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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 2 March 2016

Session 4

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RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2016, Session 4

CONVENER

*Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)
*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)
*Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
*Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD)
*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)
*Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
*Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Bertie Armstrong (Scottish Fishermen's Federation)
Tom Ballantine (Stop Climate Chaos Scotland)
Colin Campbell (James Hutton Institute)
Ian Cooke (Development Trusts Association Scotland)
Calum Duncan (Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group)
Sam Gardner (WWF Scotland)
Stuart Goodall (Confor)
Iain Gulland (Zero Waste Scotland)
Jonathan Hughes (Scottish Wildlife Trust)
Dr Andy Kerr (Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation)
Patrick Krause (Scottish Crofting Federation)
Alan Laidlaw (The Crown Estate)
Sarah-Jane Laing (Scottish Land & Estates)
Willie McGhee (Forest Policy Group)
Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland)
Dr Sarah Skerratt (Scotland's Rural College)
Clare Slipper (NFU Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Wednesday 2 March 2016

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Legacy Process

The Convener (Rob Gibson): Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the seventh meeting in 2016 of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Please settle down quickly, as we do not have all morning for this panel and we have a lot to do. I remind members that all mobile phones should be switched off, because they may affect the broadcasting system. However, committee members and others may use tablets during the meeting, because the meeting papers are provided in digital form.

The first item on our agenda is to take evidence from stakeholders as part of the committee's process of compiling its legacy report. We are glad to be joined by two panels of witnesses, all of whom were asked to submit a list of priority areas for consideration by successor committees. I might say that we have marked the submissions out of 10, and witnesses who do not know what a bullet point is will get 100 lines. The meeting will be conducted on the basis of giving bullet-point answers, not treatises.

We thank witnesses for sending their submissions, some of which are of great length and which we have read with interest. We have identified common themes for each panel, which will form the structure of our questions.

I will not ask witnesses to introduce themselves, because many of you are known to each other and have been known to us for many years. When you wish to speak, catch my eye or the clerk's eye and we will make a list of those who wish to contribute.

As this is the rural affairs committee, I will kick off on the theme of rural development, economies and communities, including broadband provision, rural democracy and decision making. I was interested to see comments from Scottish Land & Estates about beefing up community councils and I was interested to see the Development Trusts Association Scotland talking about the need to have good examples out there. However, wider issues about rural democracy need to be looked at.

Bear in mind that we are discussing a legacy paper, in which we will try to use our experience to propose ideas for the future. We do not want to go over all the activities that have happened; we want to learn from them.

Would anyone like to kick off on that issue? It is at the heart of decision making. Sarah-Jane Laing, you mentioned in your submission that Scottish Land & Estates is interested in beefing up community councils. Why?

Sarah-Jane Laing (Scottish Land & Estates): We said that we should look at the operation of rural community councils; I do not think that we made any recommendations about beefing them up.

During the discussions on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill, concerns were raised about a deficit in local decision making. If we want to deliver rural development policy and the objectives of land reform, we must address some of those concerns so that our discussions on sustainable development and community engagement do not take place in a vacuum and so that all local areas and communities are aware of what those policies are trying to deliver.

Dr Sarah Skerratt (Scotland's Rural College): I would like the committee's successor to maintain an awareness of the unintended consequences of the very good legislation and the other elements that are being put in place for devolution and local democratic initiatives. We have the rural parliament, the Scotland Bill and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and there is much activity around community energy, community benefit funds and community broadband. Those things are all extremely welcome, but there is a need to be aware of inequities that will arise and that are already arising from those initiatives. There are assumptions that all communities are equally able to seize the opportunities, which we know from evidence is not the case. If there is increasing reliance on such initiatives to address systemic issues, some areas will do well and some will fall behind, and we will have growing inequity in the rural sector. The profile of that issue must be maintained.

The Convener: Graeme Dey and Michael Russell want to chip in.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Sarah Skerratt makes a very good point, but how would she go about building the capacity to ensure that we do not get into that situation?

Dr Skerratt: There are many initiatives and agencies, such as the Development Trusts Association Scotland, which is represented today, that are doing a great job in that regard. My point is that we need coherence around that. Rather than having pockets of really successful activity, which is often dependent on local champions, we need something systemic that monitors where that

is or is not happening so that we can learn from good practice and circulate it.

Much of that is happening, but at the same time some communities are still unable to take advantage of those opportunities. We need a systemic, coherent and strategic approach rather than relying on sporadic work at ground level, although that work is very welcome.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The need to get to grips with the problem of the population in rural Scotland strikes me as one of the key issues that the committee and its successor must address as we move forward. In that regard, investment in basic infrastructure, and an understanding of what basic infrastructure is, seem to be vital.

Argyll and Bute Council has just published a report from a task force that was chaired by Nick Ferguson of BSkyB, which draws attention to digital and physical connectivity as the two key areas in which investments require to be made to stem depopulation. It would be interesting to hear the witnesses reflect on that. Perhaps Sarah Skerratt, who has some expertise in the area, could give us a useful starter.

Dr Skerratt: Without wishing to repeat myself too much, we need strategic oversight and coherence. There are initiatives, some of which are born out of necessity, on broadband coverage where communities have had to seize and create their own opportunities. We know of some good innovative examples in Michael Russell's area.

However, we need to map that against national strategic initiatives and ensure that we do not have a situation of hotspots and notspots. I was reading a paper the other day about the new arguments in the information society. The issue is not whether people have broadband; it is what type of broadband they have and how functional it is. Fifteen years ago, those who were on dial-up could agitate for broadband, but now it is much harder to agitate for equality of connectivity and to know who to make those representations to, because the landscape is quite complex for those who seek to step into it.

It is a case of having an overview, recognising what is working well and building up the opportunities in a systematic way, rather than hoping that things will trickle down or trickle across.

Michael Russell: Should we not take an Occam's razor approach? In other words, the simplest or most obvious solution is usually the best one. Government has a role to play in saying that there are some things that are basic services and which should therefore be provided. In the 19th century, it was sanitation that was the issue. Should Government not say that broadband is a basic service that people should have? The UK Government has indicated that a minimum standard should apply, and Ofcom has said that in the past week.

I think that we should adopt a much simpler approach and simply say that there is an expectation that the Government will ensure that all citizens are provided for in this way. Across the continent, other Governments are taking that simple point of view. For communities to be scrabbling around is not the most productive way to proceed; it leads to some good initiatives, but it is not the most productive way of providing basic services.

Dr Skerratt: There are examples of countries that have instigated a minimum standard, and there are commentators who say that it is now a human right to have such access. Even if it cannot be defined as a human right with capital letters, given that it enables human rights to be realised, in a second step it is a human right. Therefore, I think that it is incumbent on the successor committee to look at the issue in all seriousness, because of the link with social justice.

I offer a word of caution on having a minimum standard. I know that, when Norway introduced broadband as a human right for all, the basic level was 1 megabit per second. There is a danger of lowering the minimum standard to the lowest common denominator. Nonetheless, there are strong and compelling arguments at European level as part of the Europe 2020 strategy to the effect that, if we do not provide digital access regardless of location, we will have greater divergence within regions let alone between them.

The Convener: Dave Thompson, Bertie Armstrong and Ian Cooke want to come in.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Good morning to everyone on the panel.

I find the discussion fascinating. Sarah Skerratt outlined the number of different community initiatives that there are, and it is clear that there is a huge range of them. There is a real danger of a lack of a strategic approach. There can be a national strategy and regional strategies, but we are talking about local strategic co-ordination. There is a need for a body that can help the local community to focus and to pull things together.

That brings me back to SLE's point about community councils, which I would like some comment on. From going round my constituency in the Highlands, I get the feeling that people are extremely keen to have local council-type bodies with real power—bodies with finance-raising power and with real beef—that could do much more than the small district councils that we used to have in Highland. If they covered populations

ranging in size from 5,000 to 20,000, such small councils would be able to help to co-ordinate all the excellent community initiatives that have been mentioned.

I ask Dr Skerratt to comment on the desirability of such a model.

The Convener: We have had a good start, but we will need to think about moving on soon. However, Dave Thompson has made some fair points, so we will hear from Sarah Skerratt before I bring in Bertie Armstrong and Ian Cooke.

09:45

Dr Skerratt: I will keep it brief.

In 2008, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development produced a report on rural policy, and one of its headline points was about the number of organisations that operate within and for rural Scotland. It said that there were more than 100 organisations that were focused on rural community development. That was eight years ago, and I am sure that the landscape is similarly cluttered now.

The difficulties of navigating at local level are a real challenge. That links to the point about having local bodies that have power. The challenge of having power is linked to the difficulty of navigating the landscape. Where do they hook in? Who do they talk to? Who do they relate to?

There is a need for mapping, being strategic and having a multi-level approach. It is not either/or—we do not need a top-down or a bottom-up approach; we need the two approaches working together in a vertically integrated way, but that will not happen on its own. There is a deal of work to be done there, and it would be great if the successor committee could be mindful of those critical issues.

Bertie Armstrong (Scottish Fishermen's Federation): I will move away slightly from the really important and interesting area of local democracy and what can be done to enable that, to the functions of the RACCE Committee, particularly the future one. I make a plea—it is my one bullet point, although there was no dot there—for evidence and weighting when the committee is going about its business of scrutiny.

You will receive a great deal of evidence and of opinion. In my view it is very important that the committee takes great care to look dispassionately at evidence levels and weighting. There has been an example of the importance of that in the current session of Parliament. If the committee does not do that, there will be the unintended consequences that Sarah Skerratt referred to, and the hopeless consequence that Mike Russell referred to of accelerating the process of depopulation if the unintended consequence is the cessation of sustainable activity.

The Convener: We will leave that on the table and bear it in mind. Thank you for the stricture that you have given us. Whether we respond to that as members or in this round-table session is another matter.

Ian Cooke (Development Trusts Association Scotland): From our experience of going round the country, many rural communities say that local government does not feel that local. To an extent, the activity that we are involved in—development trusts and the sort of community anchor type organisations that Dave Thompson talked about—operate within that vacuum. There is a space there that they have filled.

A lot of activity has been largely organic and bottom-up. The challenge for Government, if it wants to see more of that, is how to achieve that. There is no blueprint, which is a danger. The challenge is how to encourage, inspire and support that development, which looks different in different communities, without suppressing the real qualities of creativity and enterprise that communities are showing. That is the essence of the development and contributes to the success of it.

I draw the committee's attention to the report by Nesta called "Mass Localism", which tries to address that particular question of how Government supports that kind of local development without doing so in a uniform way and killing the very essence of what makes it successful.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I want to make one brief point while we are talking about community development. I see a growing inequality between communities, particularly in the area that I represent—although I am sure that it exists in other areas as well—that is brought about by the advent of wind farm community benefit funds. I believe that we are reaching a situation in which we have some very wealthy rural communities, because they have access to funding, and some that are at the opposite end of the scale in relation to available funding.

That will become a greater issue for community development in future, and it might well be something that a successor committee will want to look at. One or two councils have looked at siphoning off 50 per cent to deliver, but that has failed—certainly in my region. It is a growing issue when it comes to community development.

The Convener: There is a way of looking at that, which is to suggest that, with that community benefit, some communities have more power to try to augment the funds that are available from

councils in their area and, indeed, to invest in other areas. I suspect that we could talk about that all day. I agree that the imbalance is there, but in some of the poorest communities that I have in my constituency we can see the benefits of people sitting down and developing a strategy for spending the money that they are due.

Alex Fergusson: In my part of the world, a lot of communities are not getting anything at all.

The Convener: That is definitely something for the future committee to look at.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I would like to hear the panel's views on agriculture. What challenges and opportunities will face us in the next five years? There is the common agricultural policy, the Scottish rural development programme, science and research, food security and the panel members' visions for agriculture.

Patrick Krause (Scottish Crofting Federation): We submitted five issues that we suggest need to be taken forward in crofting. One of them is croft proofing financial incentives. The issue, which we have referred to in the press lately, is that crofting gets marginalised in agriculture—particularly in how Scotland uses the CAP.

We would like the next committee to participate in addressing the fact that, in this round of the CAP, we still have the areas of natural constraint to deal with and we still have to develop a formula whereby people in ANCs get some sort of compensation for their situation. Unfortunately, the current cabinet secretary has said publicly that he is minded to keep the ANC funding system as much like the less favoured area support scheme as possible. We argue that that is completely against the spirit of the ANC system. LFASS is used for paying higher amounts of money to better land, even though it is the support scheme for less favoured areas. We do not want the ANC system to go the same way.

The Convener: Good—I agree that that is an issue for the future committee.

Dave Thompson: I am sure that Patrick Krause, and perhaps others, will want to comment on this point. The minister recently announced a welcome increase to the croft house grant scheme. To tie in with the broader issue of improving rural housing, the next stage would be the addition of a loan element to the scheme, which I know that the minister is looking at. How important do members of the panel feel that that would be in allowing people to access grants and build the houses that we need in the crofting areas?

Patrick Krause: The mix of grant and loan is essential. We used to have a croft building grant and loan scheme, but in 2004, the loan element was taken away. I remember that at the time there was puzzlement among Government officials as to why crofters were so agitated that the loan element was being taken away. The assumption was that people want a grant, but that is completely against what crofters want. In all our local consultations, people have said that they really want the loan element. That is more important than the grant.

