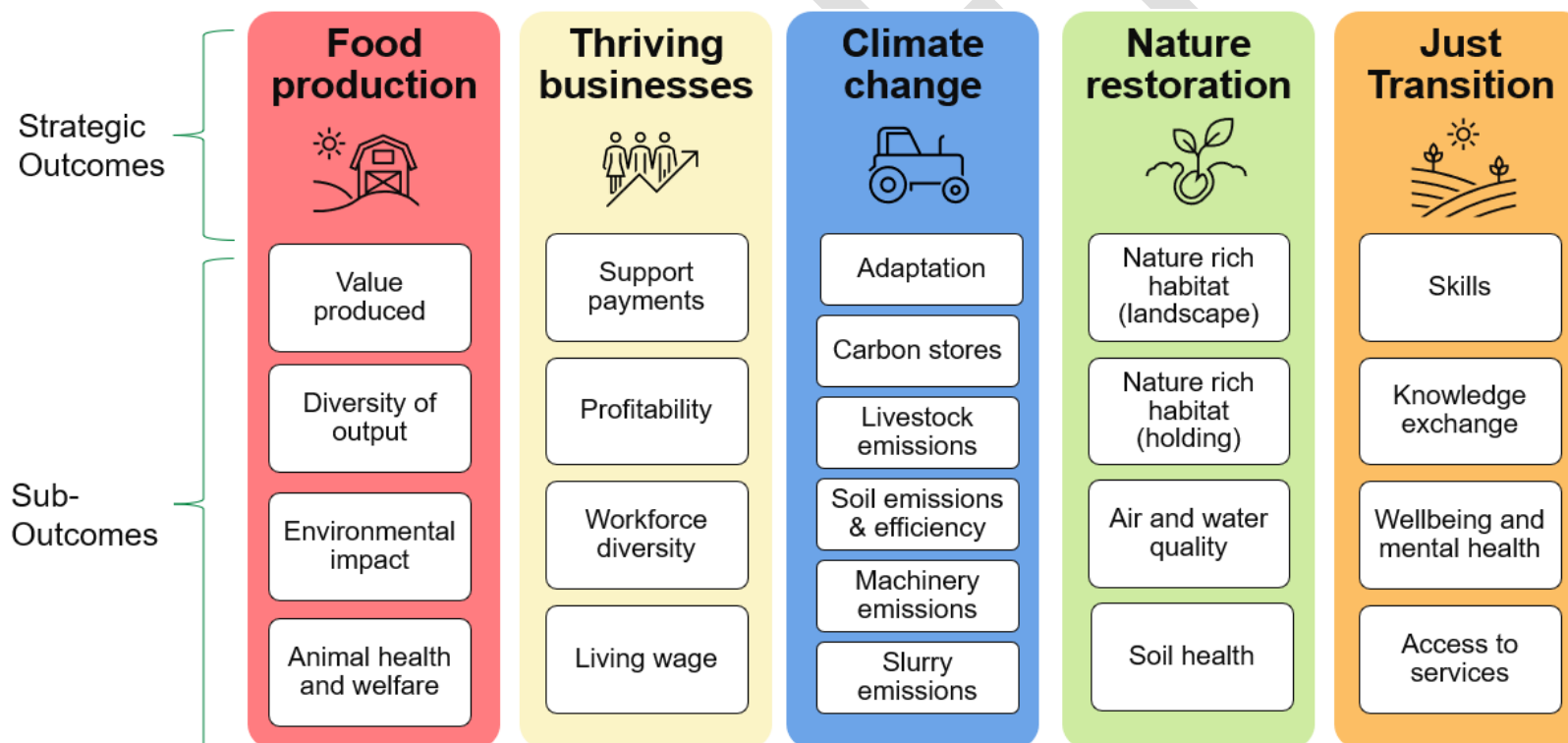
⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-support-development-new-rural-support-scheme-scotland-summary-written-outputs>

Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP) monitoring and evaluation framework.

An Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP) monitoring and evaluation framework is under development by Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS). It will set out how the programme intends to monitor and evaluate actions taken by the Scottish Government through ARP to meet outcomes. The proposed approach will create a suite of metrics and indicators assigned to outcomes in order to link modelling results to outcomes which will allow them to be quantified.

This will include alignment, where possible, to [National Performance Framework \(NPF\)](#)⁸ indicators.

Note – NPF is in the process of being reviewed – including a new proposed ‘Climate Action’ outcome.



⁸ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot>

Annual monitoring of tier output

Note – This is indicative based on existing legacy CAP reporting.

	Tier One (Base)	Tier Two (Enhanced)	Tier Three (Elective)	Tier Four (Complementary)	Total
Indicative budget					
Applications received					
Applications approved					
Expenditure					
Holdings and/or beneficiaries supported					
Actions, operations, projects supported					
Co-operation operations supported					
Area supported – ha (inc. organics)					
Jobs created					
Numbers advised					
Numbers trained					
Population benefiting from improved service and/or infrastructure					

Note - Illustrative example using Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS) (as a proxy for Tier Three (Elective)):

Indicative budget € million)	357.4
Applications received	4,547
Applications approved	3,343
Holdings/Beneficiaries supported	578
Actions/Operations/Projects supported	2,374
Area supported (ha) (total)	2,098,826 (including 138,658 ha supported for organic farming)
Area under management (ha) (2022)	1,077,300 (with a further 72,400 ha supported for organic farming)
Expenditure (€ million)	306.7
Narrative	[TBC]

Note – Figures taken from the SRDP Annual Implementation Report for period 01/01/2022 - 31/12/2022, which provides a cumulative progress update on the programme between 2014-2022. Figures could be reported annually.

5. Matters considered

Note – Detail will be provided as part of the co-development of future support as each future support mechanism is introduced, including through impact assessments as part of secondary legislation. Different support mechanisms could individually contribute to different matters while the broader tier approach will deliver cumulatively to outcomes.

Ministers must have regard to:

- **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024** objectives,
- the proposals and policies contained in the climate change plan which relate to agriculture, forestry and rural land-use,
- any other statutory duty of the Scottish Ministers relating to agriculture, rural land use, biodiversity or the environment,
- developments in the law and policy of the European Union,
- the desirability of the agricultural sector operating with fair work principles,
- the objectives of a plan produced under section 1 of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022,
- the need for sustainable food systems and supply chains in delivering food security,
- the benefits of a diverse and resilient agricultural sector including small producers, tenant farmers, crofters and agricultural co-operative societies.

Regard to statutory duties to support agriculture to deliver towards commitments and outcomes including:

- Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022
- The Environment Strategy
- The Biodiversity Strategy
- Cleaner Air for Scotland
- Emissions reduction targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009
- The Just Transition Plan for Land and Agriculture
- The Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme

Regard to broader Scottish Government outcomes and policies including:

- National Performance Framework.

6. Co-development approach

[Agricultural Reform Programme \(ARP\)](#)⁹

The Agricultural Reform Programme (ARP) engages with external stakeholders who include industry bodies and membership organisations; representative stakeholder groups such as Food & Agriculture Stakeholders Taskforce (FAST) and Scottish Environment Link (SE Link); Scottish Government sponsored stakeholder groups such as Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB); customers (farmers, crofters and land managers) and rural communities.

The aims of this external stakeholder engagement are twofold:

- to inform and work with our external stakeholders as communication partners helping prepare the sector for change; and
- engage key stakeholders as participants in helping design the future policy and support framework.

Communication aimed at preparing the sector for change is done through direct communication with stakeholders and customers, creating content for wider distribution, media relations and social media. Content includes leaflets, case studies, guides and a toolkit of resources for stakeholders. There have been a series of continuing ARP roadshows visiting marts, shows and other agricultural sector events to share information, get feedback and engage in conversation. Information is provided via the published Route Map and supporting information.

