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Official Report

RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 8 December 2010

Session 3

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RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
28th Meeting 2010, Session 3

CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Scott (Ayr) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD)
*Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)
*Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
*Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab)
Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Mark Aitken (Scottish Environment Protection Agency)
Bill Band (Scottish Natural Heritage)
Jamie Farquhar (Confederation of Forest Industries)
Jonathan Hall (NFU Scotland)
Jackie McCreery (Scottish Rural Property and Business Association)
Professor David Miller (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute)
Charles Strang (Royal Town Planning Institute)
Vicki Swales (Scottish Environment LINK)
John Watt (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs and Environment Committee

Wednesday 8 December 2010

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Maureen Watt): Good morning. Welcome to the committee's 28th meeting of 2010. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys, as they impact on the broadcasting system. Once again, Sandra White will substitute for Aileen Campbell. Unfortunately, Liam McArthur is unable to get down from Orkney because of the weather conditions; he sends his apologies. We have also received apologies from Karen Gillon.

Does the committee agree to take in private item 3, which is consideration of the evidence that we will hear today on the Government's draft land use strategy?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Government's Draft Land Use Strategy

10:02

The Convener: Our main business today is to take evidence on "Getting the best from our land—A draft land use strategy for Scotland", on which the Government is currently consulting. Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, a concluded strategy must be published by March. This morning we will hear from two panels of stakeholders.

I welcome to the committee our first panel, which consists of Vicki Swales, convener of Scottish Environment LINK's sustainable land use task force; Jonathan Hall, head of rural policy for the NFU Scotland; and Jackie McCreery, director of policy and parliamentary affairs for the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association. Jamie Farquhar, who is the national manager, Scotland, for the Confederation of Forest Industries, will join us but is running a bit late. We are grateful to all of you for agreeing to be here at relatively short notice, especially given the weather conditions. I thank those who have been able to provide us with written evidence within the time provided.

To maximise the time available, we will not ask for opening statements but will move directly to questions. Do you agree with the objectives that are proposed in the draft land use strategy? Should they be separated into three areas, as the strategy proposes?

Vicki Swales (Scottish Environment LINK): In broad terms, the three objectives—economic, environmental and social—are focused on sustainable development and are fine as they stand. However, they are very broadly written. Scottish Environment LINK's real concern about the objectives and what will flow from them is that they are not specific, action orientated and time bound. The 2009 act sets some clear requirements for what the land use strategy must deliver and states that there must be clear objectives, policies and proposals that flow from them and a timescale for how those policies and proposals will achieve something on the ground. Broadly, there is nothing wrong with having three objectives that relate to economic, social and environmental issues, but they need to be much more detailed and to make clear commitments to Government action in all the areas.

It would also have been helpful to have some specific objectives linking back to the requirements of the 2009 act and the climate change targets. The drafters of the strategy have tried to incorporate climate change mitigation and adaptation issues into the three objectives, but

they get lost in the text. It might have been helpful for the drafters to have set out some clear objectives that link back to the objectives that the 2009 act sets in relation to mitigation and adaptation and to identify what contribution land use will make to meeting the climate change targets.

Jackie McCreery (Scottish Rural Property and Business Association): I agree with Vicki Swales. Without some sort of prioritisation of the three objectives, the strategy is trying to be all things to all men. It is questionable how much use that will be in directing policy decision making, because it can be argued that each objective is more important than the others. In our view, economic stability and sustainability must be the primary consideration. The social and environmental objectives will be able to flow from that. Our concern is with rural areas, although the strategy relates to both rural and urban areas.

Jonathan Hall (NFU Scotland): I agree entirely with Jackie McCreery's perspective and almost entirely with Vicki Swales's take on the issue. It would be very difficult for anyone to disagree with the land use strategy's laudable aims and objectives; it is difficult to knock those ambitions. Our concern extends a bit beyond the strategy and touches on some of the implementation, timing and delivery issues that Vicki Swales raised. That begs the question, when does a strategy become an implementation plan and become about policy actions and measures that will make a difference on the ground? That is the wee bit that is still missing from the process.

Towards the end of her response, Vicki Swales suggested that the objectives in the strategy should be absolutely and directly relevant to tackling climate change. My view diverges slightly from hers. We see tackling climate change as an important priority, but not as a unique one. Although the land use strategy is born of the 2009 act, we see sustainable economic growth—which was the mantra of the Scottish Government for two or three years on the trot but has been superseded as the overriding objective by tackling climate change—as being just as important to it. We see tackling climate change as part of a sustainable economic growth agenda and the land use strategy as one of the tools in that process, rather than as being exclusively about delivering against climate change targets.

Vicki Swales: I would like to respond to a couple of points that Jonny Hall and Jackie McCreery have made. In Scottish Environment LINK's view, economic objectives should not have primacy over social or environmental objectives. For us, the land use strategy is about promoting sustainable development; the 2009 act is clear about that. There are three legs to the stool, as it were. Although the stated purpose of the Scottish Government is to promote sustainable economic growth, it is incredibly important that we should not lose sight of the fact that environmental protection and enhancement and viable rural communities are critical and that—as well as their being important for their intrinsic value—economic growth can flow from them. It is not about setting one objective against the others. All are equally important, and the land use strategy must help us to deliver on all fronts.

Jackie McCreery: We agree that the environmental and social objectives are critical, but we take the view that they will best be achieved if we have profitable land-based businesses, in line with the old adage that you cannot go green if you are in the red. We are not pitching one objective against the others—all are critical—but we will best achieve all of them if we have profitable businesses at the heart of the strategy.

Jonathan Hall: I agree. It is not about exclusivity or saying that one priority is more important than others, but there is a need to prioritise in some way if we are to maximise the use of our land resource.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): You touched on sustainable economic growth. There is another big strategy document around on the planning system and the national planning framework. A comment that I have heard about the land use strategy document is that people are surprised that there is not a stronger connection between it and the national planning framework, physical planning and spatial planning per se. Can you comment on that?

Jackie McCreery: We feel the draft strategy is lacking in detail in that regard. It indicates that it may be taken into account in planning and in development planning, but it does not indicate how that will happen or whether it is already aligned with NPF2, for example. A bit more work needs to be done on that matter. We understand that the Government has had a relatively tight timescale within which to produce a draft strategy in accordance with the timescales laid out in the 2009 act and that the strategy will evolve over the years, but we certainly think that this first version of it needs to be tighter on that.

I have heard it said that the land use strategy will affect parts of the land that planning does not affect; in other words, with both strategies all land in Scotland will be covered. However, the link between the two and how they interact with each other is not clear. For example, will the land use strategy be a material consideration in a planning decision? If something in the land use strategy is contrary to what a local authority or a development authority is saying, how will the two strategies link

together? That needs to be made clear in the final version that we will see in March.

Jonathan Hall: To take it down another level, the planning system is clearly vital in driving land use decision making and so on in practice, but so are a whole raft of other policy instruments. If we look at the "Successful land-based businesses" objective in the draft strategy, there are questions as to whether the policy measures and instruments that guide land-use decision making are working together.

There is clear evidence, which we have worked on with the likes of Scottish Enterprise, that the planning system, for example, can act as a constraint on or even a barrier to successful land-based businesses. Unless we get the alignment of policy measures right so that they all work together, not only in terms of rural land use in farming, forestry, rural development and so forth but in the planning system, we will be pushing water uphill, as it were.

Vicki Swales: I think that Scottish Environment LINK would support those comments. We have made the point that we see the land use strategy sitting alongside the national planning framework and planning policy. The two approaches need to speak to each other, and the land use strategy has to state clearly its scope and status in relation to other strategies and programmes.

I agree with Jonny Hall that we are looking for the land use strategy to guide and direct all the other strategies, polices and programmes that sit underneath it and which relate to sectors; it is an opportunity to line up all the ducks in a row and get them all facing in the same direction. That is not clearly articulated in the strategy as it stands, and is a missed opportunity.

Peter Peacock: You will all be aware that in the past—the practice is probably still current—indicative forestry strategies have been used by planning authorities to provide a spatial concept of where forestry is appropriate. Those strategies date back 15 or 20 years. Is the relationship that exists between indicative forestry strategies and the planning system more like the relationship that you would like to see between the land use strategy and the planning system? Is there a close parallel?

Vicki Swales: We think that there are helpful lessons to learn from things such as indicative forestry strategies. To us, that is where you start to move from having a national, broad, overarching strategy to translating it into what it means on the ground at a regional and spatial level. We suggested that it would be helpful if the land use strategy included, at least in the first stage, some spatial perspectives, perhaps based around regions, and made a commitment to move towards regional land use strategies, which would flow from that.

That approach might incorporate indicative forestry strategies, for example, and it might look at agriculture, other land uses and what the national planning framework says. There are good parallels with the national planning framework, which has a section on spatial perspectives and is helpful in setting out the opportunities, strengths, weakness and threats within a region and broad objectives, and in asking what we can deliver against those objectives. What do we need to do in Highland, the Western Isles, Dumfries and Galloway or the Borders? The national planning framework breaks the issues down into something meaningful to which people can relate.

10:15

Jonathan Hall: I do not disagree with anything that Vicki Swales said, but I have a reservation about extending the concept of indicative forestry strategies and landscape-scale planning into other sectors. I think it would be a bit of a nightmare if there were indicative farming strategies for regions that began to plan out farmland use. At the end of the day, farmland use should be driven more by the marketplace, what the land is capable of producing and getting an adequate economic return. In the current climate, obviously, it is also driven by agricultural policy.

We are already fighting with the physical constraints of Scotland's land and what it can produce, with policy constraints on what we can and cannot do in certain places, and with the demands of the marketplace. If we extend planning too far into agriculture in any way, we would remove ourselves from the marketplace even further. That would be detrimental to Scottish agriculture.

Jackie McCreery: I agree. I do not think that it is appropriate for a land use strategy to be a spatial plan. That would not be appropriate when we have the national planning framework. However, I take Vicki Swales's point that the strategy could set out in a bit more detail how we might implement its objectives at a local level. A bit more could be done there.

I come back to the point that, in our view, the document will evolve. This is just a first version, and it could evolve towards spatial planning, but we think that it is right that it is not a spatial plan.

Vicki Swales: I will come back on a point that Jonny Hall made. He is right that there are issues around the market determining what happens on the land and around productive land uses such as producing food or timber. However, many of the goods and services that we are interested in getting from the land are non-market goods and

services. It is about carbon storage, delivering biodiversity and considering water quality and protection. Land has an important role in delivering those things. The idea of looking regionally and spatially at what land can contribute in those broader terms is really important, and the land use strategy could help with that. We sometimes get a bit too hung up on the economic products and the market-driven aspects of what land provides, and the land use strategy is an opportunity for us to take the ecosystem services approach, if I can call it that, and think much more broadly.

Jonathan Hall: The challenge is in developing and constructing income streams from those ecosystem services. Individual land managers who make the decisions on the ground might act on the delivery of those things, particularly in terms of carbon and carbon markets. At the end of the day, those land managers need to stay afloat, so they are driven by policy and market signals, and we have to get the alignment of those signals right. If the policy signals say that we want more to be delivered by way of ecosystem services, land managers will respond and react. However, fundamentally, we want to see as much as possible—and more than we do now—coming from the marketplace.

Peter Peacock: There are physical planning strategies and frameworks, but there is also a list of other strategies for agriculture, for which we also have policies: forestry, food, deer management, biodiversity, freshwater fisheries, river basin management plans, flood risk plans—I could go on, I am quite sure. How will the land use strategy fit with those? Will it help to pull them all together, or are its application and potential use quite discrete?

Jonathan Hall: I would like the land use strategy to pull those strategies together. For far too long, not just in Scotland but in all policy environments, we have tended to pigeonhole sectors such as farming, forestry, water management, climate change and renewable energy generation. We have a national food policy, which I think you missed off your list. We have tended to operate in exclusive silos and not make those cross-connections, yet when we consider Scotland's land use in practice, many of the day-to-day activities on any parcel of land combine those sectors. Farmland does not exclude public access and recreation. It does not exclude catchment management or some element of woodland. The list is endless. There are multiple outcomes—or outputs—from any parcel of land. We need to ensure that all those separate strategies are a bit more coherent and work together more.

The land use strategy has a clear role in shaping and bringing forward that approach. However, as I have said, a land use strategy that sits on the shelf will never achieve that. What is important is what flows from the land use strategy—the implementation and the right sort of co-ordination between policy instruments and mechanisms to change decision-making behaviour on the ground.