As I said in our short submission, the fact that the Government has reviewed the scheme at last is welcome, as is the fact that the grant levels have gone up to reflect inflation over the years.

The loan element is essential. I remind the committee that it recommended to the Scottish Government that the loan element should be reinstated. I ask for the issue to be considered in the next session and for the committee to continue to lobby the Scottish Government on the loan element.

The Convener: We will note that.

Clare Slipper (NFU Scotland): The committee touched on an important theme when it focused on the dairy inquiry last year. Some important issues were brought up in that inquiry with regard to food production, food security and how we can emphasise food sufficiency in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Those are extremely pertinent to what Jim Hume hinted at in his question.

We would want a successor committee to consider the medium and longer-term issues and the measures that can be implemented to secure food production in Scotland. We said in our written evidence that that concerns developing supply chains, developing export potential, considering how we can attract more investment in processing into Scotland and considering how we can better promote local food and procurement. Those are important issues that we would like a committee to examine.

It seems a long way off now, but we will be looking ahead to a new common agricultural policy reform in 2020. That offers a valuable opportunity to do pre-legislative scrutiny that brings together all the voices across the spectrum to find some common ground before the negotiation takes place. We would be keen to be a part of that.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I was going to raise the next CAP reform and talk about doing a post-match analysis on where we are with the current CAP and LFASS payments. I think that we are at about 50 per cent for some payments, so there is a major pressure on the farming community.

I will broaden that out to think about the points that have been made about local food

procurement, about shorter, regional supply chains and about connectivity. We are having a discussion with the rural sector, but the urban part of Scotland is entirely disconnected from that discussion. Is that a problem for the priority that we give to the discussion about agriculture funding? The Nourish Scotland agenda is to link the matter with food poverty, food quality and getting a much more integrated approach. The committee could lead on that.

The CAP reform provides the place to have the discussion about farming and about not only food production but flood mitigation measures and flood management. A raft of issues are buried in there.

Alan Laidlaw (Crown Estate): Sarah Boyack has just made a significant part of my point. It would be really good to see the committee think about all the benefits of agriculture in the widest sense. The land use strategy, flood mitigation measures, ecosystem services, the health agenda, biodiversity and the natural habitat are all important aspects of agriculture but, at times, the debate is polarised—it is forestry versus agriculture or flooding versus agriculture. The committee has probably seen more of that than anybody else has.

It would be great if the strategy was discussed at the highest level from a committee point of view. It is too easy to go down simplistic routes and become quite polarised. Agriculture has a lot to offer all those agendas if it is done correctly. Patrick Krause was clear about the need to ensure that support in the future delivers wider public benefits that we all believe are important, rather than just minor issues.

Michael Russell: Convener, will we deal with crofting separately?

The Convener: Not really.

Michael Russell: That is fine. I want to raise a point on Patrick Krause's submission and to raise a point with Clare Slipper. Patrick Krause suggested codifying crofting law, which others around the table—particularly former ministers—want to happen. However, there is a quid pro quo. After the nightmare of the Shucksmith process, from a governmental perspective there would have to be something seriously wrong with you to want to go through such a process again. If there was going to be codification, it would have to have the crofting community's support, which would mean change taking place.

The Shucksmith process started with great enthusiasm and ended with an in-built resistance to any significant change, which was deeply to be regretted. I would appreciate Patrick Krause's view on that, because I am keen on codification but I think that, given the Scottish Government's experience, we would have to drag the Scottish Government into the process.

Many of the submissions deal with land use and the land use strategy. The Scottish land commission will bring that into focus and many people will participate in it.

10:00

I hope that Clare Slipper will not mind my saying that I was struck by the contrast between what appeared to be five reasonable and forward-looking points from the NUJ and the type of coverage that we see in today's newspapers. For example, an article in *The Press and Journal* has the headline, "NFUS in last-ditch move to block land reform proposal".

If we are to look at land use strategy, we have to do so on the basis of shared enthusiasm for getting the strategy right, rather than simply a basis on which, when we reach the point at which change has to take place, everyone digs in their heels and says, "Oh, we're not having any of that." We keep getting to that point, which is unfortunate. It happens not just with agricultural matters but with fishing matters and across the board. There has to be a keenness to negotiate and discuss change, as opposed to saying, "We believe in change, but not for us."

The Convener: You did not mean to say "NUJ"—

Michael Russell: I am sorry; I meant the NFUS. I am afraid that that was a past life catching up with me.

The Convener: No bother. Fans with typewriters.

Michael Russell: Indeed.

Sarah-Jane Laing: Alan Laidlaw covered some of the points that I wanted to make. Clare Slipper said that 2020 is quite a long way away, but I do not think that it is. To pick up on Mr Russell's point, if there is to be radical reform of the CAP in 2020, we will all have to go on that journey, and we will have to start discussions sooner rather than later.

Agriculture is about food production, but it is not just about food production. That is one of the reasons why we suggest that payments for ecosystems services should move up the agenda from what is a largely academic discussion to become a practical framework that underpins and rewards the delivery of public goods. Patrick Krause talked about moving from LFASS to the ANC system; ANC gives us a hook with which to move PES forward, because people are rewarded for what they deliver, which might not be food production—it might be a huge range of public

benefits. PES allows us to move from the aid-to-trade approach to the delivery of public goods. If we do not embed that in our ambition for CAP at the outset, we will reach the point that Mr Russell described—just before we implement the next CAP, we will be trying desperately to keep the same money going to the same people for as long as possible.

Scotland has the ability to be a world leader in payments for ecosystems services. If we underpinned our approach to CAP 2020 and our agricultural strategy with the delivery of public benefits and the natural capital agenda, we could have something that delivers for the whole of Scotland.

Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland): I echo the points that Alex Fergusson and Sarah Skerratt made about how we need to ensure that the benefits of Scotland's lands and seas accrue to everyone. The idea that because someone happens to be in a windy place they get money from the wind energy that is generated or because they are in a sunny place they get money from solar power, which they have done nothing to earn, is part of the problem. We need to think about how the benefits from our natural resources can flow to everyone.

We need to think about how we move towards a circular economy in our food and agriculture. We have just adopted a circular economy strategy and we are moving forward on that. We need to think about how it applies and about moving beyond productionism—the approach whereby we put inputs in the ground and get outputs, which produce externalities along the way that might be good or bad.

We need to shift our thinking about agriculture and food. Nourish Scotland's view is that in the next session of the Parliament we should have a food, health and farming act. We should enact new primary legislation; we have not really had primary legislation on agriculture since the Agriculture Act 1947 and then the treaty of Rome.

We need a fundamental rethink of what farming is for. At the Scottish Government's request, Nourish ran consultations on the future of Scottish agriculture, and we had meetings around the country. People from communities and farmers met to have conversations and said that farming is about three things: feeding our people well; stewardship of the environment; and contributing to communities by creating good work in rural areas, producing renewable energy and so on. People were clear that what we think farming is for should be at the heart of what we do. We have to rethink the purpose of farming.

The European Union referendum has brought the issue into focus. If we did not have the CAP, what would we pay farmers to do? We should start by thinking about what we would do if we had no CAP and if we had a blank sheet of paper.

Sarah Boyack is absolutely right that, if we could get in early with that thinking, we could take a leadership role in reshaping the CAP to get away from the idea that it is based mostly on historical payments or the idea that the more land someone has, the more money they should get. Those things do not make sense any more, and we need to think about a new approach. Fundamentally, if we do not connect food production or fishing with feeding our people, there will be a complete mismatch between what we use our land for and the public good.

The basis of land reform—that land should be used in the common interest and for the public good—should also apply to farming. We should be clear about that. We support the activity because it delivers public good, and we need a new social contract between the citizens of Scotland and the farmers and land managers of Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you for that inspiring speech.

Patrick Krause: I support what Alan Laidlaw, Sarah-Jane Laing and Pete Ritchie said.

Sarah Boyack talked about the rural and urban divide, which is fascinating. We need to convey to the urban population the fact that the CAP money belongs to all of us in Scotland as a country—it is not just the right of farmers. We pay something like 80 per cent of that public money to only 20 per cent of the landholders in Scotland. We pay very little of it to reward public goods. As has been said, public money should be for public goods.

I will move on to crofting legislation. Mike Russell was certainly in a key position in the formation of the current legislation. I would not refer to the committee of inquiry on crofting as a nightmare; I think that it is one of the most inspiring things that the Government has done.

The previous bill process was very top down. Crofters were left feeling completely disenfranchised by that bill—they had no support whatsoever. Out of that mess came the idea of having a full inquiry into crofting, which had not happened since the Taylor report was produced in the 1950s, so the committee of inquiry was really good, and it took crofting forward hugely. However, what came out of the committee of inquiry and became legislation was not entirely what the inquiry recommended.

We revisited the committee of inquiry in December. We held a conference in Inverness, at which Shucksmith and other people who were involved in the process spoke. That is where the

five points that I submitted to the committee came from.

The Convener: We can take those points on board.

Patrick Krause: When Mike Russell says that any Government would be mad to revisit the legislation, I say, "Be brave." It is unfinished business.

Michael Russell: Patrick Krause misunderstands two points that I made. I did not say that the Shucksmith inquiry was a nightmare. It was set up by my predecessor—not by me—and I encouraged it. However, at the end of the process, many of the things that Shucksmith recommended did not happen. I regret that, because I think that they should have happened. That represented a failure of nerve on the part of both the Government and the crofting community.

Although I believe that crofting law should be codified, I was making the point that that will have to have the participation, buy-in and enthusiasm of not just the Scottish Crofting Federation—if I might make that point—but all the people who are involved in crofting. The proposal would take crofting law well into the 21st century but, if it did not have that support, the Government would be wisely reluctant to get embroiled in what would simply be another fight. I see that Sarah Skerrat is nodding, because she has had that experience.

The Convener: We can sort this out in the next parliamentary session.

Patrick Krause: I make the very quick point that this is absolutely about participation. That is what will carry the process through.

Jonathan Hughes (Scottish Wildlife Trust): I want to make a few comments on agricultural economics in relation to natural capital and ecosystem services, which have already been mentioned. The most up to date figures that I have for farming are for 2013. The output was £2.9 billion, but the costs were £2.8 billion. That gives you an idea of the state of agricultural economics in Scotland.

On top of that, there was £570 million-worth of direct support payments. You could argue that that is £570 million-worth of payments without a policy purpose, so that is probably the issue that we have to talk about. I would add that, in 2012, the average farm made a loss of £16,000.

That is the background, but it is an incomplete picture, because farming delivers on a whole range of other areas other than the production of food. If you think of the money that we invest in the agricultural sector as investment in natural capital stocks to maximise the range of benefits that we get from those stocks—such as clean water, flood mitigation, carbon capture and storage, biodiversity and the stimulation of new enterprises—you get a completely different picture. However, we have not done that analysis.

Therefore, one thing that I would urge the committee to do in the next session would be to begin to get to grips with that analysis. The Scottish Government needs to do that analysis. We need to understand all those stocks and flows and not just the immediate financial flows from farming, and then we can understand how to deploy the money for the public good. That is not about either/or but about delivering a range of benefits and, as the land use strategy talks about, multifunctionality.

We must move away from monocultures and sectors and towards multifunctionality and innovation. Rural Scotland desperately needs that. Without boring you with any more figures, I will say only that I strongly support what the Crown Estate has said, as well as what Scottish Land & Estates has said about Scotland potentially becoming a world leader in payments for ecosystem services. I hope that the Scottish Wildlife Trust has paved the way for that to a small degree with the world forum of natural capital.

I also strongly support what Nourish Scotland has said about how, if we had a blank canvas, we could use the £570 million in direct support payments and how we would best spend it for all and not just a small sector of the Scottish people.

The Convener: That was thoughtful indeed. Thank you for that.

Jim Hume: Jonny Hughes makes some of my points quite clearly. He mentioned a £2.9 billion output and £2.8 billion-worth of costs, but those costs are money into the economy as well, and that money goes to feed and machinery merchants and towns and so on.

The Convener: And land agents?

Jim Hume: I do not think that land agents are a big part of people's costs. [*Laughter*.] Obviously, everyone is showing their biases today.

CAP is an important part, too, and that must be remembered by whoever sits on the next committee.

Clare Slipper made a point about the dairy industry. When we looked into that sector, it became clear that we have a lack of process and capacity. Everybody looks at New Zealand and mentions how it was able to get rid of payments, but money still goes into agricultural there—it just goes into different areas. A large amount of payments went into processing for all commodities down to wheat. For example, instead of just having liquid milk, they were able to make that into different products and export it quite successfully into south-east Asia. It would be interesting to hear

others views on whether we should be supporting the industry differently—through processing or marketing, for example. New Zealand products are marketed on our television screens, so why can we not do that the other way round?

The Convener: Thank you, Jim. Following those thoughts, I call Sarah Skerratt and then Sarah Boyack.

Dr Skerratt: The multifunctionality of agriculture and land use demands innovation and adaption by the workforce and, in order to maintain the resilience of the farming sector, an issue of which the committee needs to be mindful is the education and training of current and future generations.

We have the 2015 "National Strategy for Land-Based Education and Training in Scotland". It highlights the ageing workforce and a need to upskill existing staff and also attract new entrants.

We also have the exciting prospect of the further roll-out of the developing Scotland's young workforce agenda. That agenda is bringing together schools and colleges. It seeks to develop career pathways for individuals from rural and non-rural backgrounds so that there is a championing of the rural sector—in particular the agricultural sector—in non-rural schools.