The second strand of external stakeholder engagement is the delivery of the co-development approach and is the participatory element. Co-development allows those with an interest in future agricultural policy to share their views and ideas on the development of the Agriculture Reform Programme.

To date this has included:

- Interviews, surveys, workshops, testing and trials that informed the changes for 2025 with further topics to follow (there are currently 1250 active research volunteers signed-up (information on further topics will follow).
- A customer panel consisting of farmers, crofters and land manager to take part in research around service design.
- Since the end of 2021, our co-development work has included approximately 3,500 customer survey responses and 250 interviews and in person testing with farmers, crofters, land managers and advisers.

⁹ <https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/agricultural-reform-programme>

- The Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) Stakeholder group being reframed as a network of experts brought together as part of a targeted engagement programme to provide written and oral evidence, in a workshop environment and in smaller number than previously.

A key example of the Scottish Government's co-development approach is the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB)¹⁰ which was established to inform agriculture policy reform.

The ARIOB are supported by an Academic Advisory Panel who provide advice based on the available science, knowledge and evidence. Further support is offered by the Agriculture Policy Development Group which assists with the development of policy detail. Throughout the lifespan of the ARIOB, several sub-groups have been established to drive forward policy development from members with expertise in specific areas of industry. This includes working groups considering Animal Health and Welfare interventions, the Whole Farm Plan, Disadvantaged Areas (LFASS) and Beef Support Scheme reform.

Engagement

When preparing a Rural Support Plan the Scottish Ministers must consult such persons as they consider representative of the interests of:

- farmers (including tenant farmers), crofters, land managers and owners of rural land, and
- people who live and work in rural communities.

Scottish Ministers must also consult with:

- Scottish Natural Heritage ("NatureScot"),
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency,
- Food Standards Scotland,
- Historic Environment Scotland, and
- such other persons as they consider appropriate.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/agriculture-reform-implementation-oversight-board>

When amending a Rural Support Plan the Scottish Ministers must consult such persons as they consider likely to have an interest in, or be affected by, the amendments to the rural support plan.

When laying the Rural Support Plan, or the amended plan, before the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Ministers must lay a statement describing the consultation undertaken.

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Note – This provides an illustrative outline of the approach taken to engagement at different stages.

Co-development

Who	Internal and external stakeholders, delivery partners, customers, membership organisations, representative groups.
What	Interviews, surveys, workshops, testing, trials.
When	Scoping, options development, co-development and refinement.
Where	Agricultural Reform Programme.
Why	To engage key stakeholders and customers as participants in helping design the future policy and support framework.

Impact Assessments

Who	Impacted persons, businesses and stakeholders.
What	Interviews and modelling of change.
When	To inform decision making on proposed options.
Where	Impact Assessments for secondary legislation.
Why	To ensure no unintended consequences of change.

Communication and engagement

Who	Customers, stakeholders and public.
What	Direct communication, leaflets, case studies, guides, toolkits.
When	On-going (to inform about co-development process and to communicate changes resulting from it).
Where	Online, in-person, ARP roadshows, marts, shows, events, Route Map.
Why	To inform and help the sector prepare for change.

Statutory bodies (using Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as example)

Who	Statutory bodies (e.g. NatureScot, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Historic Environment Scotland).
What	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
When	Impact assessments for policy development and secondary legislation.
Where	SEA Gateway.
Why	To assess, consult on, and monitor likely impacts of plans, programmes and strategies on the environment.

7. Parliamentary scrutiny (indicative)

Timetable of Secondary Legislation

Secondary legislation for support mechanisms (schemes) would require to be in force on 1 January of the year the support was being introduced. There would need to be sufficient time in advance of this to prepare for any delivery changes and to ensure guidance and communication of any proposed change was undertaken.