Vicki Swales: I totally agree with that. It is critical that that is the role of the land use strategy. The strategy needs to set out a timetable for the review and, if necessary, revision of the other plans, programmes and strategies that are relevant to land use, to which Peter Peacock referred. Some of them have been around for a number of years—some might be considered slightly out of date—but some are more recent. The question is, are they all aligned, and are they all moving us towards meeting the objectives that are set out in the land use strategy? I am not sure that that is the case at the moment, so unless we have a clear commitment to action and to moving forward in that way, the land use strategy will fail and will not change anything. In five years' time, we will say, "Well, what did it deliver? We're not sure. It didn't deliver anything. It was full of fine words but no concrete action."

Jackie McCreery: That is right. The other point is that the silo mentality that we are talking about tends to happen in central and local government. On the ground, land managers have been practising integrated land use for years. Many of them have integrated land use plans, multipurpose functions for their land and so on. The strategy talks about picking up on and sharing best practice. An important element of the delivery of the strategy is about not only getting the integration right in policy terms but rolling that out throughout the sector.

A single vision and an agreed set of objectives is useful in trying to pull everything together but you have to bear in mind that there is strength in diversity. We have to remember that a single vision for land use must encompass a diverse range of land tenure, land use and land management. I agree with Vicki Swales that we need some sort of an action plan and a timetable. All the various individual strategies are reviewed in different cycles. The Scotland rural development programme, for example, is in a different cycle from that of the development plans. Ultimately, it would be useful if we could pull all of that together so that we were all moving in the same cycles.

Peter Peacock: If I have picked you up correctly, you are saying that the current draft of the strategy does not tie all of that together sufficiently. As it stands, it is deficient. That is perhaps putting it too strongly, but am I right in saying that there is a good bit to go?

Vicki Swales: Definitely. The land use strategy highlights many issues that we want to see in there; the problem is to do with concrete actions and timescales, and what will flow from the strategy. Even the actions that are in the strategy are rather broadly written. They say "we will explore" or "we will consider" something within a five-year timeframe. Who is going to do that, though? When will that happen? How will it be taken forward?

Jonathan Hall: If you look at the actions that are listed underneath the heading "Successful land-based businesses in a low-carbon economy", you will see that they include things such as the review and implementation of the SRDP, and explicit reference is made to common agricultural policy reform. However, we will be doing those things anyway, regardless of the land use strategy. What we need to see in the strategy is how we can make more of the opportunities in doing the things that we already plan to do.

All those things will continue in some shape or form. There will be a renewal of the Scottish forestry strategy in some respects, and there will be catchment management plans and river basin management plans as part of the water framework directive. Targets have already been set in the 2009 act.

Those things need to be pulled together through the land use strategy. The strategy contains specific references to things that will happen anyway, but it needs to state explicitly how it will pull those things together, rather than simply listing them as actions. At present, it just reads as a list of separate things to consider.

Jackie McCreery: The other thing that is missing is how the strategy filters down to all levels of government and public agencies. It contains some good statements about how regulation

"should place as light a burden ... as is consistent with achieving its"

objective, and about the need for a stable policy framework. Those statements are great and it is useful to have them, but we need some indication in the strategy of how they will filter down to all levels of government and the public sector.

Peter Peacock: The clear implication is that the level of detail in the document is not sufficient. However, Jonny Hall and Jackie McCreery have argued that they do not want it to be too detailed, in terms of containing a spatial set of plans and maps to say that wind farms are fine in one place and forestry in another, and that another area is for flood plain management. They do not want that level of detail; they want more co-ordinating detail rather than any spatial concepts. Am I right about that?

Jonathan Hall: I think so. A land use strategy should not be the decision maker, but it should enable decision making in some sense. That should involve pulling together the Scottish Government's existing strategies and objectives for sustainable economic growth, and linking them with the individual objectives of managers of land in all shapes, sizes and forms: planning departments, farmers, estates, environmental interests and so on.

There is no blueprint for land use anywhere, and no rule book that says, "These are the objectives that you should aspire to". Everyone has different objectives for land management and what they should be doing with land.

The strategy needs to enable the best use of the land, as the title of the document suggests, rather than being a decision maker in itself that states, "We are going to do this".

Jackie McCreery: I do not underestimate the difficulty of the task that the Government has set itself in producing an integrated land use strategy. The objectives and statements need to be clear enough for people to hang their hats on in making a decision, and not so vague that they are meaningless and allow people to make almost any decision and justify it through the strategy. The Government is trying to achieve a hugely difficult task.

Peter Peacock: It is also trying to resolve conflict between land users; that is where the strategy essentially comes from. It addresses things such as flooding, food production, forestry, wind farms, leisure use and wild land, which clearly all come into conflict at times.

Do you view the strategy as anything more than the guidance on which the decision makers—planning authorities, largely—will base their decisions?

Vicki Swales: It has to move towards being more directive. In an ideal world, if Scotland was five times bigger, we might be able to deliver everything that we wanted. If we set all the targets and objectives, we would need much more land to deliver everything, but we are not in that situation.

We have finite resources, and there are potential conflicts between certain land uses. We know that it is bad to do certain things—we have learned the lessons of the past about inappropriate planting of forestry on deep peat, for example, and we know that there are places where it is not a good idea to put wind farms, for biodiversity and other reasons.

The strategy must start to move us towards a framework in which we can make such decisions and start to identify where some of the complementarities are but also where there are

conflicts. We must be able to say what things simply must not happen; what we need to look at a bit more in the round; and where we can be a bit more creative and, if we are smart, deliver multiple benefits from the same area of land. For example, through peatland restoration we can store carbon, protect the landscape, contribute to tourism and protect biodiversity. Through smart uses of land we can have sustainable agriculture that delivers food alongside biodiversity and helps us to deliver clean water and so on. That is what we are looking for—that multiple benefit land use. LINK put together such ideas in a series of case studies. We want to use the land use strategy to take us further in that direction and, in some cases, to enable us to be a bit more directive and prescriptive about what can and cannot happen in places.

10:30

Jonathan Hall: I agree entirely with that, although there is a real challenge. Vicki Swales talked about decision making. Scotland has a finite—in fact, shrinking—amount of utilisable land, and most of it is not of very good productive potential. Fifty per cent or more of it is of agricultural class 6 or worse, which is very rough grazing. So we are expecting an awful lot from less and less land in hoping to deliver all the outcomes that we want from it.

It is about decision making, and the first rule of economics is that, as soon as a decision is made, an opportunity cost is incurred. What we really need to look at is what we do not do with the land and ask, "Is that what we want?" In developing land in a certain way—by building houses on it, by preserving it exclusively for prime agricultural use, by using it as a flood plain or whatever—it is what uses are forgone that will be of critical importance rather than what is going to be achieved from the chosen use of the land.

If it is about decision making, it is about leadership and being strong enough and bold enough at certain levels. From the Scottish Government down, we need a policy framework that allows decision making that leads us in the direction not of maximising all the benefits from any parcel of land, but of optimising the land use. That will take strong leadership from the Scottish Government right down to individual land managers, who must be brave enough to say, "This is what I want to achieve from this land, and it fits in with all the objectives and purposes that have been set out in the various strategies." At the moment, the land use strategy lacks that cutting-edge feel. As we all say, it sounds great and it is difficult to disagree with it—it is all very laudable—but it is not really cutting edge. It simply says that the Government will create a framework that makes decision making the priority when it comes to land management.

The Convener: Do you want to ask your question now, John?

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I think that the subject has been largely covered, but this is the right time to ask it. Multifunctional land use has been talked about for 20 years, and we have been practising it for 20 years. I appreciate that we have an obligation under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to deliver the land use strategy, but how different will it be from the current practical realities?

Jackie McCreery: I covered that earlier, possibly. There is a sense that policy making is catching up with the practice. You are correct to say that integrated land use has been happening on many farms and estates around the country, but we are looking for integration in policy development. The strategy has a purpose in creating an ethos among land managers. A single vision that everyone is signed up to is a useful thing in creating an ethos of social and environmental responsibility that goes along with property rights. If we can achieve greater integration in policy making, the strategy will be of benefit.

John Scott: The question is whether it is right that that is coming from the Government. Should it come from independent land managers? As a farmer, I know what I want to do with each little section of land on my farm, within the policy frameworks and objectives that are already established. Therefore, given all the targets that we have—such as for 25 per cent forestry cover by 2050 and for 50 per cent of electricity and 11 per cent of heat to come from renewables by 2020—and all the rules and regulations, how much value is there in the strategy? Somewhere in the evidence, although I cannot find it, somebody describes it as an "aspirational" wish list. That is fine by me and I am happy to subscribe to the broad policy objectives, but where is the real value in the strategy?

Vicki Swales: You have described the nature of the problem. We have large numbers of individual land managers and landowners who decide what to do on their property and who are guided by policy, but also by market forces.

John Scott: Should not that remain so?

Vicki Swales: There is an element of that, but at issue is whether the actions of those individuals add up to meeting the objectives that we have set and the commitments that the Government has made on biodiversity and climate change. The problem is that their actions do not add up to that because there is no unified view or coherent approach. For example, you as a farmer do not

necessarily collaborate with your neighbour to deal with flood risk in a particular area.

John Scott: Would not it, in that case, be the ultimate act of folly to try to impose Government targets on land and land managers that they are not capable of delivering, even though the Government has dreamed up something that they must do?

Vicki Swales: Collectively, we are capable of delivering the targets.

John Scott: Oh, right. I am sorry, but there is a contradiction there, because a moment ago you said that we are not capable of delivering and meeting all the targets that have been set.

Vicki Swales: No—I said that if we leave it to the decisions of individual land managers, we are in danger of not meeting the targets or fulfilling our obligations, nationally or internationally, because individuals make decisions that are in their interests and are for their businesses but which are not necessarily for the wider public good. For example, we need 90 per cent of farmers to undertake the actions in the climate change initiative in order to meet our climate change targets. There are real concerns that we simply will not get that level of uptake and buy-in voluntarily from farmers.

So, what role does Government have? Its role is to guide, to incentivise—if necessary, through appropriate funding regimes—and to set the policy framework that allows that to happen. There are private interests, but there are public interests, too. Many of the things that we are trying to achieve are public goods, although private individuals will deliver them. If there is market failure, it is the role of Government to intervene and ensure that those public goods are delivered for the benefit of society. If that means supporting farmers through SRDP grants, the common agricultural policy, or forestry grants, that is appropriate and we need to do that. We need to get land managers to collaborate.

The point is not that there is a role only for Government or only for private individuals: there must be a partnership, but there has to be leadership from the Government on what collectively we are trying to achieve.

Jonathan Hall: I agree entirely with Vicki Swales. The key is that, no matter what the land use strategy says, it is about what is implemented by way of policy measures that incentivise, regulate or advise individuals to change their land management behaviour. Targets in their own right are hostages to fortune, in many senses. Governments can set targets on all sorts of things, but unless they are followed up with actions that move the situation on from the status quo, the targets will never be achieved, otherwise the changes would already have been driven by existing forces.

A classic example of agriculture's contribution to climate change is not written in the land use strategy; it is what is already happening through the farming for a better climate initiative and the Scottish Government's climate change focus farms. Those involve local farm-scale changes in practice that are not about tackling climate change per se, but about input efficiency and improving the bottom line of the business. By and large, improving input efficiency will help agriculture to contribute to tackling climate change and to tackling diffuse pollution issues at the same time.

At last we are starting to get some farm-scale measures that will encourage and incentivise individual farmers to respond and react, but it is not because they are waking up in the morning feeling the great obligation that is stressed in the land use strategy to do something to tackle climate change and diffuse pollution. It is because it is in the best interests of their business for them to become more input efficient and so forth.

We need to strike the right balance. Rather than having overarching targets and so forth, what are important are the measures that will influence behaviour on the ground and farmers' decisions about what they should do with different parcels of land. Targets and strategies mean very little to the guys who are out there trying to find sheep right now.

Jackie McCreery: That is right. The strategy mentions equipping people to make good decisions and better decisions as regards land management. It also states that the majority of land use decisions should continue to be made locally by those who are close to the land. That is right. We have to recognise that those who are on the land often know best what the most productive use of that land will be. That should not be forgotten.

I agree that it is useful to have an overarching strategy to bring all the various interests together, and the Government is probably the only place it can come from. However, it should be emphasised—it is in the strategy, but it could probably be stated more strongly—that it is important to equip land managers, as the people who make decisions on land use, to make good decisions. I do not think that we are talking about farmers' losing their ability to make those decisions.