It would be helpful—perhaps imperative, looking at the sustainability of the farming sector—for your successor committee to monitor the outcomes of those initiatives, their impact, what is working well and what could be done differently if we are really trying to focus on the resilience of the rural sector.

10:15

The Convener: We have three Sarahs in a row—we have just heard from Sarah Skerratt; Sarah Boyack is next and then Sarah-Jane Laing.

Sarah Boyack: To follow on from what the last two speakers have said, when we look at CAP reform we might want to look at the role of markets in the 21st century because that is an issue for the dairy farming community. The market support is broken—it is irrelevant.

We have talked about what the Government might be able to do with the farming industry around procurement and local and regional markets, but there is a wider intellectual issue about markets, whether they work for the farming community in the 21st century and how we might respond.

Sarah-Jane Laing: I will add to what Dr Skerratt said about resilience in the farming sector. I have a plea not to focus solely on new entrants and on encouraging innovation from the next generation. Current farmers in Scotland have a huge wealth of expertise and knowledge, and we have had successful knowledge transfer projects such as the monitor farms. Indeed, we may even look at monitor estates in the future. We have to ensure that such projects are part of a bundle for supporting resilience in farming.

Although we are talking about a change, we have willingness and expertise within the industry. It is showcased every year at Carnoustie and down at the Oxford farming conference that Scottish farmers know how to innovate—they know how to enhance what they are producing. We have to make sure that they continue to be supported through projects such as the knowledge transfer schemes that the Scottish Government already has.

The Convener: I am concerned about time, but Clare Slipper is next.

Clare Slipper: I have a brief point. We have the Scottish Government's "A Vision for Scottish Agriculture" document. I am sure that all the groups around this table will be participating in that. I have a plea, more than anything else, for the successor committee to look at the document, perhaps through the next parliamentary session, and to weigh up how all the different initiatives, promotions, growth boards and visions are tying in to the wider framework of Scottish agriculture.

The Convener: That has to be considered alongside "Becoming a Good Food Nation" and the strategy up to 2025. That leads us into thinking about how people can share in the bounty—they do not at the moment.

Dave Thompson: Mention has been made of the amount of cash that is available through CAP and so on, but nobody has mentioned the fact that Scotland is just about at the bottom of the league in Europe in terms of how much money we have to give to our farming and crofting communities.

It would be useful for the successor committee to look at why that is the case and to ask whether the situation can be rectified. Can we do something even within the current structures—I will not make any political points here—within the United Kingdom to make sure that Scotland gets the same as or more than other smaller countries in Europe? That would make a huge difference to the amount of cash that is available to everybody. We all know that money is a huge problem.

The Convener: Indeed. Thank you for that point. It would be useful to move on to marine issues now.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Good morning, everybody. I would like to focus everyone's minds on Scotland's seas in relation to our marine habitats and the national marine plan and how that rolls out into the regional plans. We

need to consider how our habitats per se are protected, how we can have sustainable fisheries for the future, and the range of other economic interests that all fit together in that.

I ask for brief comments in view of time today, not because this is not important but because we want to be sure that we cover the range of issues right the way through from the economy and support for our fragile communities to the biodiversity and climate change issues in our seas. As our convener stressed at the beginning, bullet-point answers would be very much valued.

Bertie Armstrong: Good morning, Claudia—thank you for that introduction to the subject. I will bring up our single point again, which is the use of evidence and the importance of making decisions based on evidence. The problem that confronts the fishing industry of Scotland at present can be summarised in the latter half of this sentence: everybody knows about the benefits of fish and everyone loves fish, but no one actually wants anybody to catch any.

Marine protected areas and habitats are vitally important, and proper stewardship of the marine environment is extremely important. However, it needs to be productive. At each point of decision on what is enough to meet the conservation objective and—wherever possible—to ensure the continued sustainable use of the sea, that balance must prevail.

That has not been the case with a small number of the MPAs—I emphasise that it is a small number. The whole Scottish MPA process was an exemplar for other nations going about setting up marine protected areas. The problem was the decision making in four of the 20 first designations, which was skewed—in our view—for political purposes. That did such a lot of damage to what would have been a truly excellent process.

Protection of the habitat is of course vital, but as we move forward there must be evidence and we must bear in mind the other statutory requirement of the Scottish Government, which is the continued sustainable use of the seas for food production. That is the vitally important but often ignored other half.

Graeme Dey: I find myself agreeing with Bertie Armstrong, in so far as I agree with his point that it is incumbent on Parliament and its committees to differentiate between evidence and opinion masquerading as evidence. However, I also point out that it is incumbent on those who make submissions to this or any other parliamentary committee that they focus on evidence rather than opinion—and not, dare I say it, on self-interest where that conflicts with the greater good.

Bertie Armstrong referred to the MPAs, but as we found throughout the designation process—I do not make this point defensively—it can be very difficult for this or any committee to cut through the claims and counter-claims that are presented to us, especially when a case is made in a way that is not altogether acceptable.

We are sitting round the table today and hearing measured, constructive and respectful contributions that are balanced and focused on the greater good. That is the kind of evidence that we need and that the successor committee will need in the years to come.

Bertie Armstrong: I absolutely agree. If we can proceed in the next session of Parliament with that as the underlying principle, we will do better.

It is important to be able to differentiate between well-stated, plausible-sounding opinion and evidence. I completely accept Graeme Dey's point that, if people are going to present evidence, they should make it convincing.

The Convener: We have to be able to see through the orange smoke flares that were let off outside the Parliament the other week in order to get to some of the evidence beneath the opinion.

Calum Duncan can go next, followed by Alan Laidlaw.

Claudia Beamish: Can I come back in on that point, convener? It is important.

The Convener: Yes—please do.

Claudia Beamish: Thank you. On the point that Bertie Armstrong and Graeme Dey have both made—I am not asking for responses at this point—we must be careful about making comments such as those that Bertie Armstrong has just made.

Mr Armstrong, you said that the committee does not want anyone to catch any fish. I understand where you are coming from, and I understand that fragile communities are at risk. I understand your perspective, and the dichotomy with the evidence on the future of our economy. However, I stress that that is not the perspective that we are coming from. It is important that I put that on record. The committee has to weigh up fishing with the other interests in the environment that we have been looking at. That is the sort of legacy that I hope will go forward.

Bertie Armstrong: I accept that. I was deliberately using a catchy phrase. In fact, Calum Duncan and I conduct a dialogue in public and on social media, and it often includes such phrases. Underlying that is the fact that—believe it or not—we have a communicative relationship.

The Convener: Calum, you can now reply to that. It will be 10 rounds, I suppose.

Calum Duncan (Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group): I had the words "false dichotomy" written down before Claudia Beamish talked about the dichotomy, and that is what we have seen. We all want healthy seas, and the engine room of the seas is often the fragile, complex sea-bed habitats. In our opinion, the committee has done well to listen to the evidence on those habitats, which has been about both the features and the status of the seas as well as the benefits that those features can provide if the habitats are properly managed and indeed recovered.

It is worth putting on the record that the four MPA sites that were mentioned were a form of compromise and that some stakeholders felt that they did not go far enough. We have made a submission about Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura. We support the order for that, but it contains compromises that are now a matter of record.

We need to depolarise the issue. The MPA process has brought a lot of things to a head. A lot of matters related to inshore fisheries management have been a can that has been kicked down the road. As far back as 2006, there were recommendations to address spatial management of fishing and scallop dredging in particular. To get the win-wins, we must all work together for the outcome that we want, which is sustainable, well-managed inshore waters. I hope that the next committee will support progressive, strategic, ecosystem-based fishing management that allows equitable, sustainable access.

I also want to bring in the opportunities that the regional marine planning process affords to deliver sustainable management and communities that live within environmental limits. As part of the MPA review process, we have another round of management measures that need to come in. I hope that, in time, we will break the false dichotomy by getting more evidence of the benefits.

We urge people to use the historic opportunity to research the benefits that the MPAs provide for sustainable food provision. Scallops and juvenile cod like complex sea beds, so it makes sense to protect them. On the other benefits, Jonny Hughes mentioned nutrient cycling, carbon capture and coastal protection. Politics aside, we are seeing some encouraging evidence from Lamlash bay, which is providing research opportunities.

We encourage people during the next session of Parliament to make the most of this historic opportunity so that everyone can benefit from the public good that Pete Ritchie talked about.

Alan Laidlaw: It is important to think of the whole marine environment. The committee is extremely well versed in discussions about land and land use, and it has developed expertise in marine issues. All too often, however, people take a simplistic view and want the marine environment to be used for their single interest. It is like the argument about deer versus trees versus farming: it is just that they are wet deer as opposed to dry deer. I am involved in onshore and offshore land management, and whether it is wet land or dry land, we have to look at it in its entirety.

When we look at a coastal area, it is easy to see that nothing is happening on a piece of water at the time when we look, but it could be an important area for one of Bertie Armstrong's members, an important habitat—underneath—for one of Calum Duncan's interested parties, a great natural capital resource or a great community resource.

People often take a hugely simplistic approach. Where community engagement is done well, with capacity, and views are properly sought, it can be fascinating to see how quickly totemic issues disappear because there is greater understanding.

10:30

Calum Duncan mentioned marine spatial planning, regional planning partnerships and so on: there is a huge development task in getting communities engaged in what happens off their coasts. It will be a huge job to find the capacity to service those discussions, but it is really important to get it right. From a legacy point of view, the Government and, in particular, the committee are in a really good position to draw the strands together and to take an—I hate this word—holistic view. We need to take a view from 20,000 feet of what we want Scotland's natural resources to deliver.

As Jonny Hughes said, multiple benefits can be delivered from the same piece of ground if the proper approach is taken. If we take a simplistic approach, we might make a mess of everything, and the committee will need to have more dreadful evidence-taking sessions that it will not want. My plea is that we do not take a simplistic approach.

Jonathan Hughes: I want to start with a couple of pieces of evidence about the marine environment. In 1883, a map of the North Sea showed an oyster bed 20,000km^2 in extent. By 1936, those oysters could not be harvested and by 1970 the bed had gone completely. In 1948, 40,000 fishermen worked in the North Sea, achieving a peak catch of 1.2 million tonnes a year. By 2008, however, just over 10,000 fishermen were working in the North Sea, and were catching half that tonnage.

You have heard the arguments that the environment sector—to give us a loose name—has made for protection of the marine environment, but in recent years we have

increasingly been making social and economic arguments for protecting it. We need to understand the shifting baselines. How far have we really understood the extent to which we have damaged our marine environment, and the extent to which it needs to be recovered? Sometimes people look back at the five-year timescales and think, "We were in this situation five years ago. Why aren't we catching as much fish now?" The point is that we have a massive recovery job to do in order to increase production for the future. I want to put on the record now that the Scottish Wildlife Trust wants Scottish fishermen to catch more fish and wants the Scottish Fishing Federation to enable its members to do that. In order to do that, however, we need first to recover the marine environment.

The scenario is exactly the same on land, with deer. We need to bring down deer numbers to the point at which we get a rebound in primary productivity on the land, regeneration of forests and healthier, more productive and stable populations of red deer. We need recovery—we need to understand how much damage has been done to our environment and how far we need to go on the road of recovery. Perhaps the committee could look at that baseline issue in the round, given how often it is misrepresented.

Dave Thompson: I totally agree with Jonny Hughes and Calum Duncan—especially with regard to research. One thing that struck me in the whole debate about MPAs was the almost total lack of real evidence or research on the west coast, in particular. We talk about evidence, but how can we, given that there is so little evidence, make proper judgments? I therefore agree that we need to carry out a lot more research, particularly in the west, but also in the east.

The fact is that science quite often lags behind reality. The seas are changing—indeed, they change all the time—and sometimes they are ahead of the science, which can be a year or two behind. In other words, we are basing decisions on slow science. I know that science cannot be ahead of reality, but I think that we need to get a bit closer to what is going on. I therefore make a plea for greater investment in research to ensure that we really know what is going on in our seas.

The Convener: Thank you for that. Mike Russell wants to come back on something. Is it about land?

Michael Russell: No, convener. I know that there will be an opportunity to talk specifically about deer in a moment, which will be important.

On evidence-based policy making, I think that what has been said is simplistic. The idea that the committee or the Government sits and in its Platonic or Socratic wisdom decides and, in the end, delivers its verdict on very clear cases for one side or the other, is bunkum. The reality is that there is an incredibly complex mix of players. Jonny Hughes has just told us about the environment in one part of the North Sea in 1883, but in order to understand the evidence, you need a complete—not partial—set of evidence.

What this committee does—I hope—and what its successor committee should do is try to balance the evidence with which it is presented, which will always be partial, with the passion that people feel about what they do. I recognise the passion of, for example, my constituents in Tarbert who are faced with an MPA process that they think was immensely flawed and which they feel should have been operated better, and of people in Arran and elsewhere who have tried to change the marine environment. I acknowledge the view of the Government, which has a vision of taking the issues forward, and I acknowledge the requirements of EU law.

The subject is a cat's cradle, and the committee needs to find a way forward so that Scotland is better after its considerations. That does not involve simply sitting and making bland or bloodless decisions based on piles of evidence; it involves engaging with what is taking place and—as Patrick Krause suggested—encouraging participation so that, in the end, the solutions that are found are ones that everybody, or almost everybody, can buy into or believes they have influenced. That is the right way forward, and is what any committee should try to do.

