

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill

SUBMISSION FROM RSPB Scotland

About RSPB Scotland

RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB, the largest wildlife conservation charity in Europe with over one million members from both urban and rural areas, over 80,000 of which are in Scotland. At RSPB Scotland we are working to reduce the environmental impact of our own business and are accredited by the Green Dragon environmental management system. This system helps us to reduce and monitor our carbon emissions, and is also increasing the awareness of our staff and volunteers of the need to minimise our environmental impact. The RSPB, as a UK organisation, has cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 17% over the past 7 years.

RSPB Scotland is a member of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) and endorses the detailed evidence provided by the coalition.

Climate Impacts on wildlife

Climate Change is impacting our wildlife now. The State of the UK's Birds 2017¹ showed in some detail the impact of climate change on birds. Our special, precious and often unique wildlife in Scotland has not caused climate change but many species and ecosystems are sensitive and vulnerable to climatic changes and are being affected now.

Advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC)

RSPB Scotland is disappointed with the advice and recommendations given by the CCC to the Scottish Government on new targets. The advice was based on what they calculated to be feasible based on today's knowledge and technology, rather than what is likely to be possible in future decades. The CCC's own analysis stated that Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions should reduce by 89-97% by 2050, in order to play our part in a goal of returning to 1.5°C. Opting for a 90% reduction recommendation, at the lower end of the range, is particularly conservative and lacking in vision.

Scope of the Bill

RSPB Scotland is disappointed with the scope of the Bill put forward by the Scottish Government focussing so heavily on targets and amending technical details. We believe it

¹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-science/220-0653-17-18-sukb-2017-web-20-3-18.pdf>

is a missed opportunity to explicitly address the action needed to meet future more ambitious targets.

Whilst the Bill repeals and updates some aspects of the current Climate Change Act it does nothing to address other sections of the Act which need strengthened legislation. For example, the Land Use Strategy (Section 57) has not met its potential and needs further legislation, see our proposal below.

Our evidence to the Committee below includes recommendations for legislation to increase policy action in the agriculture and land use sectors. We believe that this can be included in the Bill at present and fulfils the aims of the Bill as laid out in the introductory sentence on page 1 – i.e. to ‘make provision about advice, plans and reports in relation to those targets’.

Provisions to set a Net Zero Emissions target in the future

RSPB Scotland believes it is essential that the Bill sets a target for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest, rather than including a provision to set a date for this in the future.

Increasing the 2050 target and 2030 target

As explained above, we do not agree that 90% is a sufficient reduction in emissions and not what is required to meet the obligations under the Paris Agreement. We believe that a **target of net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest** is the minimum needed to ensure that wildlife is protected from harmful climate change. We agree with the SCCS evidence which points out the shortcomings within the CCC advice and provides further moral and feasibility justifications for setting this 2050 target.

RSPB Scotland recommends that the Bill sets a trajectory to net-zero emissions by 2050 which fulfils the principle of early action. Therefore, we do not agree with the interim targets as set out in the Bill. The 2030 target is particularly poor as the proposed 66% reduction keeps Scotland on the same trajectory as targets in the current Act. Instead we want to see the Bill set a **target of 77% reduction in emissions by 2030**, based on 1990 levels.

Climate Change Bill – Implementation

RSPB Scotland wants to see the Bill set new ambitious targets AND include legislation which aims to increase the action required to meet them. Given that the Bill aims to ‘*make provision about advice, plans and reports in relation to those targets*’², we believe that the proposals for policy action below are appropriate for inclusion within the Bill.

Challenges associated with implementation of the Bill

² From introductory sentence on page 1 of the Bill

RSPB believes there will be significant challenges with implementing the Bill without the Bill setting new legislation for policies in sectors which have not, in the past, delivered enough emissions reductions.

We support the call by SCCS for more action on energy efficiency in Scotland. Heating homes in Scotland uses 50% of all Scotland's energy use. Therefore, we recommend that the Bill includes a target for all homes in Scotland should achieve at least an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C by 2025.

Reducing emissions from agriculture

The agriculture sector is now the second largest contributor of emissions in Scotland at 26.1% of emissions³. In addition, agriculture is the largest contributor of Nitrous oxide (N₂O) and methane – both greenhouse gases which are much more damaging in the atmosphere than CO₂. Agriculture is a sector which presents challenges in emission reductions but also great potential for providing negative emissions.

Farming has reduced emissions by 27.8% since 1990⁴, although much of this has come from market contraction and efficiency measures rather than Government policy. Government's plan for the sector in terms of reducing climate emissions is to deliver a package of measures as outlined in the 2018 Climate Change Plan. However, their commitment is only for a 9% reduction in emissions from the sector by 2032, and this from a suite of largely undeveloped and vague policies. The CCC pointed out that 'there has been little recent progress in reducing agricultural emissions in Scotland', and that 'Scottish Government should look again at going beyond a voluntary approach, in order for agriculture to make the necessary contributions to meeting Scotland's ambitious climate targets'⁵.

RSPB Scotland therefore recommends that the Climate Change Bill includes a package for duties to drive emission reductions from the agriculture sector. This package of policies needs to be adopted at the earliest opportunity to take us on the right pathway over the next ten years towards net-zero emissions by 2050.