John Scott: I am not sure. I think that there is an inherent contradiction between what you are saying and what Vicki Swales has said. You are representing your argument, but Vicki Swales is definitely saying that the overarching Government strategy is more important from the point of view of

biodiversity and environmental enhancement. That is a reasonable point of view, but she is making the point that that should be the direction of travel and that farmers should be incentivised—I think that that is the word she used—through the SRDP and other methods to deliver Government objectives and targets. There is an inherent contradiction between your perspective and hers.

Jackie McCreery: They are not necessarily contradictory. I appreciate your point, and in some cases you might be right, but there is a case for land managers in some situations to be better equipped to make decisions. In the light of the strategy, with information, incentives, the whole idea of best practice and all that kind of thing, existing land managers might make slightly different decisions. That is not to say that the decisions that farmers are making are wrong, but the Government's strategy might shift them slightly in a direction in which they might not otherwise have gone.

Vicki Swales: It might be helpful to look back. Before the land use strategy, there was a series of studies under the rural land use study. I was involved in one of those, which looked at the role of the public sector in realising benefits or public goods from land use. That report sets out clearly the role for Government in intervening in land use decisions. It is clear that it is quite right for private individuals to make decisions in relation to their businesses, but the Government has a role in seeking to influence those decisions in a number of different ways in order to deliver public goods. It might regulate, it might advise—as Jonny Hall said—and in some cases it might want to incentivise behaviour.

I do not think that there is a contradiction. Many individuals can help to deliver the public goods that are Government objectives, but they need to be steered in that direction. Otherwise, they will not necessarily know that they are required to deliver them, or how to deliver them.

Jackie McCreery: I add that the strategy should not and must not be another layer of regulation.

John Scott: That is the danger that we are sleepwalking into, as it were, by suggesting that this is a good idea. It will just be a further layer of guidance and requirements that will have to be met for some level of support to be provided. I appreciate that we are obliged to do it under climate change legislation, but we have to be careful about the direction and about the enthusiasm with which we embrace yet another piece of regulation.

I know from my business and from people to whom I speak that land managers and farmers have more regulations and burdens than they can happily cope with, understand and assimilate. Here is another piece being brought in, and people are saying, "This is fine." If it is just high-level aspirational stuff, that is fine, and if it fulfils the requirement in the climate change legislation, that is also fine, but unless it gets down to managing the detail, it is meaningless. If we go down that road, it will not be welcome for individual farmers, and if it does not manage the detail at individual farmer level, it is just high-level aspirational stuff.

10:45

Jonathan Hall: I agree with that, but we know where the policy framework is right now, and we know the expectations that are being placed on agriculture in particular to do more to tackle climate change, and to tackle water quality and diffuse pollution issues in particular. There is a window right now for agriculture to change tack slightly and to start to play a more positive role in tackling those issues. That expectation will come on even stronger through CAP reform, future pillar II support payments and so on, but a crunch point will come, although I do not like to say this, at which Governments of all sorts—European Governments, the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government—will say, "Well, actually, we're just going to have use the stick a bit more and start to ensure that agriculture and land managers more generally deliver against the objectives." We will then tie ourselves up even further in regulatory issues, and there will be more obligations in managing the land.

I have been at pains to stress to our members that our industry needs to evolve and take on the new challenges. We should utilise the incentives and advice that are currently on the table. Ultimately, we will have to regulate if the incentives and advice do not work, and I can see all sorts of conditionality being placed on things such as single farm payments to meet climate change targets. That would be a disaster for Scottish agriculture.

Peter Peacock: I would like to pick up on the theme that John Scott has pursued. Is not it the case that, by and large, agricultural enterprises currently follow the incentives that Governments have created? If there is an incentive to create more forests or wind farms, to farm peat for carbon sequestration purposes, or to farm flood plains for flood management, they will do that. We must have a food policy that meets our food needs, but incentives can be consistent with that. There does not have to be regulation. For example, if the land use strategy set out sufficient details that informed the SRDP to incentivise certain types of activity, those things could be made compatible without any further regulation.

Jonathan Hall: I agree entirely. Farmers are fantastic at adapting to policy signals. They have a

long history of doing so. If the right incentive is put in place, farmers will adapt. They have certainly done that since the post-war era right through the CAP in the 1950s, and from even further back than that.

Current public spending being what it is, I am concerned about whether there will be sufficient incentives to change behaviours with people still trying to pursue incomes from the marketplace. At the end of the day, we are talking about people's livelihoods. That is why they pursue types of agriculture that might not be as environmentally friendly or climate-change friendly as possible. We must turn that on its head and say, "Well, if it's all about input efficiency and you're making savings for the business so that your bottom line improves, you are still going to be better off as an agricultural producer, but you will also do something about climate change." With budget control getting tighter and tighter, I can see there being fewer incentives and more public good being extracted by direct support. If funding for the SRDP effectively dries up in the longer term—I am not saying that it will—and more demands are placed on it to do other things, the Scottish and European Governments will start to look more at single farm payments, which are to do with the incomes of farm businesses, and will attach more strings and regulation to ensure that farmers deliver against certain objectives. I can see the bar of cross-compliance being raised ever higher in the future because money will get tighter. It would be great if we were awash with public funding: people could be then incentivised to do all sorts of things. However, I am not sure that that will happen over the next 10 or 20 years.

Peter Peacock: I see your point.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I will follow the same theme in a slightly different direction. Will the strategy lead farmers in the right direction? Jonny Hall talked about how much regulation there is.

Vicki Swales: That will depend on the policy signals that farmers and land managers, more generally, are given. As things stand, a farmer will not pick up the land use strategy and decide to change the way in which they farm because of all the strategy's fine words about delivering ecosystem services, environmental management and all the rest of it. Governments have a role to play in directing farmers through a combination of policy instruments. They can intervene in different ways and have a range of tools at their disposal. They can use the stick—they can regulate to set a minimum level of environmental protection or of public health and safety. We can advise farmers and ensure that they get the right information about what they can do that is good and what is best practice. In some cases, we can incentivise them through various mechanisms of the SRDP and the common agricultural policy as a whole.

The extent to which farmers go in the right direction will depend on the signals that they are given, which is the role of Government and the land use strategy. We are getting quite hung up on the agriculture sector, but agriculture is just one form of land use. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is about the challenges that we face. We must meet the climate change targets. The act states clearly that we are to ensure sustainable development in the round across all land—rural and urban. The urban context has slipped off the side of the land use strategy, as it were, and we need to come back to that. The question is what we can deliver from land as a whole.

Sandra White: The point that I was trying to make is that landowners, small farmers and land managers are extremely busy, as Jonny Hall mentioned. They have the strategy, which we hope will guide them in the right direction but, as has been said, they also have other documentation, such as indicative forestry strategies and river basin management plans, which are all supposed to work together. Is it fair to expect small farmers and land managers to look at all those documents?

Vicki Swales: No; that is why we all said that the land use strategy has an important role to play in integrating and bringing together the various strategies so that they all point in the same direction, say the same things and lead us towards objectives that we all agree are important. I think that the multiplexity—if that is a word in the English language—of strategies, programmes and policies is confusing not just for individual farmers, but for the delivery bodies, local government and the agencies. What we are looking for from the land use strategy is co-ordination and integration. That is what it could provide, but that is where it is failing because, at the moment, it is too broad and too general. It does not set out concrete actions to take us in that direction or mechanisms that will enable us to achieve that integration over time.

Jackie McCreery: The point is that individual land managers, whether they are foresters, conservationists or farmers, have limited interaction with central Government. They interact with government at local level. The strategy is an overarching collection of ambitions or aspirations that needs to be brought down to local level, where the hands-on land manager interacts. That could be done by dovetailing the strategy with the SRDP. The strategy must dovetail with the funding streams, because it is where the incentives are provided that the individual will interact with the public agencies. That is the point.

In itself, the land use strategy will not make any difference to a land manager's day-to-day

practice, but if it successfully filters into all the agencies of Government and its objectives and vision make their way through into the different arms of Government, it will change behaviour. That will happen inadvertently—a land manager may not realise that his behaviour is changing because of the land use strategy, but it will happen.

Jonathan Hall: I agree entirely with Jackie McCreery and Vicki Swales. On a more general and slightly flippant point, the title of the consultation document is "Getting the best from our land". I know that I have said it a number of times this morning, but the real challenge is to get farmers to ask themselves how they can get the best from their land. How can they get the best from their businesses and from what they manage? Such an approach would be entirely complementary to other broader-brush policies, targets, strategies—call them what you will—and will move us in the right direction.

If farmers go in one direction and other land managers go in another because they are pursuing their own objectives that bear no resemblance to bigger issues such as climate change targets, we will be in real trouble. If things are going to polarise, we might as well pack up and go home. The land strategy needs to make these things converge because, as has been pointed out, farmers simply do not pick up Government documents and ask themselves, "How do I make what I do count?" If we can get the actions and measures right on the ground, they will implicitly start to ask those questions. After all, doing so will be in their interests and therefore in the interests of the Government and the public. The key thing is to get everything to align.

Sandra White: So, if we can get the land strategy document and whatever directives might be issued to meet up with climate change, environmental and other policies, then there might well be a drip effect on landowners and small farmers. After all, you are quite right; busy people do not pick up every document that comes their way and instead need to see results. I know that this is just a strategy document at the moment, but it needs to have more in it. Those are just my thoughts. I am not looking for an answer.

Can I go back to my first question, convener?

The Convener: Hold on a minute, Sandra—I would like to come in here.

At the discussion on the land use strategy that I went to in Aberdeen, the question was asked whether, if it is decided that, say, more forests need to be planted in Scotland, each region will have to take its share of forest-planting or whether national Government will step in and say, "We're not allowing that to happen on prime agricultural and food-producing land because we need food security" even though, at the moment, there are incentives for planting forests, even on good agricultural land. Do such incentives have to shift? After all, because of the grants that are available, a farmer might well plant on good agricultural land. Scottish Environment LINK's submission says:

> "LINK believes that the draft maintains the status quo regarding the economic benefits of productive primary land uses"—

as if that is a bad thing. It continues by saying that

> "It does not recognise the significant economic benefits that can be generated by other land uses, ecosystem services and multi-functional land use."

Moreover, Jonny Hall talked about the prime agricultural land in Scotland, but it was not always that way; the land was improved by generations of farmers. At the moment, we are trying to get maximum yield out of the land by, for example, putting in a lot of fertiliser but, unlike past generations, we are not continuing to improve existing land or trying to make more land productive.

I just thought that I would throw that into the mix.

11:00

Jonathan Hall: You have raised quite a few issues. Personally, I do not see the sense of having a national 25 per cent tree cover target because it can never be applied uniformly. In Loch Lomond and Trossachs national park, there is already 30-something per cent tree cover whereas, in other areas, it will never reach even 10 per cent. We should not be seeking uniformity in that regard.

The prime agricultural land argument is very important, because we have very little such land. If we lose it, it is gone, and that would have a huge impact both strategically and in terms of agricultural production from Scotland. In fact, the bigger threat to prime agricultural land is not from forestry but from development. The prime agricultural land is pretty much down the east coast and where centres of population and settlements are.

At the other extreme, we have a lot of deep peat carbon-rich soils where there is a presumption against forestry, too. It is not possible to plant anything on peat that is a metre deep and we have quite a lot of that in Scotland.

We are looking at planting 10,000-plus hectares per year for X number of years on what is basically the very productive middle ground of Scottish agriculture. It is class 3, 4 and 5, livestock and barley-producing ground. It is the engine house of Scottish agriculture.

We are almost back to the conflicts of land use and the opportunity cost. If we plant trees, we do not produce food from that ground and vice versa.

You are right to pick up on the incentives to plant trees on farmland, but we are in a funny situation in the sense that public policy is now in its own bidding war, because of the sectoral silo mentality that we have built up over the years. We have single farm payments and less favoured area payments on the one hand, which tell the farmer that he should keep the land in agricultural use in order to qualify for those payments. Forestry grants have had to escalate in value year on year in order to compete with that. The first thing that any farmer will ask himself is, "What would I give up?" He would give up his single farm payment and LFA payment and the ability to produce as a result of that. There is a bidding war within the SRDP: LFA payments versus forestry grants. That is not a very clever place for Government to be.

What we need to do—this goes back to planning, but it is pretty broad-brush planning—is look at Scotland more in terms of what it is capable of producing in different places. We know about agricultural capability and about tree-producing capability on that class 3, 4 and 5 agricultural land. We should map that. On top of that, we should be asking what is the best, most economic use of that ground. In certain areas, farming becomes more and more economically marginal and, in certain areas, planting trees becomes more and more economically marginal. We should let a few market forces drive this, as well as having policy incentives and so forth.