The Convener: In drawing this panel to a close, Calum Duncan, Bertie Armstrong and Claudia Beamish can have the last words, for the moment.

Calum Duncan: I echo what Jonathan Hughes said about the imperative for recovery. The sober Government report, "Scotland's Marine Atlas: Information on the National Marine Plan", which is the best available evidence, makes clear that need for recovery.

I also support the point that Alan Laidlaw made about wet land and dry land. We need proper spatial management.

To pick up on Dave Thompson's point, we have a lot of evidence of presence of features. We have less evidence of presence further offshore, and we have very little evidence of benefits. However, we are seeing encouraging stuff coming through from Lamlash and elsewhere. Like everyone else, I encourage further research in order to realise the benefits and to demonstrate them to people who are sceptical.

Bertie Armstrong: Jonathan Hughes illustrated what I mean about the general nod towards not wanting anybody to fish anything. That is an entirely predictable narrative that is a subjective

tale of woe about disasters foregone and the view that there should be an emphasis on non-specific objectives of recovery—which, of course, implies that if one MPA is good two are better, and if a big one is good, a huge one is even better still.

However, the evidence is somewhat different. Of course the seas have changed since 1880, and there is a perfectly plausible story about why. A lot of it was to do with overfishing. We heard the figure of 40,000 fishermen in the 1880s; there are 5,000 now. The fishing mortality curve from the relevant scientific body—the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea—shows a 45° downward slope, and the biomass of fish stocks curve is showing the opposite—a 45° upward slope. Therefore, if we do not get it wrong again, there is a distinct hope that the bottom line of getting more from a productive sea is entirely possible.

I dispute Michael Russell's description of the evidence as being excessively complicated and, therefore, rather arcane. In the matter of the south Arran MPA, the exact location of the features is known. The recommendation, which was supported by SNH, was that there should be zonal management and that fishing should take place in some areas, well clear of the features—

The Convener: I think that you are looking back now, not forward.

Bertie Armstrong: I am answering the point about evidence. The evidence is generally reasonably clear. The problem with the evidence that was presented on MPAs concerns the socioeconomics, and the fact that that silly trick of grossing-up was done—the assumption that activity that represents only 0.2 per cent of fishing must have a small impact. In response to that, I say that the Highland aluminium smelter represented only 0.2 per cent of Scottish gross domestic product, but its closure was a disaster for Invergordon. We are talking about something that would cause only a small amount of damage to the Scottish fishing industry, but would be a great disaster for your constituency, Mr Russell. We made that perfectly clear to you.

Michael Russell: To be fair, I point out that I argued the case strongly with regard to how people were treated by Marine Scotland. However, Mr Armstrong has just proved that evidence is not simple, but can be complex and sometimes difficult to understand. I will let the *Official Report* stand as evidence of that.

Claudia Beamish: It has been a helpful discussion that has shown that there is still quite a dichotomy on issues to do with our marine environment. However, as someone who—along with many others, both on and beyond the committee—has taken a particular interest in such matters, I hold the positive view that the various interests that think that they are different are much closer than they believe.

When it comes to our marine environment, as with land use issues, research is necessary and there needs to be participation by communities and other parties that have an interest: let us not forget the challenges of the oil and gas industry, the renewables sector, marine tourism and all the other interests. If those interests ensure not only that they contribute to the evidence and the science but that they make the most enormous effort to understand one another's perspectives, that would be a legacy from outwith the committee that would help the successor committee to address the marine issues that are faced now and those that will be faced in the future.

The Convener: I thank everybody for their contributions. It is clear that the land use strategy is the basis of some of the things that we do. We have a marine plan, but a marine use strategy that matches the land use strategy would be a good thing.

There are many other things that we have learned from this morning's discussion—not the least of which is that when people get the chance to speak, they put forward ideas that, as Claudia Beamish said, show that we can work together in a fashion that will enable us to develop what we hope will be ways of working that will allow us to move Scotland forward and to recognise where the strengths, the passions and the ability are. Some witnesses have spoken more than others, but I think that each sector has a huge part to play. On behalf of the committee, I thank the witnesses for their evidence in the past and for their evidence this morning.

Graeme Dey will make one final point.

Graeme Dey: Over the five years of the session, the committee has made a concerted effort to take evidence from witnesses who work at the coalface of organisations and who understand the practical aspects of the subject on which evidence is being taken. I argue that, to a degree, we have been successful in that.

What we have come nowhere near to succeeding on is striking any kind of gender balance in our panels. Today, three of our 15 witnesses are women, and that is no blip. Of the 107 witnesses who have appeared before us since May last year, 89 have been men and just 18 have been women. That is an 83 per cent to 17 per cent split. I ask the witnesses for help in informing the process. Why do you think the panels that give evidence to the committee are so male-dominated? Do your organisations contain too few women in positions of sufficient authority and specialisation who could be put forward to give

evidence, or is there an in-built prejudice at play when it comes to selecting representatives to attend evidence sessions?

The Convener: That is a thought that you can all take away with you.

I thank you all very much for being such useful witnesses over the piece. We must end the session there. We have covered rural development and some aspects of biodiversity, as well as marine, agriculture and land use issues, so we have had quite a good round-table discussion.

10:43

Meeting suspended.

10:52

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome back members of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee to continue item 1, which is consideration of our legacy. We are joined by the second panel, which includes many who have previously been witnesses, so we will not invite any introductory remarks. I welcome Sam Gardner, Andy Kerr, Iain Gulland, Colin Campbell, Tom Ballantine, Willie McGhee and Stuart Goodall. We will try to cover subjects such as the report on proposals and policies 3, annual climate targets and reports, forestry, biodiversity, air pollution, sustainable development and the circular economy. There are a lot of things to cover in the next hour.

As I said to the previous panel, we asked witnesses for submissions with bullet points and some wrote treatises. During the coming hour, the committee wants bullet points only, not treatises. We must try to focus. This is for a legacy paper, so we will not be looking at the past but will be trying our very best to ensure that we give the next committee a clear steer.

We need to think about the report on proposals and policies 3 and about how climate change targets and so on are actually going to work. We also need to think about how things have worked, how Government should be prodded to try to make them work better and how the whole community—business, local government, the public sector and the private sector—needs to work.

With that general statement from me, does anyone want to kick off? You should just indicate to me or the clerks and we will bring you in.

Sarah Boyack: Shall I turn that into a question?

The Convener: Even better.

Sarah Boyack: I ask the witnesses whether they think that the Parliament and our committees do enough to scrutinise progress on climate change.

As Rob Gibson said, we have missed our first four annual targets. The committee is responsible for looking at agriculture; we are not responsible for housing, energy, transport, business, the economy or fiscal mechanisms. In our committee reports in the past couple of years we have highlighted the difficulty of scrutinising the climate change element of the annual budget. Is there more that the Parliament could do, or is that up to this committee? What should the Parliament do in the next session? Is it an issue for our legacy paper? How should the other committees get involved?

The Convener: That is a good question.

Sam Gardner (WWF Scotland): I will start. It is a good question.

First, I think that it is appropriate to acknowledge—not that it needs identifying—how much of a cross-cutting issue climate change is, and the challenge that that presents to this committee.

There are examples of other committees having clearly taken the lead. In its scrutiny of the budget last year and this year, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee particularly focused on climate change, which was welcome.

The challenge for the future is being able to aggregate the conclusions from subject committees in such a way that we do not divide delivery of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 into its component parts and lose the coherence—the glue that might hold it together. That is where I see a critical role for this committee, and I think that it has sought to play that role.

With the scrutiny of RPP2, every effort was made to collate and bring together evidence from subject committees. It is challenging to do that on a continuous basis, but it needs to happen, otherwise we will lose that assessment of the coherence of the RPP and of the extent to which different sectors contribute fairly to the challenge of tackling climate change—that overview of the effectiveness of its delivery. There is an important role for the committee in future in providing that assessment of the whole and of whether delivery is adequate and whether it is happening as it ought to be.

Graeme Dey: I will pick up on Sam Gardner's point. Given this committee's wide-ranging remit, do any of the witnesses think that there is an argument for having a standalone climate change and environment committee in the Parliament?

Dr Andy Kerr (Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation): If we look at what is happening behind the scenes within the Government, we can see that issues are starting to join up. Work on RPP2 was very much from the bottom up. With RPP3, a lot of work has been commissioned, such as the TIMES modelling framework and a bunch of other things, to try to join things up across the whole energy-environment space and allow the Government to start to look across different sectors.

Rather than climate change and environment, climate change and energy may be a more coherent approach. I know that we have been there and have moved away, but for me that would be a more coherent approach going forward.

Colin Campbell (James Hutton Institute): On that point, there is always a danger of siloing some of those topics. Climate change affects all the issues that we have discussed this session. For example, adaptation is just as important as mitigation. We know that we have to adapt. That is fundamentally linked into all the discussions that we have had about natural capital. There is a danger that we will silo the debate and not take into account the wider aspects.

To answer Sarah Boyack's question, there is a need to look in greater detail at some of the new measures that are coming forward that try to mitigate the impact of greenhouse gases. New measures are coming forward on compulsory soil testing and on increasing the efficacy of animal health treatments. Those are new weapons in the armoury, but we need to examine the evidence around their future effectiveness.

Sam Gardner: Andy Kerr said what I was going to say, which is that a climate change and energy committee makes sense, certainly in the context of how the Scottish Government is approaching the development of RPP3. This committee clearly has a huge breadth of responsibility, and climate change, with its all-encompassing nature, is deserving of a more singular focus so that a committee is able to provide that leadership role on a cross-cutting topic.

11:00

Stuart Goodall (Confor): Both areas can be linked. Having a committee like this one to put a spotlight on climate change and challenge the Government is extremely important. For example, in forestry, where a big issue with the contribution to climate change mitigation is the planting targets, the committee's ability to shine a light on the fact that we are not delivering on something that is achievable will help to galvanise the agencies that are involved in the whole area of approving and delivering on those planting targets. That is an extremely important role that the committee can play.

That highlights the fact that it is beneficial to have climate change linked with other key deliverables that are the Scottish Parliament's responsibility. Forestry planting is one of the big, positive things that the Government can do to generate economic activity as well as reduce climate change, and it is part of the rural affairs agenda. It is extremely useful for the committee to have that ability to look across areas and, hopefully, come up with some joint solutions.

Tom Ballantine (Stop Climate Chaos Scotland): I can give only the broad answer that the more time that we devote to the subject, the better I will feel about it.

My main message for today is about the need for linked thinking between the Cabinet, the Cabinet sub-committee on climate change, departments, committees and the whole range of agencies that are looking at this area. To me, the most important role that this committee or any successor to it can play is in pushing for and achieving that linked thinking and in getting read-across, which is my second big bullet point for you. We must have that read-across from the RPP to the budget to delivery, and we must audit what is going on.

The committee has done some fantastic work in pushing for action on climate change, and I would like its successor committees to follow up that work, see whether the actions that you have suggested are taken and be proactive in trying to ensure that they are taken.

Michael Russell: Tom Ballantine makes the crucial point that we need to get that joined-up or linked thinking and to know who has the lead responsibility, in the Government and in the Parliament, for forcing the issue. In the Government, the time has certainly come for that to be seen as a Cabinet responsibility with a cabinet secretary taking the lead on it. I know that Richard Lochhead has the lead responsibility for it at the moment, but I think that it is important to drive that. In the Parliament, this committee needs to play an even more prominent role in forcing the issue with other committees.

My experience in the Government and as a member of the Scottish Parliament is that, without somebody taking that on and delivering it, there is a temptation to think that it can be done in a future year or by somebody else. Given the urgency of the matter, I think that our successor committee would want to see that major change and would encourage the Government to make it very early on. Indeed, although I do not know what the organisations that are represented around the

table will demand in manifestos, I hope that the matter will be thought through.

Sarah Boyack: It has been really good to get people's views on the issue. I wanted to provoke those thoughts to see what people think we could do better. I take the point that it has to be about both mitigation and adaptation, and the committee has been thinking about both in the areas of flooding, forestry, agriculture, land management and peatlands—there is a lot in there. I was also thinking about it in the context of urban and rural Scotland: the issue is important, regardless of where people are in the country.

Mike Russell talked about how the Government needs to have a focus, and I think that the Parliament needs to shadow that. In the previous session, we had a slightly different committee structure, but we also had a cross-party group on climate change, which we have not had this session. That has meant that everything has been left up to this committee. Given the committee's huge responsibility, I feel that we should put to the Parliament, both at a political level and in the context of the clerking system, the question about how we can cope with that workload.

The Convener: Indeed. We have had the problem of engaging other committees that are responsible for big carbon users, such as the Justice Committee and the Health and Sport Committee. Getting people to understand their responsibilities, or even to measure those things, has come only through our own interrogation of public agencies such as the police. Those committees should have been doing that.

Does anyone want to come back on those points?

Sam Gardner: The committee has made a clear effort to mainstream the climate change scrutiny process, in recognition of the challenge of taking it all on itself and the fact that subject committees have relevant evidence.

However, there have not been the checks and balances to provide assurance that those committees have fulfilled the mainstreaming requirements. I highlighted one committee that, in the budget process, was particularly strong in that area, but others have paid much less heed to the relevance of climate change to their budget scrutiny.