In the first instance secondary legislation will use the powers of the Agriculture (EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act 2020.

September 2024

- SSI to extend legacy SRDP to align with the phased transition outlined in the Route Map.
- SSI to introduce planned changes from 2025 to Basic Payment Scheme (Whole Farm Plan and changes to Cross Compliance) and Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme.

Thereafter any changes to introduce support within the four-tier framework will use the powers of the **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024**.

Autumn 2025 (indicative)

- SSI(s) to introduce Tier 1 (Base) and Tier 2 (Enhanced) support.

Autumn 2026 (indicative)

- SSI(s) to introduce Tier 3 (Elective) and Tier 4 (Complementary) support.

Note - Further information can be provided through Rural Support Plan amendments, as the detail and timing of the co-developed phased transition from legacy CAP schemes into the new framework legislation, is scheduled.

Role of Parliament in scrutiny

Affirmative procedure

The [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) sets out what requires affirmative procedure for making changes. This will provide parliament with clear scrutiny of any proposed amendments to:

- Overarching objectives of agricultural policy.
- Rural Support Plan – matters to be considered.
- Regulations about support (if a significant provision as set out under section 13(5)).
- Ancillary provision (if they add to, replace or omit any part of the text of an Act (including the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#))).

Secondary legislation

Parliament will have an important role in the scrutiny of the secondary legislation that will use the enabling powers of the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) to enact change and enable the phased transition of legacy CAP support into the four-tier framework. This will commence with the launch of Tiers 1 (Base) and 2 (Enhanced) from 2026 and the launch of Tiers 3 (elective) and 4 (complementary) from 2027.

Legislative scrutiny includes SSI, accompany documents and any associated impact assessments (e.g. Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA), Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)).

On-going scrutiny role

Parliament will have an ongoing scrutiny role as support mechanisms are refined and introduced in future. Parliament will be able to scrutinise the performance of the framework, as is standard practice, through portfolio evidence sessions, during the budget process and in scrutinising the matters set out in section 3 (Rural support plan: matters to be considered) of the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#).

Note – This sets out what is required by the Rural Support Plan but will be published alongside it or separately.

Monitoring and evaluation of schemes

Stage 3 amendments propose that Scottish Ministers must set out the manner in which the impact of each support scheme will be monitored for the purposes of a new section on the “*monitoring and evaluation of schemes*”. The section sets out that Scottish Ministers must monitor the impact of the scheme, prepare one or more reports on the impact and effectiveness of the scheme and that these reports are laid before the Scottish Parliament and published. The section enables Scottish Ministers to prepare reports for any support provided out with a scheme. Flexibility is provided as to the number and frequency of reporting to enable Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) to determine the appropriate timescale, method and publication to ensure the approach is robust and is evidence led.

Reports on rural support plan

Stage 3 amendments propose that Scottish Ministers must report as soon as is practicable after the end of each plan period and the report must set out the total amount of support, and the amount of support provided by each scheme, out with schemes and to third parties. It requires a description of any non-financial support. It further requires an assessment of the effectiveness of the strategic priorities, whether any of the outcomes have been achieved and progress made in respect of the Bill objectives. The section enables Scottish Ministers to prepare interim reports and other reports about support provided. Reporting on plan includes any support provided through legacy CAP schemes. Reports must be laid before the Scottish Parliament and published.

Rural support plan: engagement

Stage 3 amendments propose that Scottish Ministers must consult with such persons as they consider representative of the interests of farmers (including tenant farmers), crofters, land managers and owners of rural land, and people who live and work in rural communities. Consultation is also required with Scottish Natural Heritage (“NatureScot”), Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Food Standards Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland and any other persons as they consider appropriate. When amending a plan Scottish Ministers must consult such persons as they consider likely to have an interest in, or be affected by, the amendments. Scottish Ministers must lay a statement before the Scottish Parliament, alongside the Rural Support Plan, or an amended plan, describing the consultation undertaken.