Vicki Swales: Following on from what Jonny Hall said, I think that this is about how we decide what goes where and what is the primacy of different kinds of land use and about the potential conflict between them. To some extent, we already have a policy process that helps us to decide that. We have national policy, such as the national forestry strategy, which sets out in broad terms what kind of forestry we want to see and where it is and is not good to plant trees. That translates into indicative forestry strategies at a more regional level, which go into more detail and say, for example, that it is a bad idea to plant on deep peat and not a good idea to plant in the prime biodiversity areas where we are trying to protect open space for example.

We also want to determine what happens on the ground through conditions on grants within the SRDP. There are mechanisms to determine what happens in terms of land use. The strategy has an opportunity to take an overview of all that and to set some clear direction for it.

The convener mentioned LINK's comments about the land use strategy maintaining the status quo in relation to economic benefits of productive primary land use. We are not saying that it is not important to have productive primary land use, such as agriculture and forestry, which are important. The point that we were trying to make was that we need to take a broader perspective. In the past, we have viewed land only in relation to those economic uses: it grows food, it grows trees or it is a place to put buildings or infrastructure. In fact, land delivers a wide range of other economic benefits through the natural environment.

Scottish Natural Heritage recently did work looking at the value of nature-based tourism, which is worth £1.4 billion to the Scottish economy and provides 39,000 full-time jobs. Wildlife tourism is worth £127 million. If we look after the natural environment, we reap economic and social benefits. We are saying simply that we should not consider land use narrowly, as we have done in the past, when we have seen it only in relation to certain uses. We need to think more broadly about the ecosystem services—the wider goods and services—with which land provides us. That is what Scottish Environment LINK wants the strategy to pursue. We need to do things differently, as the status quo is not good enough. We need to be more creative about how we use land. There is a wide range of benefits that can give us economic, social and environmental goods.

Jackie McCreery: I will make a couple of small points in that context. The strategy makes a broad statement on primary use of land, but it is not of enormous value in directing decisions. It says:

"where land has a high value for a primary use",

whether agricultural or not,

"this value should be recognised in decision-making".

What does that mean? How does that help someone to make a decision if they have prime agricultural land?

The other point that the convener made—and it is a well-made point—is that it comes back to the idea of what is a natural environment and what is managed. The capability of our land has been improved over generations of management. One could almost argue that there is a conflict between the natural environment and the managed environment. That is a general point in the context of the question that the convener asked.

The Convener: We need to move on.

Sandra White: I am interested in the fact that urban land is mentioned in the strategy. The witnesses can hear from my accent that I am from Glasgow, which is pretty urban.

The witnesses have said that the strategy's aims are laudable, which they are. One of those laudable objectives is

"Vibrant, sustainable communities in urban and rural areas, with people connected to the land, enjoying it and taking an interest in its future."

Urban land makes up 6 per cent of Scotland. It seems a small amount, but it is not population-wise. At section 5.2.2, the strategy refers to vacant or derelict land in urban areas. We mentioned the climate change fund, which is used very much in inner cities, particularly in Glasgow. How will and should the strategy apply to urban land? We have heard words and phrases such as "integration", "co-ordination" and "diverse use".

Jonathan Hall: Obviously, representing a farming interest, the NFUS does not spend too much time thinking about urban planning issues. However, I make the general statement that we would like existing urban land to be used better—brownfield development and reuse of derelict sites for all sorts of development—rather than existing settlements expanding into the fringes of, generally, good agricultural land. As I said, we have little such land and, once it is under concrete, it is pretty much gone for ever.

The land use strategy could have an important role in connecting all communities with the land again and helping them to understand what it does for us—its functionality, if you like. It produces food and timber. It is about landscapes, habitats, biodiversity and water quality. If we could get urban and rural communities to reconnect with some of those issues, that would go a long way towards creating understanding of why land in Scotland is vital and why, therefore, it is vital that we manage it in the right way in everybody's interest.

We have moved from a rural land use study into a land use strategy that is both rural and urban. The last thing that we want to come out of any land use strategy is an even further polarisation of the existing situation, whereby an increasing population very much lives and works in settlements and perhaps commutes through Scotland's lands but has little connection to them. We need to reconnect people to the land—that will be an aspiration for all sorts of individuals—so that we understand better what it gives us and so that, as a society, we put a higher value on our land in future.

Vicki Swales: Many Scottish Environment LINK members would like the land use strategy to say more about sustainable urban development and green space in urban areas—in our cities and towns, for example. It makes references to that, but I do not think that it goes far enough.

We produced a number of case studies—I am not sure whether members have seen them—among which there are three urban examples: Slateford Green, the Royal Edinburgh hospital community gardens and Freiburg, which is an eco-town in Germany. Those are good examples of the sort of things that we are talking about in sustainable urban development. The land use strategy could send some clear signals in that regard.

Green spaces such as public gardens, parks, recreation grounds, green corridors, allotments and community gardens are tremendously important but are often underprovided; for example, there are huge waiting lists for allotments in many places. People get great benefits such as community spirit, social wellbeing and health benefits from having access to those spaces. They can also be important for wildlife and biodiversity in urban areas. The strategy says that we should promote

"the protection and enhanced provision of accessible green spaces near to where people live",

but it does not highlight any ways in which that may be achieved. Can we have some concrete commitments and actions in the land use strategy regarding how that might be done? It might be done through the planning process in relation to derelict and vacant land, but the strategy needs to speak to the national planning framework and planning policy and say how that is going to be delivered.

Jackie McCreery: As Jonny Hall said, because the strategy was born out of a rural land use study, it has tended to focus primarily on rural areas. Vicki Swales is correct in saying that it could say more about green spaces and land use in urban areas.

The other thing that is very important from our perspective is the idea of connecting people with the land and enhancing people's understanding of what the land does. There possibly needs to be a greater emphasis on the fact that the land is a workplace where people make their living, not just a place for recreation and leisure, although that is an important aspect of its use. A message about the need for mutual respect for each other's interests in the land could be brought out more strongly in the strategy.

John Scott: We have talked about whether there is a need for the strategy. I now want to deal with the strategy's three strategic directions, the first of which is "towards a low-carbon economy". A strategy is pointless unless it has an outcome and delivers something meaningful. How can we get there? As has been said, unless land managers have an element of prosperity, they cannot achieve any of what is in the strategy. How can land-based businesses become more prosperous or sufficiently well-off given the current economic climate? How can they do that as well as reduce carbon emissions? What contribution

should land managers make towards cutting carbon emissions?

Jonathan Hall: As we all said at the start, successful land-based businesses are fundamentally important. I also hinted quite strongly that I have an issue with the approach being all about attaining a low-carbon economy. A low-carbon economy is a laudable aim, but I am concerned that we are in danger of ditching the sustainable economic growth argument. How do we interpret "low-carbon economy"? Do we produce as much as we did before, if not more, but use fewer inputs thereby producing less carbon and reducing our climate change impact? We could look at it in that way. However, if we are to drive for a low-carbon economy, we are looking at lower-input and lower-output systems. That would be a short-term answer to achieving a low-carbon economy that, in the end, would probably start to pull the rug from beneath our own feet, as the economy relies on a number of businesses that require inputs to produce outputs.

I would like the approach to be more about input efficiency rather than a low-carbon economy. The two might overlap significantly, but I am concerned that the drive to a low-carbon economy means doing less and less. The quickest way to get to a low-carbon economy is to do nothing to increase productive capacity or potential. The process should be about input efficiency. There are such initiatives in agriculture, such as the farming for a better climate initiative, which deals with water quality as well as climate change. That is all about better use of fertilisers and energy and involves considering renewable energy generation on farms and so on.

Increasing opportunity for income streams or cost reduction for individual businesses and incentivising individuals through that route will have a consequence for climate change, water quality and other issues. I would prefer the approach to be about input efficiency for successful land-based businesses rather than just saying, "Let's get to the low-carbon economy."

11:15

Jackie McCreery: I agree with Jonny Hall. We are concerned that there has been no adequate economic impact assessment of what is proposed. An in-depth and substantial environmental impact assessment of the whole strategy has been done, so an economic impact assessment would be appropriate, too. That will be central to achieving the aims. To pick up on what Jonny Hall said, in the actions for Government, we need to put more work into valuing the goods and producing markets for services so that markets can be activated in areas where currently there is no market.

Incentives are another issue. In the part where the document discusses how to achieve the strategic objective, the third point talks about

"Land-based businesses using natural resources sustainably and reducing the greenhouse gas emissions associated with land use."

The economic impact of that statement has not been fully considered.

The Convener: Bill Wilson has questions about the ecosystems approach.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): That is the essence of the question. Will the panel give their views on implementing an ecosystems approach to land use in Scotland? What are the implications of that in accounting terms or for land use decisions?

Vicki Swales: That relates to some of the things that I have talked about. Basically, the ecosystem services approach recognises that land delivers a wide range of goods and services. Some of those are what we think of as provisioning services, such as food and timber production, but they extend to supporting services such as biodiversity, regulation and cultural services, which relate to our aesthetic appreciation of the environment. The ecosystem services approach means that, in thinking about land use, policy and the funding streams that flow from it, we take account of that broad suite of goods and services that land provides. We are not taking just a narrow view, as perhaps we have done in the past, that is about certain productive uses and economic outputs from land.

The approach needs to be embedded in policy across Government and in what we do and deliver. It means changing what we incentivise in some cases and thinking about measures that I have mentioned, such as peatland restoration. It is also about being able to deliver a range of benefits, such as carbon storage, biodiversity and the contribution to landscape effects.

The approach is fundamental in setting out how we achieve climate change mitigation actions and adaptation to climate change. We might want the land use strategy to promote an ecologically coherent network of protected sites with connectivity between habitats. That would take account of the ecosystem services approach. We need to embed that in policy and in the funding streams that flow from it.

Jackie McCreery: It may be too early to talk about embedding the ecosystems approach in policy. I agree that work needs to be done to value the services and goods. We have traditionally looked at the income that someone forgoes when they leave a field margin or carry out some environmental activity. I agree that we need to look at other ways of valuing the services and

what is being done, but it may be too soon to embed that in policy. The Government's approach in making a commitment in that direction may be the right one.

Jonathan Hall: I will add only the point that we require some management or intervention, driven by policy and the right signals, advice and incentives, to make the most of ecosystem services. If we walk away and think that everything will happen by itself, we will be in big trouble quite quickly. To make the most of the ecosystem services, someone is required to manage the land in the most constructive fashion, particularly considering catchment management and habitats. We will get the connectivity that Vicki Swales referred to only if land managers, collectively on a landscape scale, start to act in a cohesive and coherent fashion.

Jackie McCreery: The point was made that we need to look more at developing markets for ecosystem services and not necessarily rely totally on incentives and public funding.

Vicki Swales: We have choices about how we act. Flooding offers a practical example. We will probably experience more extreme weather events and a greater incidence of flooding in Scotland as a result of climate change. We can tackle the problem in two ways: we can build hard concrete defences to keep the water out and build sea defences to protect ourselves from a rise in sea levels, which is the approach that we have taken in the past; or we can take a wider and different approach, including natural flood management. We can look at how we manage land and use it to alleviate flood risk and deliver other benefits on the back of that—for example, creating new wetland areas to store water will have biodiversity benefits. We can think about managed coastal realignment, rather than trying to maintain sea defences, which will become increasingly costly and are probably untenable in the long term. Part of the ecosystem services approach and framework involves thinking differently about how we use land and address some of the challenges that climate change and other things will bring us.

Jonathan Hall: I have to come back quickly on that and refer to my mantra of considering the opportunity cost of anything that we do. If we are considering natural flood management—which is what we have to do—we must ask about the opportunity cost of going down the route of using flood plains, for example, as they tend to be our most agriculturally productive pieces of land. We must trade off those factors carefully.

Bill Wilson: It occurs to me that part of the reason why much of the flood plain is prime land is that it has experienced floods and alluvial deposits. A potential ecosystem benefit of returning land to its more natural circumstance of a flood plain would be an improvement in the natural fertility of the soil—or do you not think that that is the case?