A process of dilution happens between the different committees reporting back to the Finance Committee and what eventually appears in the Finance Committee's report in relation to climate change. We need to acknowledge that and find ways to provide greater assurance that climate change features prominently in the Finance Committee's report by identifying where spend is right or where it needs to be shifted. That will be important: to date, we have not been confident that the budget has aligned with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The Convener: I do not think that the Finance Committee has taken on board the centrality of what you are talking about. The pressures are different.

Sarah Boyack: Post Paris, the critical years will be 2016 to 2021. The EU is not going to have a target of a 42 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020. We therefore have a potential leadership role, but the issue is whether our ambition is real. Our successor committee could be crucial in following all that through. It is really good to get people's views.

Colin Campbell: I will pick up the point that Sarah Boyack made about the urban-agriculture divide. There is a great need to connect the two communities more than we have done in the past. The agricultural sector often feels under pressure and unappreciated by the urban community. The urban community has negative views of agriculture.

In the central belt, people are still very close to farms and rural areas. Those farms and rural areas are often not the best, but people are still very close to them. There is an opportunity to connect urban and agricultural communities much more by thinking about that problem and how to solve it. It is fundamental that we get support from the urban population for what we are doing in the agricultural sector.

The Convener: At this stage, we might want to think about the circular economy, too. It was nice to see the whey from a cheese factory being used by pig producers. As I saw last Friday in Tain, such things are little links in the chain.

Tied in with the RPP and the annual climate targets is behaviour change, and how behaviour change happens ties in with the policies that the Government has been adopting. Iain Gulland might want to pick up on that.

Iain Gulland (Zero Waste Scotland): I want to highlight work that we did last year that showed that moving to a circular economy will also have a significant impact in reducing carbon emissions in Scotland—it goes much further than simply thinking of it as waste management. I emphasise that adopting the circular economy in Scotland creates opportunity, not just in relation to economics and the environment more broadly, but in relation to leadership on climate change.

The conversations about climate change and the circular economy are very similar, because the circular economy is also a cross-cutting issue. It is about much more than just the environment; it is about economic opportunity for Scotland in terms

of jobs and the stewardship of the natural environment—agriculture or fishing and the marine environment—that we heard about in the earlier evidence session. It is about the natural assets that we have in Scotland and how we use them. There are a lot of similarities with climate change in the conversation about how we ensure that the circular economy is seen as a cross-cutting issue and not just an environmental one.

In 2014, I was involved in a round-table discussion in the Parliament about the circular economy that included people from the skills, education and business sectors, who were trying to understand what the opportunities were. There is still a role for the committee not just to champion the circular economy but to reach out to the other committees in the Parliament to ensure that they are thinking about it and responding to the opportunities that are now laid out in the Scottish Government's circular economy strategy, which was launched just a couple of weeks ago.

Clearly, there are opportunities in the urban setting and in the rural sector. There is a lot of evidence of opportunities for jobs and environmental benefits, and for mitigating climate change. The issue is about how to get that theme to cut across the work of the Parliament and the Government.

The Convener: Graeme Dey and Claudia Beamish will follow up on that.

Graeme Dey: I will strip this back a bit. How do we explain effectively to the wider public what the circular economy means? We had a very good parliamentary debate—it was last year, I think—in which MSPs made a decent fist of trying to articulate what the circular economy is. We understand it and you understand it, but how do we get the message out to the public, so that we can secure the buy-in and behavioural change that are needed? We are talking about the circular economy at a high level, but how do we get the message out to the public and get people to change their behaviour?

Iain Gulland: That is an interesting question. I think that we talked about that in the round-table session. It is an issue of language. The words "circular economy" probably do not attract the attention of too many people. However, I think that the public understand the concept.

Throughout 2015, we carried out an extensive engagement process on behalf of the Government, not just with businesses but with consumers—young people and the whole range of people around. I know that this is the strapline for that consultation, but it really was basically about making things last. We sought to understand how people are consuming differently and how they can think about what they are consuming, making products last longer or repairing them, or accessing services differently by leasing or hiring. To be honest, people understood that and they really responded to it. They did not respond to the words "circular economy", but they understood. Nobody—whether they are a consumer or running a business—likes to waste anything, and nobody really wants to buy something that is not going to last. People understand that. I know that there is a nuance to the language, but people understand. They want to buy things differently and they want to consume differently.

In particular, people understand when it comes to matters such as climate change. They want to do something that really benefits climate change mitigation or tackles the other aspects of climate change that they have seen writ large across the main media. That was particularly the case in the run-up to the Paris summit. In relation to the circular economy, I think that they understand about making things last longer, recycling, repairing, remanufacturing and using things for longer—they understand that for themselves and they pass those things on. I think that the public get that.

Claudia Beamish: The main points that I wanted to raise have been raised.

I will follow on from the points that Iain Gulland and Graeme Dey made. For our legacy paper, I am interested in how we can involve communities and those who are not on quite such robust incomes as others. I am also interested in households' understanding of climate change and the circular economy, and the contribution that people can make. Often, people say, "I would like to do something, but I am not sure what." That has moved on quite a lot, but there are still ways in which we might be able to advise the future committee on how to help people in that regard. I would value your views on that.

Tom Ballantine: That takes us back to the point about how to get the public to buy into the idea of the circular economy.

For the future, I think that it is important to say that we are operating in a new context in which people see the kind of extreme weather events that go on—in this country and elsewhere—and the impacts that climate change has on health issues, food production and all sorts of areas of people's lives. We will get buy-in when people see the impact of doing nothing and understand that they want to do something to avoid the worse impacts that we will face if they do not act.

That is linked to the outcome of the Paris summit—the agreement to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C, rather than 2°C. I think that that is another bit of momentum for getting buy-in from the public and from Government.

Dr Kerr: I will challenge Tom Ballantine a little bit. There were a lot of years in which there was an assumption that if we could get people to believe in and buy into climate change, they would then do something about it. However, we know that a lot of people buy into climate change but do not do anything about it. It seems to me that we have to make it far more real for people. That goes back to Iain Gulland's point about the circular economy.

11:15

Take the energy system as an example. Over the past couple of decades, we have treated people as passive consumers of energy, whereas now—particularly in Scotland, where there have been some good exemplars over the past few years—we are trying to get people to take a stake in the energy sector, whether that is by buying into a community scheme or simply by taking an active part in helping people to understand the options. If people do not want a wind turbine locally, we need to ask what they do want and ensure that they understand the options, because they cannot have nothing at all; they have to have something.

There is a sense that we are moving in the right direction in getting people to start to address what will make a difference for them and what the issues are for them on the energy side, and I suspect that the same is true of the circular economy. However, we have to move on from the notion that people will do something if only we can make them believe in climate change.

I know that I am being slightly unfair on Tom Ballantine, but we must move beyond that and we have some good examples from around Scotland. To pick just one thing, we know that in rural communities a lot of people use electricity for heating and that more than 50 per cent of people in that situation are in fuel poverty. There are things that we can do to support that, which involve bringing in biomass for heating or other initiatives, working as a community and working with farms, which is not being done at the moment. There are positive things that we can do and we are starting to see bits of that, but we need to scale it up. That is the issue, but the response has got to be real.

Tom Ballantine: I want to make it clear that I am not talking about buy-in to the idea of climate change. I am talking about buy-in to the effects of climate change, an understanding of the effects of climate change and actually seeing those effects on the ground. People are experiencing flooding in rural communities and in towns, and they are seeing the health impacts of climate change around the world and understanding that that may have implications for them.

It is not about buying into whether climate change is happening. That argument is pretty much over, and people understand that it is happening. Until now, they have not seen the effects on them and their lives—that is what is happening now and where the momentum is coming from in part.

Dave Thompson: I am thinking about how we encourage folk to reuse things. I have a lovely pair of boots whose soles are now worn through but the leather uppers are perfect. They are very comfortable, but I cannot get them resoled because they are not designed to be easily resoled. That is a terrible waste and I cannot bring myself to throw them out.

How do we ensure that companies that make such items make them in such a way that they can be repaired? Do we use taxation? If we think of housing, is there a case for reducing the amount of whatever property taxes are being levied for those properties that have a positive thermal impact? Could we adjust whatever is going to succeed the council tax, so that people get a 10 per cent reduction if their home report shows that there are hardly any heat emissions? Is taxation one of the things that we could go forward with, bearing in mind that we have only limited taxation powers in this Parliament?

Iain Gulland: I always think that there is great alignment around energy in communities, as was also mentioned by the earlier panel. What was waste can now be a resource and an asset, and it is an asset that is flowing through our communities across Scotland. The same is true of putting up wind turbines and accessing economic benefit, which also involve engaging with people to tackle climate change. We have the same opportunity of tapping into what was the waste stream flowing through those communities and realising that those are assets that could be sold, repurposed, remanufactured or reused locally to create employment opportunities. That is the real opportunity for Scotland and what would really engage communities is getting them to see that material as something that will bring them economic and social benefit, in both rural and urban settings.

That links to how we can encourage and incentivise reuse. I am not trying to avoid the question about taxation, but we have a huge and successful renewables industry in Scotland because a subsidy was put in place—although I hate to use the word "subsidy"—to make that attractive in the marketplace when burning fossil fuels was still more competitive.

We could start to think about the recycling, reuse and reprocessing of materials. Although we have a very high recycling rate, and although consumers and businesses are engaged in buying

recycled goods, we still export the majority of our material to be reprocessed outwith Scotland. That is a huge loss to our economy. How do we ensure that the materials that we collect for reuse, repair and recycling are processed in Scotland? How can we incentivise that? To ensure that we get those economic opportunities for our communities as well as the environmental dividends, do we need to consider a solution like the renewables obligation certificates that were put in place for wind and wave power?

Dr Kerr: The short answer to Dave Thompson's question is yes. We should use taxation but only as part of a wider set of tools. In Scotland, like most of Britain, we obsess about up-front costs, not running costs. We need to be aware that, in itself, that is not the only thing.

The point at which we want to change behaviour is the point at which there is disruption in somebody's life. If somebody is moving house, that is the time to get in and do up the house. If we use tax as an incentive to improve the quality of houses and ratchet it every time that they are sold, we can retrofit houses quite rapidly through the system. However, we cannot do that in the absence of anything else, because people will buy houses because they can afford them and they are in places that they want.

Colin Campbell: I will not comment on tax, but making people understand about the whole-system approach can help a great deal. Dave Thompson gave the example of his boots; I will give an example from agriculture. We have been good at breeding new crop varieties that have increased yields enormously over the years. Part of that process ended up with barley that was much shorter. The problem with that was that there was then less straw for livestock farmers to have as bedding material whereas, if we had started from the point of view that we were trying to supply two products not one, we would have had a different approach.

That is a simple example of how, if we take a wider perspective, we might design something very differently. It goes back to communication. How do we design for the whole system and think about the whole cycle of the economy? We need to be able to quantify the economic aspects at every point in the cycle to get that understanding.

Agriculture is good at the circular economy. We already recycle many materials on the farm, but we need to have a precautionary approach about receiving byproducts from outside the farm cycle because, although they may have started out being natural, they can get contaminated and become unnatural. Therefore, we need to have a precautionary approach about how we connect the farm cycle to the wider economic cycle.

Tom Ballantine: I have a very simple principle for taxation. It is a no-brainer: reward the behaviours that you want and disincentivise the behaviours that you do not want. On that front, I will be interested to see what happens on air passenger duty, for example. It is self-evident that, if you want to change behaviour, you have to reward behaviours that you want and disincentivise the ones that you do not want.

Sam Gardner: As I recall, the Scottish Parliament had the opportunity to vary stamp duty to incentivise improvements in energy efficiency in the housing stock. That has recently been given more profile by Energy UK, the energy body, revisiting it. The Scottish Government might want to return to it in future.

I will highlight the role of regulation to complement tax. In particular, there are three key areas in which there is a growing consensus and growing evidence on the need for regulation to create markets. For example, we do not have a district heating industry in Scotland and the introduction of regulatory measures is critical to incentivising such an industry, reducing the costs, giving investors the confidence that they will get a return on it and protecting the consumer in the long term.

In the housing sector, the Scottish Government has done a lot of work on modelling what the introduction of minimum standards at the point of sale and rental will look like. There is cross-party support for that and we hope—in fact, we expect—that there will be consultation on the introduction of those minimum standards in the new parliamentary session. As Andy Kerr says, the point of sale is the opportunity to increase the energy efficiency of our housing stock; regulation is critical to doing that.

In the urban environment, there is a clear need for regulation, particularly where air quality is low, which has many consequences for public health.

Although all of those perhaps fit with other committees, there is a role for this committee in monitoring the RPP. There is often a data deficit with such monitoring and the committee could identify where there is a regulatory need, because the current package of policies or voluntary measures is not proving to be adequate. The committee does not need to provide the specifics, but should challenge the subject committees to do that.

Sarah Boyack: Listening to people talking about this round the table has prompted the thought that one of the things that the committee has not done much of is sending individual members or groups to do reports. We are adding more and more new things to do and every time that one of us speaks, a light bulb switches on in

my head and I think, “That’s a great idea.” The committee might want to recommend that its successor thinks about having short-term committee inquiries in which someone reports back, rather than sending us all off round the country together.

Andy Kerr suggested that we could change some of the fiscal measures, but we already did that: under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 it is possible to reduce business rates and council tax for energy efficiency or renewables installations. That power has virtually never been used. I have asked some parliamentary questions on it. Such an approach must have leadership and the Government must buy into it so that it is part of an overall strategy.

