



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Liam McArthur
Convener
Conveners' Group

Thursday 29 May 2025

Dear Liam,

Scottish Government co-ordination of government business

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

Contact: Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email rural.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

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. I also attach recent correspondence from the Scottish Food Coalition which relates to my above correspondence with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and parliamentary scrutiny of the good food nation plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Finlay Carson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Finlay Carson MSP
Convener