Jonathan Hall: If we are experiencing an increasing number of flood events and an individual's income relies on an annual crop from the land that we want to use, I am not sure that they will necessarily take the same view. We have always lived with flood risk management, and you are right that flood plains have built up naturally and are productive land but, ultimately, if we decide to take an annual crop away from it, we need some measure in place—although I hate to use this phrase—to compensate the owner for the income forgone on a long-term basis. That is when policy has to step in. If we simply say that we will allow flooding to occur in a particular location, we will diminish the land's capital value and remove an individual's income stream. If that is for public benefit but comes at a private cost, there is a big question to be asked.

Bill Wilson: I do not think that anyone would dispute that point. If it is part of the agreement that there are floods when the crops are in the field, there will have to be compensation. Surely, however, you would accept that there are positives. There is evidence to suggest that there has been a loss of topsoil—a decline in its thickness—over the past 50 years, which has resulted in the decline in fertility. Is it possible to manage the land differently, considering how it can be more sustainable and perhaps reducing inputs or needing fewer of them?

Jonathan Hall: Yes—on a case-by-case, location-by-location basis. Soil erosion and the loss of functionality of soil are indeed a very important matter—we need to improve soil again. However, allowing the floodgates to open—literally—and having natural flood management and seeing what happens, without safeguards being put in place, takes us back to the policy drawing board. I would be very concerned about that.

A lot of work was done in the wake of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009—there was another pun there—regarding natural flood management and softer approaches, rather than hard engineering. The other side of it, however, is that nothing has really been done yet to satisfy land managers, and particularly farmers, that their interests will be protected.

Bill Wilson: Vicki Swales referred to coherent networks. There seems to be some concern that setting up coherent networks will result in a loss of development opportunity. Would she care to comment on that?

Vicki Swales: This is not my area of expertise as such, but I do not necessarily think that that is the case. We have a process that determines where development is appropriate and where safeguards need to be in place. It is feasible to establish corridors and connectivity between important protected sites, but we need to buffer those sites in the countryside. That will not necessarily prevent development—it is a matter of having the right development in the right places, in the same way that it can be a matter of having the right trees in the right places or the right wind farms in the right places in order to protect important areas and ensure resilience for biodiversity and the ability of species to move as the climate changes and as we adapt to that.

Bill Wilson: As it is not Vicki Swales's specialist area, might I ask that one of Environment LINK's specialists send us a written submission on the subject?

Vicki Swales: We would be happy to provide further evidence on that from the LINK network.

Bill Wilson: That would be helpful.

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I know that LINK has been disappointed, and that there are differences of opinion about the extent to which an ecosystems approach should be applied.

I apologise for being late—there were frozen points in several places on the railway—and I am sorry that I was not here for the earlier parts of the discussion; I hope that you have not touched on this already. I still do not see how the ecosystems approach would help with the choices to be made about having trees or wind turbines in certain places, or about flood plains. We spoke about those things when considering the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill and the Marine (Scotland) Bill. When it comes to land use strategy, there needs to be some indication of how decisions are made.

Vicki Swales: Part of the process of making such decisions is to take some wider considerations and to factor in other issues. It is not just a choice between having prime agricultural land or not, or between allowing development or not. The point is to look at land differently, and to recognise that there is an opportunity to do things in a such a way as to deliver multiple benefits. How many of the provisioning, regulating, cultural and support services can we provide through the choice that we make about how we use land? It is a matter of changing the way we think about things and looking for a wider range of benefits in the decisions that we make. Too often in the past, stark choices have been made between one thing and another without seeing the wider framework and the wider context.

Elaine Murray: Even in that context, would there not have to be some sort of hierarchy of benefits?

Jonathan Hall: I agree with that. I agree with everything that Vicki Swales has just said, in the sense that we are not talking about exclusive use—we never are, as land use is never about exclusivity. Nor are we saying that everything is on an equal footing, and that we must deliver absolutely everything on a given parcel of land.

There will be primary and secondary issues that stand out as being clearly the right thing to do on a particular parcel of land, and there might therefore be a hierarchy thereafter. We might sometimes conclude that the parcel of land in question is just not suited to the suggested outcomes or outputs, and that there is therefore a cut-off. Any particular parcel of land can produce four, five or six varying benefits, but they would not be ranked equally. We would say that the primary function of one parcel of land is agriculture and the primary function of another is habitat or carbon management. Secondary functions would be built in behind that, but we would not try to achieve everything from a single parcel of land. It is not possible to do that; if we did, we would end up with nothing.

11:30

Vicki Swales: In a way, that is part of the problem. I am not sure how we can do what Jonny Hall suggests. In the past, we have given primacy to certain uses—we have just discussed the example of flood risk management versus agricultural production—and have said that agricultural production is sacrosanct. However, issues such as climate change are forcing us to rethink that approach and to say that the primary purpose of land is to prevent Perth, for example, from being flooded, because the implications of that are more costly than trying to protect the land for agriculture.

The Convener: We know all those arguments from consideration of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill. We are really pushed for time.

John Scott: I have a question about reconnecting with the land. Connecting people to the land is part of the third objective. In what ways are we most likely to do that? How do you see the process working? In my experience, one thing that has reconnected people with the land is, extraordinarily, farmers markets; I declare an interest in that regard. Farmers markets have connected people with food, food production and food security. Do you see other ways in which town can be connected with country?

Jonathan Hall: I touched on that point when I spoke about the urban-rural issue. It is vital that the land use strategy makes inroads into

reconnecting people in rural areas and settlements and urban areas to an understanding of what Scotland's land delivers for all of us, in many senses. The concept of farmers markets is a stand-out example of how that link can be made and local produce can be got into settlements, communities, urban areas and all sorts of other places, but we can do a great deal more.

At a practical level, I see the urban fringe as a key area, because often that is where conflicts, issues and tensions over land use arise. Perhaps we should turn those conflicts on their head and try to achieve positive outcomes from them. The urban fringe is where we get fly-tipping, irresponsible access and all of the other issues that I am always being told about, but it also presents farmers with an opportunity to engage more with their customers about what they are doing on the land, why they are doing it, what operations are happening and so on.

There are already good examples in forestry. There are specific grants to create a network of woodlands in and around towns in places such as the central belt. However, we could push on any number of initiatives and still never do enough to reconnect people with the land. Agriculture, in particular, struggles to reconnect with people. Although a lot of effort has been made to improve education about and understanding of it, we still have a long way to go. If the land use strategy can make a difference in that respect, that will be a positive outcome.

Jackie McCreery: The actions for Government in section 5 of the strategy are quite weak and could be added to. I see no mention of the role of education or even health policy.

Vicki Swales: I endorse that point. The land use strategy does not say much about local food production, farmers markets, green space in urban areas—which has been mentioned—and ensuring that there are opportunities for access and recreation. Education is mentioned earlier in the text, but not as an action. The strategy could be much more positive and concrete about such actions, which are critical, and how they will be taken forward.

The Convener: I probably want just a yes or no answer to my next question, which is for the sake of the record. The strategy does not say much about land tenure, although section 5 mentions vibrant communities and the community right to buy under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Should the land use strategy address land tenure and, if so, what should the objective be?

Jonathan Hall: No.

Vicki Swales: No.

Jackie McCreery: No.

Jonathan Hall: We are about land management.

The Convener: That is good. I wish that every answer was as succinct as that.

Peter Peacock will wind up on indicators and information that is needed.

Peter Peacock: I wondered whether we might have got support for Mr Mugabe's approach to land reform, but clearly not. Perhaps we will return to that later.

I will raise two points quickly. In developing the strategy, do we have enough of the data that we require to understand land use changes? Is anything that we require clearly missing from the data sets?

You have touched on your concern about the strategy's lack of potential for success, but what would success look like? Do you have thoughts about indicators of what success would look like?

Vicki Swales: Setting indicators is difficult, but we have concerns about the so-called monitoring arrangements. They are supposed to be set out in the land use strategy, but they are non-existent. The strategy does not really say how we will judge and monitor whether the strategy has had any effect. Scottish Environment LINK would like a national stakeholder forum to be established, to follow the implementation process and to hear reports from the Government about what has happened year by year in the five years of the strategy. Establishing more concrete, specific and time-bound objectives will help us to monitor and measure whether anything has happened.

It is right to say that potential issues relate to our knowledge about land use. We could improve our knowledge about what is happening. Much information is out there about land uses, the state of the environment and the state of land. Some of that was brought together through the earlier rural land use study, so the rural context has been covered, but perhaps the urban context has not been covered as much. We need a baseline so that we can say where we are and say in five years' time whether the strategy made a difference, whether we changed how we did things and whether we delivered something.

Jackie McCreery: In the context section at the start of the environmental report, it might have been useful to have more data on matters such as demographics and trends, to direct what we will have to cope with in the future and where land use decisions might be affected.

What success looks like is a difficult question. We will never get rid of conflict between land uses—it will not disappear. Success might be a single vision for land use in Scotland that all

parties—the public, private and third sectors—can buy into, but achieving that is a huge challenge.

Jonathan Hall: I disagree with nothing that has been said. On data and information, we always need to set land uses in context. In Scotland, we map land use very well—we can see that. However, that does not translate awfully well into what we get out of the land in terms not of economic production benefits but of other benefits for biodiversity, species and so on. I would like to see reasonably robust data on what we get out of land use. That relates to Vicki Swales's point about where we set the benchmark that allows us to measure progress five or 10 years down the line.

As for whether the strategy will succeed, I say—cynically—that if any farmer ever read the strategy, that would be a success.

Peter Peacock: How would you measure that?

Jonathan Hall: You would have to count only to one. John Scott might be the one.

John Scott: I have read the strategy and I am none the wiser. That is the problem.

Jonathan Hall: Okay—success would be a farmer having read the strategy and become somewhat wiser.

The Convener: On that note, we are done. I thank all the witnesses for their evidence and invite them to forward to the clerks any supplementary written evidence.

I suspend the meeting for a maximum of five minutes to change over the witnesses.

11:39

Meeting suspended.

11:45

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome the second panel of witnesses today: John Watt, director of strengthening communities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Bill Band, head of strategic direction, Scottish Natural Heritage; Mark Aitken, unit manager for operations, Scottish Environment Protection Agency; Professor David Miller, Macaulay Land Use Research Institute; and Charles Strang, Scottish planning policy officer, Royal Town Planning Institute. We also have with us Jamie Farquhar, national manager for Scotland with the Confederation of Forest Industries, who should have been on the first panel but is joining us now.

We are grateful that you have all agreed to be here at relatively short notice and in such inclement weather. I thank those of you who have provided written evidence. The first session overran slightly, so to maximise the time available we will not ask for opening statements and will move straight to questions. If someone on the panel says what you want to say, I ask you to state for the record that you agree, rather than going over the arguments again.

To begin, do you agree with the objectives that are proposed in the draft land use strategy? Should they be separated into the three areas that the strategy proposes?

Bill Band (Scottish Natural Heritage): I will kick off. SNH strongly supports the objectives that the strategy sets out. If you are going to have a strategy for sustainable land use, you have to say what you think sustainable land use is, which the objectives do very well. However, we question in our written evidence whether they are the right way round, with regard to having vibrant and active communities as an objective to support the aim of a low-carbon and prosperous economy.

Mark Aitken (Scottish Environment Protection Agency): SEPA fully supports the objectives of the land use strategy and the need for economic, social and environmental pillars. Acknowledgement of the importance of land as a non-renewable resource is essential for a sustainable environment, and that needs to be fully recognised by an overarching land strategy that integrates with other Government policies and strategies.

Professor David Miller (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute): I agree with the overall objectives. The language that is used in them, however, is a mix of where mitigation and adaptation could be applicable to all three objectives. After all, the strategy relates to climate change. If that is the overall vision, issues of consistency feed through part of the document, which leads us in the direction of mitigation for one of the objectives but not for the others. Apart from those aspects of consistency, it is good to see that urban as well as rural issues are identified in the strategy, and that the three pillars of sustainability are core to it.

Charles Strang (Royal Town Planning Institute): I observe that the objectives are rather less measurable than one would wish—they are more aims than objectives.

John Watt (Highlands and Islands Enterprise): I echo that, and some of the statements that were made earlier. The social, economic and environmental objectives are laudable and high level, but we had hoped that the strategy would be more precise and detailed about them. To an extent, they are outcomes rather than objectives; it would be better if we saw a link

between objectives, activities, impacts and outcomes. The strategy is very general and high level.

Jamie Farquhar (Confederation of Forest Industries): We cannot have a strategy that does not address the three pillars. The problem that we have found with the strategy is that it states a great deal about the virtues of many different aspects of land use, but no single purpose drives it. We are concerned that, unless some prioritisation is built into the structure, it will not deliver.