Duty to produce a nitrogen balance sheet and statutory targets for nitrogen efficiency improvements by 2020. Nitrous oxide emissions can be mitigated by using nitrogen more efficiently, cutting losses to the natural environment, and recycling nutrients better⁶. A Nitrogen Balance Sheet is an established scientific technique for understanding how nitrogen flows through sectors of the economy and the environment. This data can then be used by Government to design fair and effective policies and action to reduce nitrous oxide emissions and pollution. It must inform the Climate Change Plan policy to develop "target

³ <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/6601/354604>

⁴ As above

⁵ UKCCC Progress Report 2017 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Reducing-emissions-in-Scotland-2017-Progress-Report-CCC.pdf>

⁶ A nitrogen budget for Scotland, Nourish Scotland briefing <http://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/A-Nitrogen-Budget-for-Scotland-Nourish-Scotland-briefing.pdf>

for reducing Scotland's emissions from nitrogen fertiliser." The Climate Change Bill should set a duty on the Scottish Government to regularly commission and publish nitrogen balance sheets, with the first one published no later than 2020.

Duty to set methane emission reduction targets by 2020. Scotland emitted 6.5 MtCO_{2e} of methane in 2016, 16.8% Scotland's total GHG emissions. The 2018 Climate Change Plan commits developing actions to reduce emissions of methane from agriculture, however, the policy proposals are undeveloped, vague and voluntary with no timescale for delivery. To drive forward action to reduce methane emissions within a fixed timescale the Climate Change Bill should set a duty on Ministers to set reduction targets for methane emissions in Scotland by 2020.

Statutory targets for land in organic management. Boosting the organic farming sector is a proven effective mitigation strategy for agriculture. Research shows that organic farming is effective in reducing emissions⁷ and increasing carbon sequestration in soils⁸. We recommend that the Climate Change Bill should set an ambitious statutory target of region 1 land⁹ to be under organic management by 2030 (which comes up to 6% of Scotland's agricultural land).

Duty for all agriculture and rural policies to contribute to mitigating climate change and meeting Scotland's emissions reduction targets. Despite strong public support for farm policies which support wildlife and reduce climate impacts, the Scottish Government has done little in recent years to ensure agricultural policies support farmers in developing and implementing plans for climate change mitigation and adaptation. As we design our farming and rural policies for post-Brexit, we must ensure they contribute to the delivery of Scotland's ambitious climate change targets. The Climate Change Bill should place a duty on Ministers to demonstrate how each farming or rural policy supports the objectives of this Bill.

Increasing negative emissions from land use

Activities in the land use sector can contribute to climate targets by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere and locking it away in vegetation and soils – also known as negative emissions. A recent research paper shows that Scotland is “exceptionally well suited” to put in place land based negative emissions technologies and make significant impact in balancing emissions¹⁰. Activities such as afforestation and peatland restoration will have an important role to play in balancing the emissions that are an inevitable but unwanted consequence of growing food on the land.

⁷ Lynch, D. et al The Carbon and Global Warming Potential Impacts of Organic Farming: Does It Have a Significant Role in an Energy Constrained World? Sustainability 2011, 3, 322-362; doi:10.3390/su3020322

⁸ Gattinger, A. et al <http://www.pnas.org/content/109/44/18226>

⁹ Region 1 land covers 1.8 million hectares in Scotland and is better quality, productive agricultural land typically used for arable cropping, temporary grass and permanent grass <https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00456286.pdf>

¹⁰ Alcalde, J. Smith, P., Haszeldine, R. S., Bond, C. E. (2018) The potential for implementation for Negative Emission Technologies in Scotland, International Journal of Greenhouse Gas Control, 76: 85-91

Because our existing carbon-rich land and habitats will be so important in meeting a net-zero target RSPB Scotland believes that Scotland must do more to protect these areas and increase their potential for sequestration. A report we published in 2011 showed that policies need to change to give more protection to peatlands¹¹. This remains true even after the Scottish Government committed to restoring 250,000ha of peatland in the Climate Change Plan.

The Climate Change Bill provides the potential to better protect Scotland's natural carbon sinks and stores, in order to contribute to increasing Scotland's negative emissions and meeting the net-zero emission target. The legislation should aim to identify, protect and enhance existing natural sinks. We recommend the Bill explicitly protects these areas from development, land use change and inappropriate management.

We recommend that the Bill sets a duty on Ministers to designate and put in place protections on carbon-rich land and habitats, e.g. peatlands, carbon-rich soils, native woodlands, and blue carbon habitats. It should require guidance to be developed, including use of carbon calculators or whole lifecycle assessments of carbon implications, outline presumption against development in designated areas, and guide future support payments. The Bill could also establish SEPA as a competent authority to oversee this.

Strengthen Land Use Strategy legislation

Section 57 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act required that Ministers produce a Land Use Strategy (LUS) with policies, proposals and objectives of the LUS contributing to meeting climate objectives. However, whilst the Land Use Strategy has been produced and is now on its second iteration, it has yet to deliver significant change on the ground and its powers and influence are limited. Furthermore, its potential to support land uses and management which reduces climate emissions is low.

To make the LUS more influential, the legislation needs to be updated to provide more accountability. Subsidies, advice and regulation which influence land use should be better aligned to deliver emissions reductions and crucially the LUS needs to be delivered at a regional and local level, to ensure that all opportunities and challenges are identified to ensure maximum benefits are delivered from land use decisions, and ensure the policy is developed in at the regional scale needed.

RSPB Scotland recommends that the Climate Change Bill amends Section 57 of the Climate Change Scotland (2009) Act requiring Ministers to publish an action plan, and an annual progress report, and establish Regional Land Use Frameworks, covering all of Scotland, by 2024¹².

¹¹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/positions/agriculture/realising-the-benefits-of-peatlands.pdf>

¹² To be in place to guide a 'new rural policy' starting in April 2024.