People have made really interesting points about the kind of reality check that we need. Dave Thompson talked about his boots, and I am wearing a similar pair. When it comes to repairing things, the situation is frustrating. We are quite good on recycling and we have some recovery mechanisms, but on repair there is a gap in terms of the economics and skills and how to make that work on the market. There are a few things that we could usefully go back and have a look at—beyond the headline of the circular economy, there are all the bits that have yet to come to fruition.

Jim Hume: I am sorry to hear that David Thompson is so down at heel. We will do a whip round to see whether we can get him a pair of new boots, seeing as he cannot get his old ones resoled.

David Thompson made an interesting point about whether we should penalise or incentivise. I would always promote incentivising when it comes to our hard-to-heat homes. It was a timely reminder that Scotland’s rural college did some work and found that, in rural Scotland, 51 per cent of our housing stock is in what is called fuel poverty. We have a lot of action to take, so I was glad to hear those words today.

The Convener: We do have a lot to do. We will consider forestry and biodiversity next. Mike Russell will lead on that.

Michael Russell: I want to pose four questions—answering them is not compulsory and people do not have to answer them all. Do not attempt to write on both sides of the paper at the same time.

The first question, which relates to Confor’s submission, is about the planting targets. It is all very well to say that we must meet the planting targets, but they have not been met in the last whatever number of years. If we agree that the planting targets are essential—and most of us do—how do we meet them? There are obligations on the commercial sector to do more in that regard, which ties into the second of Confor’s points about the availability of grant funding. Grant funding should be available and simpler to get, but perhaps the commercial sector is using that as a strong excuse not to plant rather than finding ways to plant.

The second issue is the role of community, which features quite strongly in the submission from the Forest Policy Group. I think that the group is right to argue that in forestry and biodiversity matters there should be public good from public money. Earlier this morning, Jonny Hughes made some good points on that, which we did not get the chance to explore fully. How should we structure the payment of public moneys in order to get that public good in forestry and more widely? What should our strategy be to involve communities and increase democratic accountability in the sectors?

The third issue is deer management. I am sorry that we did not get to touch on that earlier. Deer management is crucial in terms of where we are going on biodiversity. Tackling deer management at last, after two centuries of failing to do so, would be a noble—if rather big—ambition for the new committee.

My final point, which ties all the others together, relates to the land use strategy. We touched on it briefly in the first session, but it is an important issue here, too. Half the submissions that we received mentioned the need for a coherent land use strategy. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill will establish a land commission, assuming that the bill is passed at stage 3 next week. What will the commission do to bring about the land use strategy, and how will that strategy affect not just forestry but the wider issue of ensuring that we have a healthy, thriving, biodiverse Scotland, in which the different sectors are contributing to the issues around climate change?

That is probably enough to get us started.

11:30

The Convener: Indeed. As you say, deer management is part of that strategy. That is something that the committee had a united view on when we recommended that the Government take tougher action. Thinking about forestry and deer together is a useful combination. Perhaps Stuart Goodall can start us off.

Stuart Goodall: The planting target is vital, not least in the context of the climate change discussions that we have had. To make a pun, it is a major plank in the Government’s intent to deliver on climate change. The planting and products that come from that lock up carbon and are a low-carbon building material. We have done some calculations to say that, if we hit our targets, we

would be sequestering another 55 million tonnes of carbon in Scotland's forests. That would also allow us to secure a sector that has grown by more than 50 per cent since 2008 and is now contributing £1 billion to Scotland's economy. The sector employs 25,000 people across Scotland's rural areas, often providing high-quality, skilled and well-paid jobs in areas where alternative employment opportunities are limited.

The target is achievable. The issue is that there is a lack of drive-through in the agencies that are responsible for delivering the policy. They have lots of different objectives that they are trying to deliver and they face lots of different challenges. It can be easy to put planting to one side because it is seen as difficult. Part of that difficulty is perception: the forests that were planted in the last century are not what we are creating now, but those are what people see and what people envisage being created. I spend a huge amount of time responding to people who say that they do not want the kind of forests that we planted last century, to which I say, "That's great, because that's not what we're asking for." However, such forests are what is expected. When we take environmental conservation organisations, local authorities and others out to see a modern forestry planting site, they are taken aback by how different it is and by the benefits that it provides.

Mike Russell mentioned biodiversity. In the forests that we are planting, I have yet to see one that has more than, say, 60 to 70 per cent of trees producing timber as its primary output. In itself, producing timber is a very positive thing and it delivers on climate change—it is low carbon and it supports the economy—but those other parts of the area being planted are open space, with different types of trees and so on, and are hugely biodiverse. They provide an increase in biodiversity from the previous land use.

Delivering on the targets with modern, productive planting will deliver a range of benefits. We want to do that in a way that works with communities. We are agnostic on the issue of land ownership, but we recognise that, if we are going to deliver modern forests that are managed, people will start to see them being harvested, with trees coming off the hills and lorries on the roads, and they will need to understand that there is a purpose behind that. Therefore we take responsibility for explaining that. We recently produced a film, which is on our website—if members have 10 minutes spare I would encourage them to watch it. We are also producing an animation, which shows how we have wood all around us—as you can see in the Parliament building—and how that relates back to the growing of wood and the sector that we represent. We are very keen to step up to the plate on that.

We want to see the people who we engage with—those people who are dealing with applications coming forward—talking to us and listening to our ideas about the benefits. We want to see the agencies providing quick decisions. At the moment, if you put in an application, it can take two to three years to get a decision. That is ludicrous and offputting and takes up huge amounts of resource.

I could go on and I am happy to address some of the issues, but I do not want to hog the discussion.

The Convener: It would be useful and positive for you to tweet something about your film.

Graeme Dey: I seek clarity from Mr Goodall. In your submission, under the heading "Five points for future forestry", the third bullet point reads:

> "Replant forests harvested to supply wood. This is in addition to new planting".

Are you saying that we need to plant 100,000 hectares by 2022 plus the replanting? If so, what is the "plus"? If we are not hitting the planting targets now, how are we going to get to the point that you suggest we need to get to?

Stuart Goodall: It is a very important point for us and perhaps not something that is easy to explain in a bullet point. In terms of carbon and future wood supply, when we are harvesting forests, it is like a tank full of water: if you turn on the tap, you drain some away, so you also need to keep filling up. If you want to fill up that tank, you need to put in new planting.

We are losing areas of forest to wind farms, for example. In the past, planting took place in areas such as the flow country, which was seen as inappropriate. We do not contest that. We are working with the Scottish Government to identify the increasing number of areas in Scotland where there have been forests and there should still be forests but they are not being replanted. We are working to understand why that it is, because it is of real concern to us. It is vital that the next Government gets a handle on that so that where we expect there to be forests producing wood, they will be restocked and so that we get new planting as well.

Graeme Dey: Just to be clear, do you have a figure in mind? Are you thinking of, say, 150,000 hectares?

Stuart Goodall: We are happy with the 100,000 hectares target for planting. That is fine. I would not want to quote the figures that are out there for the areas that are not being restocked, because that might be alarmist. We have spoken with the minister on the subject and she has been very good at saying that we need to get to the bottom of the situation and understand it. That is what we

want to do. By the time the new Government is in place, we should have those figures and can have that conversation.

Willie McGhee (Forest Policy Group): I am not going to say anything about the numerical value of the targets. The forest policy group has been working on the different ways in which we can achieve greater forest cover, greater carbon sequestration capacity, more benefits to communities, more biodiversity and, in particular, rural development.

On the planting targets, there is an opportunity that, if it is not being missed, is perhaps not being exploited to the full, which is to involve communities in the drive for greater forest cover. The Scottish Government has signed up to a target of 1 million acres under community ownership. That is something that the next incarnation of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee would do well to look at. In what way can the grants that are available but are not getting the results be restructured to ensure that communities could take advantage of them and plant forests that could potentially be more diverse? I am talking not just about the species but about the aims of forestry. We have tended to have a pendulum in Scotland whereby, in times gone by, we have swung between me and native woodlands on one side and Stuart Goodall and commercial conifer on the other.

In the first panel, Alan Laidlaw made the point about integration. If we strive for more integration in land use and forestry, so that we do not end up with great slabs of monoculture, whether that be sport, sheep, sitka spruce or native woodland, and we think more constructively, the message would get through to more farmers and landowners who, at the moment might look at the grant incentives—I am not saying that they do this—and say that such forestry is not for them, but who might think differently if it was a portion of their holding. I am looking at Jim Hume because we tried to put that sort of thing together in the southern uplands and it worked very well. We got estates, tenant farmers and owner-occupiers coming in. They were not planting 500 or 1,000 hectares at a time, but they were planting bit by bit. The targets might be more attractive if we look at a bit of innovation, greater community involvement and local rural development goals.

Jim Hume: In the distant past, Willie McGhee and I were trustees of the Borders Forest Trust, which did a lot of work to integrate farming and forestry rather than having a situation of farming versus forestry, which we often hear is what exists. Following on from Willie McGhee's point, I think that it would be interesting to hear as many views as possible on opportunities to diversify land rather than compete for land. As he suggested, that could include farmers getting opportunities to plant blocks of forest, which could be productive and have wider environmental benefits.

Alex Fergusson: I will make two points on things that are bees in my bonnet. The first was prompted by what Stuart Goodall said about the loss of forestry to wind farm development. My understanding is that there is supposed to be a policy that ensures that compensatory planting takes place. Over the years, I have asked several questions to try to find out whether that is being adhered to, and my understanding is that it is not. Our successor committee might want to look at helping to meet some of the planting targets that are spoken about.

My second point is on flooding and flood mitigation. Will we move on to that later, convener?

The Convener: I am sure that we will.

Alex Fergusson: I just make the point that the private forestry sector and indeed the public forestry sector have a huge role to play in addressing flood mitigation. I do not think that they have been enormously involved in the discussions, but they need to be. Again, that is for the future.

I finish with a question for Willie McGhee. I understand his vision for how forestry planting should take place in future, but how can we tie that in with the need—I think that it is agreed that there is a need—to maintain the sustainable and vibrant commercial forest industry that we have, which is hugely important to rural employment?

Willie McGhee: I am very glad that Alex Fergusson asked me that question. If we are talking about timber, we know from the past five or 10 years how susceptible the trees in our country are to attack from pests and diseases. Sitka spruce have got away with it, but it is only a matter of time.

There is an appetite among saw millers and processors to look at different species. I applaud the Forestry Commission for its diverse conifers grant, which is an attempt to get people to plant other conifers, albeit often exotic ones, and to move away from the heavy reliance on Sitka spruce. I have nothing against Sitka spruce, but we are putting a lot of our eggs in one basket. In the past 30 to 40 years, we have expended resources on understanding Sitka and its properties, its growing, its milling and its engineering. If we did that with other species, we would be making a start.

Alex Fergusson: I ask Stuart Goodall and Willie McGhee whether they can work within the holistic vision that was mentioned by Alan Laidlaw on the first panel.

Stuart Goodall: Yes—absolutely. To put it simply, integration is the way forward for us. It is not about having forestry or farming. Next week, I will be at a very good event that the National Sheep Association is putting on, which is about how sheep farmers can look at forestry as a way of adding value to the land. It is about how they can put in shelter belts that will deliver forestry on a commercial scale—whether it is commercial soft wood forestry, native woodland or whatever—without undermining sheep production. That can be done.

Over the decades, we have created that separation through a sort of silo thinking, which is reinforced by the way in which the CAP is structured. However, if we have the conversations, we can bring that together. Equally, when we plant new woodlands, a significant percentage is of diverse species, whether conifer or native woodland species. That is part of modern forestry.

11:45

Claudia Beamish: The point that I want to raise has been touched on. The term "agroforestry" has a resonance in the matter. That might take us on to dealing with flooding and climate change later on. We have already talked about incentivisation in relation to climate change. To what extent might agroforestry, which has come up in the committee, have a value in future? I ask the witnesses to respond briefly on that.

We have also touched on plant health, on which the committee has done a great deal. It is an important issue. Are there any further comments on that?

Colin Campbell: This comment follows on nicely from what Claudia Beamish said. One of the options that we have for planting more trees is on farms. Unfortunately, that land is what we sometimes call the squeezed middle—there are many demands on it. We need to understand the reasons why farmers do not want to plant trees on farms. A lot of good work has been done on that already. There are multiple benefits from planting trees. There is a lot of scientific evidence for everything that Stuart Goodall said about the benefits of trees. Flooding is another one that will come up, but we have less scientific evidence on that so far. We know theoretically that there are many potential benefits from planting trees, so there are potentially many good reasons to grow trees on farms.

We have a long-term agroforestry experiment at the James Hutton Institute's Glensaugh research farm. I would welcome the committee coming to visit that.

The Convener: The next committee.

Colin Campbell: The next committee in the next five years.

It is provoking to see that experiment in the field, because it raises issues about how we integrate trees on farms. However, we need to sell the benefits. We need to get it across to farmers that there are undoubted benefits from growing trees and that it helps their businesses to have those benefits on their farms.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh's facing up to climate change inquiry made the point that agriculture and forestry were polarised and that we needed to break down those barriers. We have demonstration farms for all sorts of climate change mitigation options but we do not have a demonstration farm for trees on farms. That is perhaps an option for the future. A demonstration farm is not a research farm; it would be a real farm where a real farmer would be helped to grow trees on the farm.