John Scott: In your view, what should be the priority for land use in Scotland? Perhaps you can each give us one or two sentences on that.

Jamie Farquhar: I would put two or three extra words into the vision, so that it would be:

"A prosperous and sustainable low-carbon economy, underpinned by successful land-based businesses"

that are delivering

"flourishing natural environments and vibrant communities".

If we do not have that stable, economically sustainable base in the rural sector, we will simply not deliver the benefits. The economic imperative needs to come out more strongly in the strategy.

John Watt: You are asking the ultimate question: what do we want out of the strategy? We had hoped for fairly clear guidance on some land use management decisions, but I am not sure that we are getting that from the strategy. Lots of drivers affect land management decisions. Climate change and environmental sustainability are important drivers, but so is the need to sustain rural communities. We would have liked clearer guidance on how some land use management decisions should be made.

I echo the comments of the earlier panel in asking how the strategy fits in with all the other Government strategies that we have at the moment. We feel that there is a lack of integration between the strategy and the planning guidance. I recently read the Government's low-carbon economy strategy, which is also pertinent to the land use strategy. How do those two fit together? If you read them carefully, you will see that they are quite different strategies.

Charles Strang: I agree with Mr Watt that integration with the planning system, especially the national planning framework, seems eminently desirable, but the strategy does not mention that convincingly. I would also like to see integration with the blue bits of Scotland—the marine parts—through the marine strategy and marine planning. That, too, would be eminently sensible. In addressing renewable energy issues and coastal planning, land use cannot be considered without looking at both sides of the coast.

John Scott: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Professor Miller: You asked what we want from land use. The question is the extent to which we have an aim in the strategy that is both agreed and specific. If the aim is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to move to a low-carbon economy, we might want one set of uses for the land. However, because land use change is almost always long term, there will be changes in our demands and expectations of it, which will always be a mix that will depend on the perceived view of societal expectations and how they can be met. From the land manager to the individual who never strays beyond the urban boundary, what we want from the land will vary enormously. If there were one uniform purpose, it would be easy to answer your question, but I do not think that there is one uniform purpose.

John Scott: Should we be trying to create a hierarchy of outcomes?

Professor Miller: If that hierarchy was perceived as being about sustainable development, at the top end that would allow the mix to fit well. If it only related to threats of carbon emissions and climate change, that would direct how we use the land in particular ways. If the outcome is sustainable development, the answer is yes.

Mark Aitken: To ensure that an overarching land strategy works at ground level, we must ensure—it is not quite there—that there are regional strategies and plans at a local level that land managers can work on. Also, more clarity is required on how the land use strategy links to land use planning. There is a requirement for urban issues to be addressed more in the strategy.

Bill Band: The whole point of the land use strategy is to underline that we want a lot of things out of our land simultaneously. The issue is how to achieve those multiple benefits. It is wrong to think of land use as a hierarchy, in which one thing is more important than any other. The point is that if we plan it right, we can achieve all those things simultaneously.

Peter Peacock: Those of you who were here for the earlier panel would have heard a fairly lengthy discussion about the connection—or lack of connection—between the national planning framework and the draft land use strategy. We touched on all the other strategies that are kicking around, such as those for food, forestry, flood plain management, deer management and biodiversity. Judging by your responses to John Scott's question, you seem to think that part of the purpose of the strategy ought to be to pull all of that together more coherently—or is that not its

purpose? In particular, what is the connection between physical planning—land use planning—and the strategy in terms of informing future decision making?

Charles Strang: As a planner, I believe that it makes sense to view NPF3 as an opportunity to draw together more of those strategies and the strands of the land use strategy under the umbrella of sustainable development and addressing climate change. That is probably easier said than done, but it would be the sensible approach. You are right—we have an overabundance of strategies, most of which contain the same rhetoric, although occasionally it is put in different ways.

On the part of your question about outcomes, again I argue that the planning system—perhaps tweaked a bit—has something to offer at the local level, because land use issues can be discussed meaningfully and things that are within statutory control can meld with things that are not. Although many agricultural land use issues are outwith the planning system as we understand it, it is still possible to have supplementary planning guidance as part of local development plans. We discussed flood prevention, flood management and so on earlier. On the one hand, national objectives can be brought in, but on the other hand, the views of communities can ameliorate or indeed drive those objectives.

Bill Band: The strategies that you indicated—which I call sectoral strategies—lie below the level of the land use strategy. The land use strategy should be an overarching strategy. We should ensure that those sectoral strategies, as they become recycled or evolved in their next generation, are compatible with that overarching strategy.

The planning system might be slightly different, because there is a big difference between the way in which the planning system operates, through development planning and zoning for development, and the way in which this strategy will, I expect, operate, in terms of helping to steer the incentives system within which land-based businesses operate. The delivery mechanism is very different, and I see the strategies as sitting side by side.

12:00

Peter Peacock: You mentioned the point that I was going to come to. You see the strategy as a broad, overarching set of policy statements and directions of travel. Others see it going into a greater level of detail, which will influence outcomes and behaviours on the land. Some people might have started off envisaging the strategy as a zoning document of some kind, which is about physical land use. I am interested to hear the witnesses' views on whether the level of detail in the land use strategy is so high that it is of little value, whether it is about right, whether it needs to go into less detail, or how much more detailed it needs to be.

Mark Aitken: We need that high level of detail in the strategy as a whole. However, to ensure that things happen and that specific objectives are achieved and actions are carried out, it also needs to go down to the regional level.

In SEPA, we have examples of success through partnership working. For example, we have a broad range of organisations involved in river basin management planning. That planning needs to dovetail with the requirements of the land use strategy and to look at the multiple benefits that we can achieve, not just for water quality as required by the water framework directive, but for flooding, soil protection and food security.

We have significant targets from the European Union on the water framework directive. In Scotland, 65 per cent of water is of good or better quality, which is very good compared with practically all member states. Nevertheless, we have to achieve a target of 98 per cent by 2027. Water quality really relies on land management practices, so we see an opportunity for allying the land use strategy with river basin management planning. That will involve active partnership work between a broad range of land managers and associated organisations.

Jamie Farquhar: Forestry has lived with local regional planning under regional forestry and woodland strategies for a considerable time. In a way, I agree with Bill Band that, by and large, the land use strategy should remain overarching as long as it has direction. I go back to my previous comments about it needing a basic driver for it to be successful.

At a regional level, the forestry world has benefited considerably from the modern style of what we once called indicative forestry strategies, which have been used, for example, in Ayrshire and Arran and the Borders. They are excellent local planning tools. However, I do not want the planning role to get any stronger; it should simply provide general guidance. The nub of regional woodland strategies is to identify preferred land for planting and no-go areas such as critical sites of special scientific interest and deep peats. There is a role for regional planning, but it should not be too definitive.

Peter Peacock: It is an interesting point that in the early days, indicative forestry strategies were just that: indicative. They were not definite in that they limited or required action, but they gave a broad indication of the appropriate use of a piece

of land. Should the land use strategy go to that level of detail?

Jamie Farquhar: The problem is that forestry is a long-term subject. Farming, which is the other predominant land use, is relatively short term and can be influenced to change in a short cycle.

Peter Peacock: That is interesting, but you could equally argue that carbon sequestration is a long-term activity, or the management of peatlands, or wind farming, which is a 25 or 30-year activity. Would those activities benefit from the spatial planning approach that was pioneered through indicative forestry planning, or would that be too ambitious and a step too far?

Jamie Farquhar: I believe that there are possibilities. I am just saying that it would probably be more difficult than in our forestry world.

Professor Miller: I would also go for the draft strategy being an overarching, high-level set of principles so that it is distinct and does not clutter the decision-making landscape. There are already well-set-out processes within the planning framework and down the channels. The advantage of the strategy is that it sets out in one document key principles about where things can be brought together.

Interesting opportunities arise in terms of how the one rural infrastructure development in the national planning framework—the central Scotland green network—might tie in with the strategy. That development covers both urban and rural areas and it covers many of the issues that have been picked up today, including forestry and agriculture. It could well be driven and be used as the exemplar—the overarching case demonstrator of how the strategy can deliver at different scales without tripping over all sorts of existing mechanisms.

Our key feeling is that, if the Government wants to deliver the lines on the map—indicative or otherwise—through the strategy, the governance structure will need to be set out. That will mean duplicating things or coming up with something new, which I think will be a problem.

John Watt: The strategy is a high-level document that gives guidance. The question is what its purpose is and what it is trying to achieve. Will it affect individual land managers' decisions? We heard earlier that it is highly unlikely that any land manager will ever read it and that it will probably not affect their decisions, so that is not its purpose—or if it is, it will not be effective. Is its purpose to inform future incentive regimes? Will it affect the upcoming SRDP and incentivise certain activities that will result in the outcomes that have been outlined, or is its purpose to influence regulation and put in place more restrictions on what is done and where? I am not clear what the purpose of the strategy is. Perhaps it is all those things, but I am not sure whether it will achieve them.

Peter Peacock: Thank you.

Sandra White: We have perhaps heard the answer to the question that I asked earlier about urban land. Mr Watt's comments were interesting. Perhaps we can go into them later if we have time. How does the panel see the strategy applying to urban land? I will leave my question as open as that.

Charles Strang: I think that it should apply to urban land. One criticism of the draft strategy is that urban land is perhaps treated as 6 per cent of the problem. I suspect that, in the context of what I used to describe as a sustainable land use strategy, it is rather more than that, but I do not think that that is reflected in the document. Perhaps it ought to be.

Mark Aitken: Can I comment on that, as a non-planner? It is important that planning issues are considered. Some work that the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute did for the Scottish Government demonstrated that, in Scotland, we lose approximately 1,400 hectares of land every year. Some developments are essential but, from SEPA's point of view, we must weigh that against development on flood plains, loss of soil, and the reduction in carbon sequestration and the other many benefits that we get from land and soil. Urban issues relate directly to rural issues, particularly with regard to development.

Professor Miller: I agree. We should not differentiate here. The document tends to differentiate, but the principles that are set out relate to people; it does not matter where they live. The section on communities, towards the end of the document, addresses elements of awareness, capacity building and involvement.

Most of us live in towns, and most of our experience of how change is happening relates to where we live or work. That might be in a comparatively small village or town—which would be covered by the definition of urban in the document—or it might be in the middle of a city. One could take that view a bit further forward and argue that some of the demonstrators of how land can be used to deliver multiple objectives should be urban-centred. For example, there are huge parks—such as Pollock country park, the park at Murrayfield in Edinburgh and Hazelhead park in Aberdeen—that can be exploited. Baxter park, in Dundee, has begun to move down that line, with regard to the connect agenda. I argue that we should forget the urban/rural division, as the issue of people and land is what is important.

Bill Band: The strategy is actually quite good at making the connection between the urban

population and rural land use and making it clear that they are strongly interconnected. The principles are as valid in the urban context as they are in the rural context, but the balance of priorities is different. When you are in urban areas or in the green areas around towns, the value of land for the recreational and health and wellbeing opportunities that it provides is much greater than it is deep in the rural countryside.

John Scott: How can the reconnection of town and country or urban and rural be accomplished in practical terms? I am particularly interested in what has just been said about a more holistic approach. If the issue is about the whole of Scotland, it must include our urban as well as our rural environment.

Bill Band: We have found the phrase, "deepening our connection with the land" to be quite interesting, as that involves a number of dimensions. One is educational and involves the extent to which people understand the use of the land, which can be addressed through farmers markets, school programmes and so on. Another involves people simply using and appreciating the countryside and another relates to people being involved in the decision-making process. That is quite hard just now—there is no obvious way for any rural community to be involved in the decision making that affects its land, except in national parks.

Mark Aitken: I agree that reconnecting town and country is important. There are many good examples of that already—farmers markets are an obvious example, as is education. We look to organisations such as the Scottish Agricultural College and other colleges and universities to increase awareness. There are industry-led initiatives in Leith that link environment and farming, and I know that a farmer-led organisation held an open day in Fife last year, to which about 1,000 people turned up. That is an excellent way of increasing awareness. The Scottish Agricultural College runs school visits to its farm at Auchincruive and the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute has been good about promoting the value of soil to school children and the general public.

All those initiatives should be built on because that kind of reconnection is extremely important, especially given that we are about to launch into the renegotiation of the CAP budget and so on. In SEPA we think that it is important to maintain a good budget to ensure that farmers meet public needs and farm sustainably in economic and environmental terms.

