Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Annual Report 2014-2015
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Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

This Committee’s work focuses on agriculture, fisheries, rural development, climate change, the environment and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment.

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Committee Membership

Convener
Rob Gibson
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Graeme Dey
Scottish National Party

Claudia Beamish
Scottish Labour

Alex Fergusson
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

Sarah Boyack
Scottish Labour

Jim Hume
Scottish Liberal Democrats

Angus MacDonald
Scottish National Party

Michael Russell
Scottish National Party

Dave Thompson
Scottish National Party

Note: The membership of the Committee changed during the period covered by this report, as follows:

Michael Russell MSP joined the Committee on 27 November 2014 replacing Nigel Don MSP, Scottish National Party, Angus North and Mearns.
Sarah Boyack MSP joined the Committee on 8 January 2015, replacing Cara Hilton MSP, Scottish Labour, Dunfermline.
Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee during the parliamentary year from 11 May 2014 to 10 May 2015.

Inquiries and reports


3. The Committee took evidence from the police3 and the previous Minister for Environment and Climate Change4. Following its deliberations, the Committee wrote5 to the Scottish Government, highlighting issues such as: data presentation; levels of reported crime; evidence; police resources; criminal proceedings; vicarious liability; raptor crimes; and future measures to tackle wildlife crime.

Scotland’s climate change targets

4. The Committee took evidence on the implementation of the Second Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP2) and the delivery of Scotland’s climate change targets, hearing both from stakeholders6 and the previous Minister7.

5. The Committee wrote8 to the new Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform setting out its views on progress towards meeting climate change targets.

Dairy industry inquiry

6. In January 2015, the Committee initiated an urgent inquiry into the dairy industry in response to news that producer cooperative First Milk was delaying payment to dairy farmers.

7. The Committee took evidence from a variety of stakeholders, including major retailers, the Grocery Code Adjudicator, processors, dairy farmers and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment.

8. The Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary making recommendations for the future of the dairy industry9. Many of these recommendations were adopted in the Scottish Government Dairy Action Plan, published on 24 March 201510.

9. The Committee secured a debate in the Chamber on the subject which took place on 31 March 201511.
National Marine Plan

10. The Committee took evidence on the draft National Marine Plan from Scottish Government officials\(^{12}\); stakeholders\(^{13}\); and the Cabinet Secretary\(^{14}\).

11. The Committee published its report\(^{15}\) on 30 January 2015, highlighting concerns on whether the draft National Marine Plan was “fit for purpose”\(^{16}\).

Scottish Government reviews

12. The Committee continued (from 2013/14) its scrutiny of issues relating to wild fisheries, land reform and agricultural tenancies as Scottish Government reviews of the subjects reached their conclusion.

13. The Wild Fisheries review panel published its final report on the 8 October 2014\(^{17}\). The Committee took evidence on its proposals and wrote to the Scottish Government with its views\(^{18}\).

14. Having taken evidence on the Land Reform Review Group final report, the Committee wrote to the previous Minister outlining its views on the 27 June 2014\(^{19}\). On the 5 August 2014, the previous Minister responded, highlighting progress made on the land reform agenda, both through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and proposals for a land reform bill.

15. The Committee took evidence on both the interim and final report of the Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review group throughout the year. The Committee wrote to the Scottish Government outlining its views on the Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review final report in May 2015.

Evidence sessions

16. The Committee also took evidence on the following issues—

- Resource use and the circular economy;
- Marine and fisheries issues with George Eustice MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Farming, Food and Marine Environment\(^{20}\); UK Government;
- Marine Protected Areas;
- Mandatory public sector climate reporting;
- The publication of the Crown Estate’s Scotland Report\(^{21}\); and
- The Scottish Government’s Biodiversity Strategy.
Bills

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

17. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Parliament on the 11 June 2014. The Bill was referred to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee for scrutiny as the lead Committee. However, following a request from the Scottish Government, the RACCE Committee agreed to scrutinise Part 4 of the Bill, on the community right-to-buy land.

18. The Committee published its report on Part 4 of the Bill as part of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s Stage 1 Report.

19. At stage 2, the Committee took further evidence from stakeholders and the Minister on amendments relating to the crofting community right-to-buy. Additional written evidence was received ahead of these meetings. The Committee’s consideration of stage 2 amendments of the Bill marked the first time two Committees have concurrently considered a Bill at stage 2 and one Member of the RACCE Committee spoke on amendments in both Committees on the same morning.

Draft Budget 2015-16

20. The Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2015-16 was laid in the Parliament on 9 October 2014. The Committee issued a call for views which focussed on three areas of the budget: forestry, Scottish Rural Development Programme climate measures, and equalities.