Dr Kerr: I will leave one legacy issue for the committee. If we look at the emissions inventory, we see that the energy sector is typically the biggest single sector. After this year, the rural sector will be the biggest sector. That means that, for the successor committee, the attention will be on what people are doing. At the moment, we have the forestry sector, which is the biggest sequester—it is a huge benefit to the country's emissions targets—and then everything else. People will start to ask why the rural sector is not being imposed on as other businesses and industries are. The successor committee needs to be aware of that as a rising issue.

I was going to make a point about flooding, but it has been picked up already, so we will come back to that later.

The Convener: Willie McGhee is next.

Willie McGhee: Am I still answering Michael Russell's questions?

The Convener: Yes, at the moment.

Willie McGhee: I will try to wrap two of them to community, if that is okay.

The Convener: You have made points about community.

Willie McGhee: I will tie the matter in with the land use strategy and grants. We have talked a lot about integration. The forest policy group is also really focused on small-scale enterprise in rural or peri-urban areas and the opportunities that forestry can bring for anything climate change related, such as biomass, firewood or harvesting. Such enterprise relies on being able to get access to small areas.

The Scottish Government has been instrumental in pushing through one initiative: the Scottish

Woodlot Association, which is a great boon to allowing people—the public community—to access more land. Money that goes into grants for small woodland owners feeds its way all the way through to things such as social justice and greater control over local resources. That partly links to the point about the management of the state forests but, as we have not touched on that, I can park that.

In the same way as we have planting targets, we would like communities to be given the levers to take control over local enterprise and rural development, and part of that will come through the grant system. We could have a renaissance in Scotland in management of and access to woodlands, whereas other European countries are experiencing decline. For instance, in Sweden, young people have moved wholesale from rural areas and forests are now undermanaged. In Scotland, we do not quite have that problem; we have a problem of getting ownership of or access to land to manage.

We endorse the point about public moneys and public benefit, and we would like communities to have much more access to small woodland areas, whether they are in private ownership or state owned. We worked well with Forest Enterprise when, as part of the national forest land scheme, it put land on the market. Forest Enterprise listened and subdivided land into small lots so that local communities and businesses could access the areas. The committee has played a role in that move forward.

The Convener: Jim Hume has a small question.

Jim Hume: It is more a point that follows on from Colin Campbell's point that the James Hutton Institute does not have any demonstration farms where agriculture is integrated with forestry. Two past directors of the Borders Forest Trust—me and Willie McGhee—probably have 20 years' experience of working with a plethora of such farms. Mr Campbell should contact the Borders Forest Trust, which has been on the go for 20 years. The trust is celebrating that anniversary tonight in the Parliament—I am hosting that in the members' room at 6 o'clock, so everybody can come along to hear about how that has been happening for 20 years.

Willie McGhee: The fact that one of those farms is Mr Hume's is irrelevant. [*Laughter*.]

Jim Hume: I have a non-pecuniary interest.

The Convener: That is useful information.

I would like to move on to biodiversity, but I want Mike Russell to come back in on forestry. However, before he does so, my point, which leads on to biodiversity, is that we need to grow timber for building purposes, and that sort of timber needs a lot more looking after. One of the species for that, larch, is under threat, although Douglas fir might be less so at the moment.

Willie McGhee: Douglas fir is not under threat.

The Convener: We need to ensure that we grow as many as possible of those kinds of species in commercial forestry, so that we have a chance to move away from concrete building and into wood building. In the land reform discussions, we have talked about having more eco-friendly models of buildings for crofters and farmers to live in, in the way that the Crofters Commission did in the past. It had models of houses that it offered to people to buy and build. We need up-to-date versions of those. If people read the *Official Report* of our previous discussions, they will see that point. Are we doing enough on that issue, given that those types of trees are more expensive to look after and raise?

Stuart Goodall: My simple response is that I think that we can do all those things, and we are doing all of them.

On the diversity of conifers, we recently did some work on the area of spruce that has been felled and what has been replaced. We reckon that only about 40 per cent of the spruce that has been felled recently has been replaced. There is a lack of appreciation of how much change is going on out there.

We are hugely keen on producing wood that can be used in construction, because it is very high value and it is great for tackling climate change because it locks up the carbon for a long time. Wood is a low-carbon building material. It therefore delivers enormous benefits and it can deliver high-quality housing.

Willie McGhee alluded to the work on spruce that allows us to use it and grow it for the future. It can be used, especially in volume housing, but there are opportunities to grow species such as Douglas fir and western red cedar. Larch is still around and will be around for a while—it is not going to disappear in the next couple of years. Those are all things that we can build with. We absolutely want to see small-scale local construction using small amounts of wood, but we also want to ensure that we continue to feed the mills and other things that provide the overwhelming number of the 25,000 jobs and the £1 billion contribution to the economy.

We can grow different tree species, but they have to be planted in volume. We cannot plant a couple of hundred here and a couple of hundred there—it has to be done on a strategic basis. In delivering the planting targets we are looking at the forests that we have and, if we want to introduce greater diversity, that has to be done by producing a volume of those trees and not just a

sprinkling of different types, because that will not work.

Michael Russell: I have to say that meeting that target is the biggest objective. I hope that the successor committee will examine closely why the target has not been met and how it can be met, because everything else pales into insignificance. If we cannot meet the target, jobs are at risk and the contribution to mitigating climate change will be greatly diminished.

On Willie McGhee's strictures about involving the community, my personal opinion is that that is where we need to go. Involving the community in more creative and constructive ways of meeting the objective of increasing the amount of land under community ownership while contributing to the targets and using public money to do that seems to me to be a win-win-win situation. That can be done constructively without losing sight of the strong needs of the commercial sector. Indeed, there is no reason why the community cannot be a key player in the commercial sector as well. That adds another dimension.

There are all sorts of things that a successor committee can examine and support, but this is a matter of urgency. Year on year, we say, "Oh gosh, we've not met those targets again." There has to be a determination to meet them in the early part of the next session of Parliament. That will also be part of the land use strategy issue, which we need to get a grip of, because there are so many issues there. Whether or not that is all done by demonstration on Jim Hume's farm, I do not really care, as long as we get it done and we understand how those things can be done.

I think that we are now going to discuss deer management, which I am happy to contribute to, because we need to do something about that, too.

The Convener: We do, indeed, because deer are very much the biggest predator of growing trees. We need to talk about deer management, but also about the way in which the nature directives operate. Biodiversity requires us to think about how we practically apply those things. We are always under pressure to ensure that we do not get into infraction proceedings at European level. I will not give any leads, but I think that the panel needs to give us their views on how we have done on deer management and what more we should do. Who wants to start on that?

Willie McGhee: That issue is point 4 in our written submission. I hope that we have stuck to our bullet point layout.

We have majored on deer control—we have been at it for the last half a dozen years. However, we do not believe that the current system of deer management plans is enforceable or that SNH is equipped to provide policy support or has the resources to use its powers effectively.

We recognise the positive role that the committee has played. From our standpoint, that is the star achievement of the committee because, without that intervention, we would not have gone as far down that route as we have done. There are deer management plans, and the standards are supposed to be improved this year, but we do not believe that there is any prospect of meaningful follow-up. We urge the successor committee to continue to hold the baton of deer and to continue the good fight, because we firmly believe that this committee has been instrumental in moving deer policy along.

The Convener: Thank you for that. I can assure you that it becomes more complex when you look at particular pieces of ground, as I know—to my interest and regret.

12:00

Graeme Dey: Flattery will get you everywhere, Mr McGhee.

I visited Glen Isla forest last Friday, and I was struck when I heard about the challenges that the forestry sector faces in relation to deer management. I was also struck by the wider issue of biodiversity as I saw that they are constructing habitats for wildcats. I am interested to touch briefly on what proactive work is done in forests to look at the wider issue of biodiversity.

I will add a negative point. Last night, I hosted an event in Parliament on the use of neonicotinoids in agriculture. Over the course of the discussion, the use of neonics in forestry was referenced. Can you comment on that?

Willie McGhee: I do not think that I can comment on that.

The Deputy Convener: I have to say that it was new to me, too.

Willie McGhee: Was it wildcats that you mentioned? I will quickly comment on that. I have not heard about the work that has been done, but I think that Jonny Hughes hit the deer problem fairly and squarely on the head in the first panel discussion. The issues of restoring the uplands or regenerating forests—which were mentioned in many people's papers—would all fall into place if we had greater deer control.

I am sorry, but I cannot add anything about neonicotinoids in forestry.

Stuart Goodall: Unfortunately, I cannot add much about that either. The use of pesticides—chemical use—in the forestry sector is controlled under the standards that we operate against. We have standards for forest management that were

developed with environmental organisations, the recreational access sector, the commercial sector and the Government. Those standards are designed to ensure that we provide a variety of benefits in all the forests that we plant, rather than simply achieving a commercial output. Part of that is about how to reduce chemical usage. Chemical usage in the forestry sector is tiny compared to other land uses, and we are bearing down on that.

Earlier, I said that we try to take people from conservation organisations and others out to show them what new forestry looks like and what we are trying to achieve. We did that in southern Scotland with a group that included Jonny Hughes, alongside the John Muir Trust, RSPB Scotland and others. We showed them a forest that had been created that retained the high-quality farmland, and also had an area to help to restore capercaillie. We had geared ourselves up for three hours of intensive interrogation—of having a difficult time with the spotlight on us—but, in fact, everybody came away from that meeting saying that that was just the kind of land use that they wanted to see. There had been bare hill land on one side and, on the other, there was a 1970s commercial forest. We said "No, what we want is in the middle—an integrated land use that delivers all those benefits". I think that we need to do more of that. If we can do that, we will help to deliver those planting targets.

The Convener: We will hear from Sam Gardner, followed by Alex Fergusson.

Sam Gardner: Sorry, I think that I looked in your direction, convener, but I do not have anything to add.

The Convener: Do not be so modest. [*Laughter*.]

Alex Fergusson: To look in your direction at the wrong time is fatal, convener.

I wanted to make one point about the restoration of biodiversity, particularly in upland and moorland Scotland, if I may.

Last week, I hosted a briefing—which Jim Hume kindly attended—from the understanding moorland predation initiative. We have been talking about holistic ways of approaching things, and that initiative has brought together such diverse organisation as the RSPB and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association. Those organisations do not always see eye to eye, but on this occasion they did.

We have talked about the impact of predation and the impact of forestry on biodiversity. Commercial forestry in particular plays host to a number of predators that have an impact on ground-nesting birds and I think that it would be good to put down a marker that a successor committee may well touch base with that initiative from time to time when looking at biodiversity.

Colin Campbell: I will just add to that. A very significant issue has been recognised in relation to upland biodiversity. In the next five-year research programme—funded by the Scottish Government through the rural and environmental science and analytical services division—some significant new experiments are being done to look at the issue of upland biodiversity.

There could be more than one factor. Factors such as climate change and land management may be relevant, rather than it being all about predators. It is difficult to tease that out, and new experiments are proposed in the next five-year programme to investigate that.

The Convener: Thinking about those things, we are right to say that the committee has been on the ball in terms of deer management. It is a big job for the next committee, but we are on the right track. We have got to get the deer numbers down to a level at which they are in balance with the ecosystem. That is a huge job and will probably have to be a compulsory one. The points have been well made.

We need to move on to sustainable development. Sarah Boyack wants to kick off. It is the last major part of what we do, and may include urban matters such as air pollution too.

Sarah Boyack: I was thinking of flood management and air pollution.

The Convener: Okay, let us do those first.

Sarah Boyack: I suggest flood management because it is a natural follow on from forestry and I was just looking at the comment on reforesting the uplands from the forest policy group. We have the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency maps and the action strategies will be coming out this summer. That would be a good issue for the next committee to look at. There are 108,000 households at risk of flooding and the money in place to help 10,000. We will need a much more upstream approach and a mix of forestry, flooding, land management and agriculture measures. It will be a big change.

Do people have comments on the different contributions that could be made to that?

The Convener: That is a good point.

Dr Kerr: We all appreciate that adaptation in its widest form has been the Cinderella in the space. There have been some good initiatives. The national centre for resilience has come into being. It ought to be a coordination point between the end-users, emergency responders, communities and businesses, with the aim of joining up much more effectively so that we learn better from what

works in one part of the country and can apply it to other parts. We now have a tool that will allow us to do that.

We have to be very careful about saying "if only we would plant more trees, there would be no more flooding downstream". If there is enough rain, it will flood. The issue is how we best use land management, which comes back to the wider land management understanding across the country.

There are two or three independent elements. There is a climate change risk assessment, which is a statutory duty; a Scottish risk assessment is coming, which is focusing on natural hazards as well as other things. We have lots of different elements, which are not particularly well joined up.

The next committee needs to look at how we draw those together: the land planning framework, the Scottish risk assessment and the climate change risk assessment as well as the SEPA maps.

What we finally have now, because we have been working closely with a number of different partners, is some hard data about how many houses are at risk and what the issues are. We have a whole set of indicators, which allows us to see change as it starts to happen. We are starting to be able to quantify that, rather than being in that very generic qualitative position of thinking that there is a problem that we should do something about.

We are starting to see all the bits coming together, but the successor committee could start to pin down who is delivering what to ensure that we have more resilience within both the downstream urban communities and the upstream frameworks.