12:15

John Watt: I agree with Bill Band that the strategy is quite good at making the urban-rural link. I point out, though, the need to ensure that rural populations are also connected to the land because, with the reduction in employment in forests, farms and the like, an increasing proportion of the rural population has no such direct connection.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended a reception in this very building for the crofting connections project, which, through the curriculum for excellence, is allowing younger people in rural areas to reconnect with crofting. It is certainly important that we ensure that people in both rural and urban areas have that connection with the land.

Professor Miller: We need to increase the understanding of the interconnectedness of everything. When we think of land in rural areas we might well think of scenery and landscape but we do not necessarily put that together with reform of the CAP post-2013, what the payment mechanisms might mean and how all that might relate to changes in livestock numbers, cropping patterns and, indeed, changes to the landscape. It is a long-term exercise to build in that kind of understanding, which, as John Watt has pointed out, has been lost from rural as much as from urban communities. The curriculum for excellence sits right at the centre of such activity.

Charles Strang: Although not necessarily climate change or sustainable development-orientated, management plans for national scenic areas might well be worth looking at. You might well ask, "What management plans are these?" but I think that they are being worked up in one or two places.

John Scott: There are three of them.

Charles Strang: The plans cover landscape objectives as well as community and other interests, which brings us back to the idea of bringing together and openly discussing different values. In that respect, there are also village design statements, which are perhaps not so common in Scotland, and the transition towns movement. Obviously it would be daft if the movement did not consider its hinterland when going about its long-term activities with regard to energy.

One problem might be the scale of local development plans, which, generally speaking, cover entire council areas and do not go down to a level that local communities might consider to be terribly meaningful. Indeed, that is why I highlighted the need for supplementary planning guidance. If such plans look at a community and its surroundings, people will relate to them. After

all, even commuters take an interest in their environment and where their children are growing up, and that is part of the key to our taking a rather more serious view of climate change and what happens in the long term.

John Scott: Very good. I point out, though, that as well as the traditional uses of land in rural Scotland that we have been discussing, there is the industrialisation of such land. I hope that you will agree that visits to places such as the pumped storage scheme at Cruachan and the wind farm at Whitelee outside Glasgow should also be added to the educational process of appreciating landscape.

At the moment, we have all these overarching strategies, such as increasing the amount of tree cover from 15 to 25 per cent by 2050 and generating 50 per cent of electricity and 11 per cent of heat from renewable sources by 2020, as well as the flood plain management that we discussed earlier. How do we reconcile all those potentially irreconcilable demands and objectives? Food security is my favourite. I declare an interest in stating my position, which is that food production should be the first use of land in Scotland, given what the size of the world's population will be in 40 years' time and all the issues that surround that. I will stop making a speech, because I want your views.

Bill Band: I will kick off by suggesting that one should not start by saying that they are not reconcilable.

John Scott: I take your point.

Bill Band: We have multiple aims and the strategy does well in setting out their importance. Next, we need to work out what it means at a local level and whether those aims can be achieved at a local level.

I am very struck by the complexity of the maps in the back of the strategy, which indicate the complexity of the constraints and opportunities. It is not possible at a national level to work out what it means at a local level. As was discussed earlier, some sort of lower-level, regional process will be required to do that.

Once we have been through that process, we can begin to say whether we can meet all those aims. I am an optimist. I think that we probably can if we think of them all at the start.

John Scott: We can probably meet them all, but we will meet some more fully than others.

Charles Strang: It is probably unhelpful and too late to offer this comment now, but I did make it at the time. When the strategy was being discussed, it would have been helpful if some areas had been thought of in which to run pilots to give examples of the practical issues. Some rather horrid problems would have emerged, but it is in the nature of planning and producing strategies that their implications have to be worked out.

John Watt: Mr Scott's comments were interesting, but I do not think that food security would be the highest priority in Ardnamurchan.

John Scott: I fully accept that.

John Watt: I suppose that I am making the argument for the regionalisation and localisation of some of the guidance, because it cannot recommend the same approach everywhere. My point is that it is the responsibility of Government to make some of those decisions and, through the democratic process, to give an overarching view. I know that the strategy represents an attempt to go along that track, but I think that it has some way to go in being definitive about which direction we should be taking and what the priorities should be in different areas.

The Convener: Are you arguing for something like the marine planning area system that was brought in by the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, whereby each area decides on how best to use the marine landscape in that area, but that plan goes to Marine Scotland, which takes an overarching view of what is happening? It might have to go back to some areas and say that, from the point of view of Scotland's overall needs, they need to tweak their plans a little to fit into the overall picture.

John Watt: I believe that that has to be the case. There needs to be a regional approach.

John Scott: Charles Strang made an interesting point about pilots. We had pilots for the marine planning areas. I am very taken with the concept of a regional approach and an NPF 3, whoever had that idea.

Charles Strang: I suggested at the time that the national scenic areas would be good places to run pilots. In one or two areas management plans are being developed, but that work is not strictly related to the present exercise.

Mark Aitken: An essential requirement when it comes to helping land managers make decisions on whether their priority at farm or forestry level should be food, electricity, flooding or whatever is the provision of good-quality information. Whether we are talking about growing food, sequestering soil carbon, growing trees, developing flood plains or capturing renewables through wind farms and so on, basic information on the suitability of their land for those different objectives is useful. There should not be a requirement on land managers to follow that information, because it is their land.

Once those maps are produced and overlaid with particular targets relating to the water framework and so on, that will allow policy makers

to prioritise and consider what incentivisation is required to enable land managers to go for different land use. Information is extremely important. The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute has been very good to date with the mapping that it has provided, but I see opportunities for considering different scenario testing for different policy requirements and considering the information that comes out of that as a guide for policy makers in the Parliament and the Scottish Government.

Professor Miller: John Scott's question was about multiple targets, objectives and aims and whether they could all be achieved simultaneously. In a few places the strategy tends towards the point of view that things can be optimised—that there could be one solution. I realise that that is probably not what was implied, but the question made a connection back to the wording of the strategy.

Taking an optimising perspective is pretty risky because things will always change, so the solution will always change. There will not be a solution that satisfies attitudes now and in 10 and 20 years' time. The physical environment will change and the suitability of something planted today will change tomorrow, so I would steer away from talking about optimising. Rather, the strategy should be taken as a basis for contingency planning and exploring where the risks are and what the unintended consequences would be, and heading off irrevocable errors. Things will always happen at different scales that we will perhaps regret, but it is far better to view the strategy as a series of stepping-stones that are guided by the sustainable development agenda—the three pillars of sustainability, achieving prosperity, reducing greenhouse emissions and so on—and not to get stuck or accelerate in one direction while perhaps trading off adversely in another direction to hit certain targets. The contingency planning aspect should be important; the optimising aspect should be much less so.

John Scott: That is fascinating. I do not wish to set one member of the panel against another, but, with the benefit of hindsight, is an example of an irrevocable error the planting of Sitka spruce in the flow country many years ago?

Professor Miller: I surveyed those very bogs when I started my work in the mid-1980s. Since then, policy has changed significantly in respect of our extraction of peat, the building of a wind farm on one of the peat bogs and the reconsideration of planting policy. In 25 years or so, there have been changes in at least three different policy dimensions.

Bill Band: An example of an irrevocable error is the digging away of the peat in the carse of Stirling in the 19th century for agricultural improvement. That was a pretty horrendous decision, judging by our ecosystem values.

Jamie Farquhar: I will, with considerable temerity, try to differ slightly from the good and learned professor. I do not see anything wrong with optimising land use. That is what will happen. All the conflicts that have rightly been identified will certainly not be resolved in the first five years of the land use strategy, if it gets on to the books.

I return to Sandra White's urban question. If the strategy achieves only the outcome of delivering better connectivity and understanding and awareness of what happens in the countryside among the true urban population and the commuting population, it is worth implementing.

I think that Charles Strang suggested having a pilot in a national park, as there is already a framework that automatically draws in virtually all the players, and it provides a perfect opportunity. There are, however, good examples in the private sector, on large landed estates. Very few of those do not have their own land use strategy. However, on the ground, it will still be driven by a series of relatively small-time decisions made by land managers. Yes, we should have a strategy that influences their direction of travel, but we should not try to make that strategy dictate what they do.

12:30

Sandra White: The previous panel talked about the strategy giving direction to small farmers and land managers. You have picked up on the fact that there are many other strategies including national park strategies and forestry strategies. Is it right for us to expect small farmers and land managers to go through all the paperwork and read everything? Will the strategy give direction to landowners and small farmers?

Jamie Farquhar: I agree with Jonny Hall that if one farmer read the strategy it would be a miracle. I could also substitute the word "forester" for farmer.

Professor Miller: We conducted part of one of the underpinning land use studies, and an element of that was land manager decision making. A clear finding was an increasing differentiation between land managers who have access to information—who can professionalise for a variety of reasons, whether that is because they can afford it or because they know how to access the material—and those who do not. One can perceive that divide increasingly opening up. That returns us to the availability of information—the education and training element. Those who are aware of strategies and can keep all that information in their heads may be in the minority, but there are those who can afford to employ someone who knows where to look, to do that for them. That brings a

very different perspective. What is the capacity of land managers to bring together information in an effective and affordable way?

Mark Aitken: You are absolutely right to be concerned about overburdening small farmers with paperwork. In its work on Scotland's environment and rural services, SEPA has recognised the importance of minimising that burden on farmers. All the different strategies make a complex picture and there is a need for one-to-one independent advice from agricultural advisers who can see the bigger picture and are aware of the economic, environmental and social issues. There have been some successes. For example, there has been Scottish Government funding for the climate change focus farms and the so-called four-point plan. There has also been the work that SEPA is carrying out on priority catchments. Those are all good illustrations of the value of raising awareness among farmers through a trusted independent adviser looking at the bigger picture and giving advice to farmers that is, ultimately, economically suitable for them. It is about the adviser looking for the win-wins and how more efficient use can be made of the resources on the farm, such as fertilisers, manure, slurry, electricity, diesel and so on. There are win-wins that can be identified.

Bill Band: The mechanism for delivery is in tailoring the incentives that are available to land managers. It is not through the farmer reading the strategy document; it is through the strategy having a bearing on the incentive system, which the land manager will respond to.

John Watt: The question is how to valorise and incentivise public good. Whereas food security or food production would have been a driver for land use decisions in, say, Ardnamurchan, it is less so now that sheep and cattle numbers are dropping. The question now is what public good there is in that area that could produce value to sustain those communities, whether that is carbon sequestration, landscape value or the potential for renewables. That is one of the challenges and it is why the strategy should give more guidance on how to design incentives to produce more balanced land use decisions and sustainable rural communities.

John Scott: Two of the three members of the previous panel agreed that carbon sequestration, carbon capture or emissions reductions would require some form of enhancement, as it were, and Mr Farquhar alluded to the fact that organisations on the land have to be profitable if they are to deliver environmental benefits. Reducing emissions will not necessarily contribute to profit but, given the need to reduce emissions, what contribution should land managers make towards meeting emissions targets?

Jamie Farquhar: Plant more trees.

John Scott: That is fine and, perhaps predictably, that is your answer.

Jamie Farquhar: I make no apology for supporting the concept of the land use strategy; it should enable us to achieve our sector strategy of increasing woodland cover in Scotland, it may introduce other discipline and it could introduce a presumption in favour of forestry against a background of one of the highest forest management standards in the globe—the UK forestry standard and its associated guidelines.

The flow country will not be replanted. We will not plant conifers right up to every watercourse. It just ain't going to happen. We have learned a lot about what we plant, and even pure Sitka spruce plantations are environmentally positive and full of biodiversity. If the strategy can help us push our aims, it is worth doing.

Bill Band: We now have the Scottish Government's publication "Low Carbon Scotland: The Draft Report on Proposals and Policies". It is intended to help us to meet the climate change targets, and the section on rural land use gives an interesting insight into the carbon abatement potential of various activities. What strikes me strongly about that section is that the farming for a better climate measures have substantial abatement potential. What is more, many of those measures would have negative cost—in other words, they would lead to farm efficiencies and therefore be profitable for the farmer. One might therefore expect the measures to be taken voluntarily. There is quite a big message there: farming is a significant sector in the carbon abatement process.

Mark Aitken: As Jonny Hall on the previous panel suggested, reducing emissions should not be communicated as reducing inputs; it should be communicated as optimising inputs and carrying out efficient and effective farming, which is what many farmers are doing already—with considerable benefits. For example, the Scottish Agricultural College's Crichton farm near Dumfries, which is a highly successful dairy and research farm, uses substantially less fertiliser than farms of equivalent size.