21. The Committee took evidence from stakeholders, the Minister; and the Cabinet Secretary.

22. The Committee reported to the Finance Committee on Monday 12 January 2015.

Public Body Consent Memoranda

23. The Committee considered and reported on the following Public Body Consent Memoranda during the course of the year—

- Public Bodies (Abolition of Food from Britain) Order 2014 [draft];
- Abolition of the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee Order 2014 [draft]; and the
- Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides) Order 2015 [draft].
Subordinate legislation

24. Over the course of the year, the Committee scrutinised—

- 8 Scottish Statutory Instruments (SSIs) subject to the affirmative procedure, and
- 33 SSIs subject to the negative procedure.

Petitions

25. The Committee considered three petitions during the year.

26. It continued its consideration of PE01490 by the Patrick Krause, on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation, on the control of wild geese numbers. The Committee wrote to the Scottish Government requesting further details for a second time, following the petitioner’s dissatisfaction with the original response.

27. PE01547 by Ian Gordon and the Salmon and Trout Association (Scotland) on the conservation of wild salmon was also considered. The Committee agreed to review the petition as part of consideration of the Wild Fisheries Review Panel final report and wrote to the Scottish Government on the 27 March 2015.

28. The Committee also considered PE01519 by John F. Robins on behalf of Save Our Seals Fund regarding seal welfare, and agreed to close the petition on 10 December 2014.

Engagement and innovation

29. Over the period, Members of the Committee have welcomed several visitors to the Scottish Parliament. In June 2014, the Committee met with Tassos Haniotis, Director in the Directorate General for Agriculture of the European Commission. In January 2015, the Committee welcomed Members of the Canada/UK Interparliamentary Association, including Canadian Parliamentarians, to the Scottish Parliament to discuss issues of mutual interest relating to climate change.

30. The Committee hosted an event with the Committee on Climate Change in January 2015, led by its Chairman, Lord Deben, to which all MSPs were invited.

31. Other events hosted by the Committee include—

- a meeting with the Scottish Rural Parliament;
- a visit from Anne McIntosh MP, then Chair of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee in the House of Commons; and
• a fact-finding delegation of Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly during Scottish Environment Week.

32. The Committee visited Laggan Farm and Peel Farm in August 2014 to learn more about agri-tourism. The Committee also visited Hatton of Ogilvy Farm to learn more about farm diversification.

33. The Committee has actively promoted its work via its Twitter feed and gained 461 new followers over the period covered by this report, representing an increase of over 50%. The RACCE Twitter feed received a great deal of interaction and was praised by many stakeholders for improving the openness, transparency and accountability of the Committee’s work.

34. As part of coordinated media activity regarding the Committee’s work on wildlife crime in the autumn of 2014, the Committee made a video\textsuperscript{32} publicising its work which has received over 170 hits on YouTube and also received significant interest on Twitter.

\section*{Equalities}

35. During its consideration of the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2015-16, the Committee identified equalities as one of the three main themes for scrutiny. The impact of proposals on people depending on their age, location, employment status, gender, as well as a variety of other factors, was considered.

36. In March 2015, the Convener of the RACCE Committee participated\textsuperscript{33} in a Health and Sport Committee debate on health inequalities.

37. The Committee has made a dedicated effort to diversify the witnesses presenting evidence to the Committee via oral evidence, and has particularly sought to hear from women.

\section*{Meetings}

38. The Committee met 36 times during the Parliamentary year. One meeting was held entirely in private and 19 other meetings included items in private.

39. The majority of items taken in private were draft reports, consideration of evidence heard in public earlier in meetings and the Committee’s work programme. All meetings were held in Edinburgh.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1} Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Written Correspondence, 20 October 2014, available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General\%20Documents/2014.10.20_-_Minister_Wildlife_Crime_Annual_Report_2013.pdf.}
8 Letter to Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, 26 November 2014, [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/2014.11.26_-_Convener_to_Minister_climate_change.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/2014.11.26_-_Convener_to_Minister_climate_change.pdf)
9 Letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment, 20 February 2015, [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150220_Convener_to_Cab_Sec_on_dairy_inquiry.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150220_Convener_to_Cab_Sec_on_dairy_inquiry.pdf)
18 Letter to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, 27 March 2015, [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150327_Letter_to_Minister_on_Wild_Fish_Review.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150327_Letter_to_Minister_on_Wild_Fish_Review.pdf)
24 You can access the written evidence received here: [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/82153.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/82153.aspx)
32 RACCE video to publicise activity on wildlife crime work: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pACBZbR_M3g