Willie McGhee: I agree with Andy Kerr's point that trees will not solve the problem. Colin Campbell probably has some opinions—he is nodding.

We talked about evidence and opinion in the first panel. I could get you two hydrologists in the room: one would give you overwhelming evidence that grassland was the best cover and the other would give you evidence that trees were.

My experience has been in the southern uplands—and there is a lady sitting behind here who was involved at an early stage—where we looked at the upper Ettrick and flood plain mitigation. We know that, if enough rain falls, it will flood, but there are ways of making that gentler and softer—if floods can ever be thought of in such terms. Given the landscape and the mosaic of land use that we have—this comes back to the land use strategy, which is where its home, in part, should be—if the water is not all being funnelled down the Ettrick, the Yarrow, the Tweed or whatever, we will get buffering.

I hesitate to bring up beavers in this conversation, but they are part of biodiversity. I just throw that in.

The Convener: We are not throwing beavers into anything.

Willie McGhee: On catchment management in the southern uplands at Talla and Gameshope and in the Moffat valley, large-scale native afforestation will help to buffer the water as it comes down.

Dr Kerr: I agree. One of the challenges that we have seen in different parts of Scotland, and particularly around the central belt, has been that different councils cover different parts and we do not treat the catchment as a coherent environmental unit. That has been a big problem.

The Convener: Alex Fergusson was going to make that point.

Alex Fergusson: If I may, I will expand on it briefly, convener. When it comes to flood mitigation, it is hugely important that we start to look at whole-catchment management. Recent events in my constituency have absolutely brought that home, to be frank.

Willie McGhee said that trees will not solve the flooding problem. Indeed they will not, but I argue that the management of trees and their extraction can have a significant impact on how quickly water flows off the hills. I believe that it has done so in one particular area in my constituency.

We need to bring all the stakeholders together to work on catchment management. We will not stop floods, of course, but we can mitigate some of their worst impacts if we have a genuinely holistic look at how this can be managed better—I hate the word "holistic" too, but we keep coming back to it. I believe that results can be achieved, and it will not necessarily be that expensive, either.

Stuart Goodall: There is a lot of consensus in the conversation. I will reiterate much of what has been said. We have done a lot of work with Forest Research and others about the role that forestry can play in slowing the flow so that flood defences are not overwhelmed, but that is not a replacement for flood defences; we need hard engineering.

We also have to design where the forests are, because we do not want to have a number of forests that all hold back the water at the same time and then release it at the same time. There is an awful lot that needs to be looked at. However, that does not mean that we should kick the issue into the long grass, so to speak, for 50 years. We

can look at this, and there are models out there. As I said, we have done a lot of work with Forest Research. We have looked at the issues in northern England, which is equally afflicted by flooding events, and there are a lot of positives that can be taken forward.

We are happy to be contributing to that for the future, but we have to take an integrated, whole-catchment approach.

The Convener: I will broaden the discussion to include sustainable development, which can be urban or rural. We heard quite a lot of specifics from the previous panel, but do our current witnesses have views on fuel poverty, appropriate and sustainable work and the services that we require, as well as services for the environment? All those things go together to make sustainable development. What should the next committee focus on in that basket of issues to help to take Scotland forward?

No witness has indicated that they want to comment, but Mike Russell wants to come in. Perhaps he can prompt people or prod them.

Michael Russell: I do not want to disagree with you, convener, but the question is almost impossible to answer at this stage. We had a discussion earlier about what committees do and how they operate. To some extent, a committee is also a creature of Government and time, and the political issues of the election, the issues that bodies round the table present and the issues that the new Government brings forward will dictate to a great extent what our successor committee chooses to do.

If the committees are constituted in the same way, there will be core issues that our successor committee cannot ignore, the most important of which is to go back to where we started, which is driving forward the issues about and action on climate change in the Parliament. That is the committee's most important responsibility. Strangely, it is probable that the bulk of the committee's time has not been spent on that action, for a variety of reasons. A range of issues underneath that also need to be actioned.

12:15

The Convener: Latterly, that could be said to be true. In the first half of the parliamentary session, the position was probably the other way round, because we had to deal with RPPs and so on.

Michael Russell: That is true.

Colin Campbell: Governments have signed up to the sustainable development goals, but we are not clear how they map on to the livelihoods and businesses of rural Scotland. There are two differences in the sustainable development goals from what we had before: first, there is greater involvement of the private sector in the development of goals, which will have a particular flavour for rural Scotland, and secondly, there is a greater emphasis on small stakeholders, which for rural businesses mean small business or small farm units. A great deal more thinking is going on behind that, which we could look at in relation to how rural Scotland maps on to those international sustainable development goals. That is a big opportunity to co-ordinate, because such things do not happen just in Scotland or in isolation; they are scaled up across Europe and the world. It is an important thought exercise to consider how those goals map on to rural Scotland.

Michael Russell: I agree with Colin Campbell that those issues are crucial, but in terms of sustainability, survival is an issue in many parts of rural Scotland—for example, in the areas that I represent. We all understand—or think that we understand—what sustainability means. Depopulation, an ageing population, a lack of economic opportunities, increasing cost and problems with local government become issues of survival in rural Scotland. The committee will need to be in a position to address such issues.

That is not to say that the high-level discussions are not vital. However, at grass-roots and islands level, there are crucial issues that have to be decided about how we sustain rural communities so that they survive.

Sam Gardner: I will build on what Mr Russell said about focusing on the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The convener was right to note that, at the beginning of the parliamentary session, there was an awful lot of focus on the development of RPP2.

To bring us back to the implementation or achievement of sustainable development, the challenge is in the committee having the capacity—given all the other demands on its time—to take a view on the implementation of RPP2 and proactively engage with its strengths and weaknesses, including the areas where it is struggling. I have identified specific sectors where there is a significant opportunity to further sustainable development goals, such as in urban air quality and transport, where our emissions levels are languishing at about what they were in 1990. There is a clear climate change agenda, but there is also a public health agenda and social impacts—for example, this relates to the housing sector, where the fuel poverty rate of more than 40 per cent is way too high.

The committee has a challenge in data provision and access to live data. RPP2 has been too much of a static document, which has not allowed for adaptation, reflection and change. I hope that the subsequent committee will engage with the new

governance structure that the Government has put in place—the cabinet sub-committee—and put the onus on the Government to provide live data as to the effectiveness of different policies. The greatest contribution that a committee with a focus on climate change can make is to ensure that everything is being done to deliver on the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009—that is the biggest single contribution that it can make to ensuring that we fulfil our sustainable development goals.

Claudia Beamish: I have a brief point that follows on from Mike Russell's comments. I might be missing the point, but surely the legacy for the next committee, if it is a rural affairs committee, should be to examine how the sustainable development goals underpin and overarch all the issues that we deal with. That goes back to Colin Campbell's point. Seeing how those goals can help our fragile communities and biodiversity—how that all fits together and fuses together into a positive future for rural Scotland—might be helpful.

The Convener: Willie McGhee can talk about the United Nations sustainable development goals in relation to forestry and woodlands.

Willie McGhee: I agree with Mike Russell. The concept of sustainable development is enormous, intimidating and difficult to get to grips with. I caution against dealing with it as a single issue in a committee.

Sustainable development is cross-cutting, because it has economic, social and environmental elements. Whatever committee comes next should be careful about the view that it takes on the meaning of sustainable development and which bits of it to tackle.

As the first panel said, the next committee could play a role in baselining or benchmarking where we are with issues such as fuel poverty, which Sam Gardner mentioned. The committee might play the prodding role that the convener alluded to in relation to other committees that have social and economic issues in their remits.

Stuart Goodall: I will pick up specifically the point that Mike Russell made about how we do sustainable development, what it looks like and its scale. We have found the subject very interesting and we have been looking at it over the past year.

I had an excellent visit to the community woodland in north-west Mull, where a group has taken over a 1960s commercial forest. That is ready to be harvested and the group is maintaining the commercial component, so it will continue to produce income. As it has that resource, the group can deliver new housing, increased numbers of jobs and wood fuel to tackle fuel poverty. The community is benefiting hugely from the asset.

We are keen to consider how we could recreate that kind of development and create others, as Willie McGhee mentioned. There are opportunities to look at such schemes as practical examples of local community-based sustainable development.

Iain Gulland: The idea of the circular economy, which we talked about earlier, is exciting, and there are huge opportunities across Scotland and not just in the central belt. We have done work to identify those opportunities, particularly in key sectors such as agriculture, beer, fish farming and whisky, which operate across Scotland.

The future committee should bear that in mind as we move towards the idea of a circular economy in Scotland. How do we make sure that we get the jobs and economic opportunities—they are there—into the rural parts of Scotland? This is not about sucking all the materials in Scotland into the central belt for it to reap the benefit; it is about an opportunity for jobs. Work is taking place at the Scottish and the UK levels to seize the opportunities of upwards of 17,000 or 18,000 jobs. Those jobs will be in communities the length and breadth of Scotland—they mean people fixing shoes all over Scotland, not sending them away to some factory or for processing in the central belt.

That is what this is about; that is the opportunity. I am listening to the same challenges in agriculture and forestry about how we engage communities and get them to understand that there are benefits in doing things differently. The same issues apply to the circular economy, and that should not be forgotten about.

The Convener: That is a good point on which to wind up.

Like Mike Russell, I represent areas with some of the most endangered species: the most endangered species of all are human beings, in very fragile communities, who feel responsible for their environment, who feel that they have a capacity to do much better and who want to make sure that there is a place for their young people to grow. They will provide services for bigger communities in due course. The sustainable development goal at world level and the sustainable development goal that we see in the committee are reflected in the most local areas, such as the north coast of Sutherland, which I visited again last Friday.

I thank the witnesses very much for all those aides-memoire, which the next committee will have an exciting chance to take forward. It has been a pleasure to receive your evidence in my role as convener of the committee, which I will no longer have after 23 March.

We have to move on to other business, so we will suspend now, but we cannot have long

conversations in the room. The next item is in public and is on secondary legislation.

12:25

Meeting suspended.

12:29

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

The Convener: We will finish off today's business. Agenda item 2 is subordinate legislation: we have five Scottish statutory instruments before us. Dave Thompson is not back yet, and he may wish to comment on at least one of the instruments, so I do not want to make a mistake here.

Seed (Licensing and Enforcement etc) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 (SSI 2016/68)

Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 (SSI 2016/69)

The Convener: I refer members to the paper that is before us. Members have no comments on the Seed (Licensing and Enforcement etc) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 or the Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Regulations 2016.

Plant Health (Scotland) Amendment Order 2016 (SSI 2016/83)

The Convener: Does any member wish to comment on the order?

Sarah Boyack: I have a matter of process—rather than content—to raise regarding the order. I attempted to read the cover note. Referring to pages 23 and 24, I ask the authors of such papers to consider how they present them. It is one of the most difficult things that I have had to read. The explanation is one paragraph that runs for more than a page. It is almost impossible to read.

The Convener: That is now a matter of record, and we will tell the authors.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you, convener.

The Convener: There are no further comments on the order.

Wester Ross Marine Conservation Order 2016 (SSI 2016/88)

The Convener: Does any member wish to comment on the order?

Dave Thompson: I wish to note that there might be an error in the policy note regarding the business and regulatory impact assessment. Page 44 of the committee papers refers to the types of trawling and so on that can be carried out within the Wester Ross marine conservation area. The paper mentions

"vessels of <150 gross tonnage."

Article 4 of the order, which is headed "Prohibited and regulated activities", refers to the

"engine power not exceeding 500 kilowatts".

That is a better way to deal with such matters. I merely point out that there appears to be a contradiction in that the limit of 150 tonnes is still mentioned in the note, while the order itself deals with engine size. That could be a crucial difference.

The Convener: It could indeed. We will point that out to the Government. I think that it is correct to say, however, that the order itself is in order.

Claudia Beamish: In relation to the Wester Ross MPA, along with the points that have been made about other MPAs, I highlight the importance of continuing scientific and socioeconomic research in ensuring that the measures are right for the protection of habitats and their recovery, and for our fragile communities.

The Convener: That must be based, of course, on evidence. As we know, it is essential to have the information and the research.

I very much welcome the order, which I believe will work very well through integration between the different sectors. We will have to ensure that the situation is reviewed so that there are no unintended consequences.

Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura Marine Conservation Order 2016 (SSI 2016/90)

The Convener: Does any member wish to comment on the order?

Michael Russell: I wish to put two points on record in relation to the order. First, this is the final order affecting the MPA in my constituency, at this stage. Although I think that everybody welcomes the measures, the process that was adopted by Marine Scotland in putting them together in my constituency was not acceptable. People found the process unacceptable because they believed that things were happening or being done that did not happen. That must be avoided.

Secondly, I hope that in the future the process of making changes to designations or creating new designations is a collaborative and participatory one for all those who will be affected—in particular, those who make their living in the area—rather than an imposition on them. If that can be achieved—and that is the right way—what we in my constituency have gone through might prove to be a useful learning experience, painful though it was. If that cannot be achieved, the type of thing that we have been through will be repeated again and again.

The Convener: I thank members for their comments.

Does the committee agree that it does not wish to make any recommendations on the five instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: At the committee's next meeting, we will consider several items of subordinate legislation, petitions on wild goose numbers and conserving wild salmon, and drafts of our annual report and legacy report.

I thank everybody for their participation.

Meeting closed at 12:35.

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