Win-wins can be identified for farmers by following programmes such as farming for a better climate and its associated actions, which are all about effective and efficient farming.

In addition, we should consider what openings forthcoming policy opportunities, such as common agricultural policy reform and the SRDP, could provide for incentivising farmers to carry out measures such as carbon accounting on their farms or for rewarding them for sequestering carbon. We need to consider such economic tools

to give land managers rightful rewards when they carry out public goods.

John Scott: Excellent, thank you.

Jamie Farquhar: I will ruin everyone's day by mentioning two unmentionables: nuclear power and genetic modification. If we really want to cut emissions, we need to rebuild in some nuclear capacity that will, in itself, take pressure off fossil fuel generation and may give renewable energy the opportunity to catch up. If we are trying to maximise or optimise efficient delivery from our prime agricultural land, why are we so blinkered about GM?

Bill Wilson: Perhaps it is because of the effects in Argentina, where we see increasing problems with glycophosphate damage to people's health and local areas without any increased yield. That might be one of the reasons why we are not happy with GM.

Jamie Farquhar: GM is the wrong term, of course, because it immediately raises everyone's hackles. However, in forestry, we have been improving tree breeding with great success. Forest Research has done some of the leading work in the world on that. We can now plant a tree that we are confident will, over a 30 or 40-year period, grow at 20 to 22 per cent more than one that we have just cut down.

Bill Wilson: I suspect that there may be some difference between your improving of trees through breeding and Monsanto's use of GM crops. That may be where some of the disagreement lies.

Professor Miller: I will make an observation on crossing different strategies and policies. The land manager may be the wind farm developer, as small-scale wind turbine development has become prevalent in many parts of the north-east and increasingly down the coast. Equally, they would be the decision maker on aspects of biofuels and energy crops. They may also want to retain the tools, mechanisms and cropping patterns that have been on the land for a goodly number of years.

We should think about how we future proof the exploitation of the land. We may be able not only to take on new tools—new aspects of the low-energy inputs—but to jettison more quickly some of the tools that, because we still want to do what we did 10 years ago**,** might be higher-energy, high-cost inputs. The climate changes progressively and the soils change very slowly. Future proofing our land use will enable us to adapt to that more quickly.

That connects back into the discussion of education, informing and the SAC demonstration farms. We should focus on adaptation. There are many different dimensions to that adaptation equation, not only the input and output aspect.

John Scott: Therefore, many dimensions of the ability to adapt would probably be better left to ingenuity rather than Government prescription about how it should be done. That would drive us towards a high-level strategy of goals and objectives rather than a prescriptive approach.

Bill Wilson: I am slightly curious about the biodiversity value of Sitka spruce plantations. I would like to know what it is in comparison with the original ground or native trees. Perhaps the witnesses can provide some interesting comments on that later, because I think that the convener will object if I detour us into that topic now—I can sense her hackles rising even as I speak.

I invite the witnesses to comment generally about the benefits or disbenefits of implementing an ecosystems approach to the land use strategy in Scotland.

12:45

Bill Band: The ecosystems approach brings a wider perspective on biodiversity and is to be welcomed because it addresses the linkages between the biodiversity resource and people—how we benefit from that resource, whether it be from flood risk abatement, from storing carbon or from the cultural provision of nice scenery for us to visit. We place value on all those things.

A great deal has been said about an ecosystems approach, not just in the strategy but UK wide and internationally. The big question for us is to work out what it means at a local level. Ecosystems are incredibly complex and exist at all sorts of scales, from the national scale down to the local scale. Expressing their value in a way that people can understand will be quite a challenge, but once one has a handle on that value, it will be an important lever in decisions.

Mark Aitken: SEPA strongly supports the benefits of the ecosystem services approach; its inclusion in the strategy is welcome. The approach has the value of demonstrating linkages, as Bill Band said, and can demonstrate the specific value of the different ecosystems that operate on a piece of land. As was said in the previous session, a number of ecosystem services can be provided at the same time; farming can take place alongside the provision of other benefits such as soil carbon sequestration, good water quality and flood risk mitigation. Taking an ecosystems approach and looking more closely at the value of specific ecosystem services would allow policy makers to examine in more detail how to reward land managers appropriately for the ecosystem services that they provide on farms. The

information could be used in future policy making in relation to the SRDP, CAP reform and so on.

One issue—not just in Scotland—is that many of the current rewards for farming and implementing good environmental measures are based on income forgone. In some cases—for example, in relation to flood risk alleviation, water quality and sequestration of carbon—that income can be substantially less than a measure's value to the public.

Professor Miller: We were enthused to see that the ecosystems approach has been picked up. We did some work for the biodiversity group in the Scottish Government on the model ecosystems framework, as one means of implementing the approach. It is worth observing that ecosystem services and an ecosystems approach are two different things. In essence, the approach involves putting together planning and services. It is worth reflecting on that difference, so that we do not get confused and trip up.

Most of the organisations that are represented here are party to a major UK-wide exercise that is under way at the moment: the national ecosystem assessment. The exercise has national chapters and includes a detailed Scottish assessment, which will provide some sense of the baseline and of change through time—over 50, 70 or more years, on land and at sea—in the services that we have and the functions that the land provides. When the assessment is published, around spring next year, it will fill a major information gap. The question is, how will the ecosystems approach try to exploit that?

I bring one key distinction to the committee's attention. Whereas the national assessments are, by definition, top down, the essence of the ecosystems approach is that we can proceed from the bottom up. Therefore, it really does integrate right through to community involvement, which is espoused in the strategy. It is supposed to be adaptive; it is supposed to allow you to recognise that, whenever you make a decision, things have changed up to that point and things will move on and change again.

If that key principle can be applied at the right level of the decision-making hierarchy, or with the right Government support, it could be immensely powerful. It would allow quite a degree of subsidiarity in responsibilities, whether in relation to the farm manager or the estate owner who has their own management strategy, sub-catchment basin management planning or something that is a little lower than Scotland level, where you get national assessments. There is real value in that. Finding the people who will do it will be the trick. Which body is responsible? Can it be done autonomously? Is it provided by local authority mechanisms? What are the mechanisms to enable it to happen?

John Scott: Maybe the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute.

Professor Miller: I am sure that the rural and environment research and analysis directorate would be happy to hear that.

John Watt: I want to repeat something that I said earlier about value. I support Mark Aitken's views on this. How do we put a value on ecosystem services and how is that value transmitted to land managers and communities in relation to sustaining those communities? That is the challenge.

Bill Wilson: You heard our discussion earlier about a coherent network of protected areas. Do you have any comments on that?

Bill Band: A key report on that was done by Professor John Lawton—the Lawton review that was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It was an English study that looked at biodiversity and whether the network of protected areas in England was satisfactory, given what needed to be done. Broadly, Professor Lawton's conclusion was that the network was not enough and that there needed to be more bigger and joined-up protected areas. That key message probably has some relevance in Scotland, certainly in the more developed parts of Scotland. We need to look at that.

The joined-up approach is set with certain qualifications about the ability of different species to jump. Birds, for example, do not need continuous habitat in order to disperse from one area to another.

All I am saying is that the Lawton review is a baseline report that I think will set the tenor of what is meant by a coherent network for the future.

Bill Wilson: All being well, we will have John Lawton up to speak in the Scottish Parliament soon, so I will let you know when he comes.

The Convener: Should the land use strategy address the question of land tenure and, if so, what should the objective be? I know that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was mentioned in John Watt's submission.

John Watt: Unlike the previous panel, my answer is yes. The diversity of land tenures is important. Community land ownership is one of the best ways of bringing people back into contact with the land, in as much as they are making immediate and direct decisions on land management in the community in which they live. We welcome the strategy's discussion about the

role of communities. We would have liked to see it go further than simply being about communities being passive factors that can participate in a decision or be consulted. Communities perhaps have more of a role to play in some of the decisions about local land use. From the efforts that we have undertaken to help communities to acquire and manage land, we have seen significant benefits that fulfil all the objectives in the strategy—on economic growth, environmental benefit and strengthening communities.

Peter Peacock: I reflected during our earlier discussions on the point that John Watt has just made. I visited the island of Eigg in the summer, and in a sense, what is happening there—I guess it is the same in Assynt ,Gigha and many other places—is a co-ordinated land use strategy. The people have democratic control of the land. On Eigg they have decided—although they might not describe it in these terms—that they want to develop one area for forestry, one for energy production, one for housing, and others for their broadband communications network, allotments, polytunnels and so on.

You have probably spent more time in those types of communities than anyone in Scotland. Does the situation on Eigg, where things are happening in a tangible way but are not described in terms of a land use strategy, reflect what is happening elsewhere? Is it an argument for bringing much more of Scotland's land under democratic control?

John Watt: Yes, I think that you are right. Once communities have acquired land, especially bigger tracts, they create their own land use strategy and priorities. They consider—to return to John Scott's earlier question—what priorities they have for land use, and what they want to use a particular bit of land for. That obviously varies from place to place, and the communities have developed their own strategies for doing it.

As with all land management decisions, people follow the policy environment in which they live. If there are incentives for renewables, they will go for renewables, and if there are incentives for forestry, they will go for that. That is what guides them.

A comment was made in the previous session that sometimes public policy is behind community initiative. Communities themselves have decided what is needed for their survival and growth, and they have pushed on with it and made the best of the things that are available. Eigg is a good example of a community that has decided that having its own electricity grid that is not fossil fuel dependent is its highest priority. It now has 24-hour electricity that is not diesel generated but comes instead from a variety of alternative sources.

That is happening in various places. Another interesting initiative is in process on Harris. The owners of the Harris estate—the community owners—have deemed the creation of a national park to be of benefit to the community. I am sure that Peter Peacock will remember some of the challenges that were involved in introducing national parks in other places; there was a great deal of community resistance. The community in Harris, however, has had the initiative to try to develop that idea, whether or not it comes to fruition.

With regard to the points that I mentioned earlier, the community saw that the landscape and wild land value was one of its assets, and that a national park would add value to benefit the community in general.

On your second question about whether there should be more such schemes, democratically and community-owned land is appropriate in certain situations but perhaps not in others. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has been quite demanding since it has been in existence. Since the act came into force in 2003, only nine communities—or certainly fewer than 10—have acquired land through it. A lot of the other community acquisitions have taken place through normal market forces and agreements between buyers and sellers. It could be made easier for communities to do that, which could bring a wider range of benefits in rural areas.

13:00

The Convener: We commissioned some work on that, which we will be looking at in the new year.

John Scott: We are talking about land use strategy examples. Peter Peacock was talking about a community example in which planning exists, and I think that Mr Farquhar may have been talking about large estate owners having had their own land use strategy for planning purposes, in many cases for generations. Those are two working models that come from a different perspective. Could those models—and others, such as the national park models—be used to inform us in taking up Mr Strang's suggestion of developing NPF3? As a results-driven person, I want to see, if we are going to do that, how it will work. Is that a way of making the strategy work—using the examples to inform future strategy development?

Jamie Farquhar: Before answering that, convener, I would like to come back to your question. You allowed the previous panel only one word in answer to it, so my answer is no, but I will give a reason. We would be in danger of going down the wrong road and losing focus on the land

use strategy if it also addressed ownership. The strategy should be about how land and possibly marine interests are managed and, frankly, the ownership should be irrelevant.

I perfectly agree that there is a good role for community involvement. In the forestry world, there has been successful community involvement, particularly in outlying Forestry Commission properties. It makes the role of our particular trade association a little more awkward when there is community involvement as opposed to an individual owner, but that is not a reason to try to block that type of ownership.

Charles Strang: On the question of land ownership, I wrote the note to myself that democratically controlled land does not need to be democratically owned. There is a question of how the community is involved. Obviously, some estates have been successful at long-term national objectives, but sooner or later someone will come along and apply a different set of objectives. Equally, it is conceivable that a community could agree a set of objectives that are not in line with the plans to address the problems of climate change. In such a case, we would have to rely on the national incentive arrangements to kick in.

The community needs to be involved and engaged in a positive way. The Eigg example is a good one because it shows the energy that is being put towards addressing some of the problems of climate change by positive engagement with the community. We would hope to see that in the rest of the country, too.

The Convener: That concludes the evidence session with this panel of witnesses. I thank you all for giving us your evidence. If there is anything that you want to expand on in written supplementary evidence, please send it to the clerks as soon as possible.

That concludes the public part of today's meeting. I thank everyone in the public gallery for their attendance and the panel for coming in such adverse weather conditions.

13:04

Meeting continued in private until 13:21.

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