



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 22 June 2011

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RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2011, Session 4

CONVENER

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

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)

*Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

*Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD)

*Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)

*Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Bob Irvine (Scottish Government)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead)

Jonathan Pryce (Scottish Government)

Linda Rosborough (Scottish Government)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson)

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

Simon Watkins

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Wednesday 22 June 2011

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 10:32*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Rob Gibson): Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the second meeting in 2011 of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Members and the public should turn off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys because leaving them in flight mode or on silent will affect the broadcasting system.

We have received no formal apologies. I welcome Jean Urquhart MSP, who is sitting along with the committee. If she wishes to ask any questions after we have asked ours, she can do so.

Agenda item 1 is to seek the committee's agreement to take in private items 5 and 6. Item 5 is to discuss the evidence that we are to hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and item 6 is further discussion of the committee's business planning meeting. Do we agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and the Environment

10:34

The Convener: Item 2 is to hear evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. I welcome Richard Lochhead, the cabinet secretary, and Stewart Stevenson, the minister. I ask them to introduce their supporting officials.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Thank you. Before I kick off formally, would you like me to ask each official to say a quick word about their roles, to help the committee?

The Convener: Yes, please.

Richard Lochhead: Bob Irvine will kick off.

Bob Irvine (Scottish Government): I look after climate change policy and I am here to support Mr Stevenson on that issue.

Jonathan Pryce (Scottish Government): I am the director for rural and environment matters. My responsibilities cover policy on agriculture, farming and food, animal health and welfare, veterinary services, drinking water quality, environmental quality and natural resources.

Linda Rosborough (Scottish Government): I am interim director of Marine Scotland, which is the part of the Scottish Government that is charged with integrated management of the sea. Its responsibilities include fisheries and fisheries protection, the compliance role, marine science, the licensing of renewables, marine planning and aquaculture.

The Convener: Thank you. The cabinet secretary may want to update the committee on any issues that relate to his remit before we come to questions.

Richard Lochhead: Thank you, convener. I am delighted to have the opportunity to make my first appearance before your committee in this new session. I congratulate members who are new on your appointment to this very important committee, which is one of the Parliament's best. I see a couple of old veterans sitting around the table, and some other faces who have returned after long absences. It is good to see some familiar faces as well as new faces. I wish you all the best of luck for the future, with some exciting but challenging portfolios to discuss.

There is a Government debate this afternoon on taking Scotland forward in the rural affairs and environment portfolio, in which we will meet again

and no doubt cover a lot of similar ground. I understand that you have given us 20 minutes to make opening statements when we are usually given five minutes. That is very generous of the committee, and I hope that you will not regret it. We will do our best to keep our remarks focused before moving on to the open discussion.

I will talk initially about my view of rural affairs and the environment, and cover our high-level vision for the portfolio over the course of this session of Parliament. I will then hand over to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, who will talk briefly about climate change and the position around delivery of our very ambitious emissions reduction targets. We will be happy to follow up any points that you wish to pursue and, as always, we are willing to follow up afterwards with more detail in writing to the committee.

I hope that the committee will agree that although rural Scotland is in relatively good health, our rural communities are not immune to the very tough economic times of the past two or three years. There are financial pressures on everyone and some of those—particularly high fuel prices—are felt particularly keenly in our rural communities. However, there are signs that rural Scotland has come through the economic crisis with robustness and resilience. Our task is to support rural communities and ensure that they continue to thrive.

Members may recall the “Speak up for Rural Scotland” consultation that we conducted last year. In March I was pleased to launch “Our Rural Future: The Scottish Government’s response to the Speak Up for Rural Scotland consultation”, which set out the results. We therefore have a clearer picture of a rural Scotland that is punching above its weight in its contribution to our nation’s success.

Rural Scotland is a place where people are choosing to live, and where they are more economically active and involved in their local communities. Looking to the future, we need to provide new economic opportunities, particularly for young families, as well as to support existing sectors. For instance, to underpin economic development in the coming years we must rise to the challenge of connecting rural Scotland to the world through high-speed broadband, the lack of which many of us accept is a barrier to investment. We are working with local authorities to ensure that Scotland accesses as much UK funding as possible to enable that to happen. Earlier this year I chaired a rural broadband summit to highlight our objectives and to promote solutions to ensure that rural Scotland joins the global connected economy. That includes extending mobile phone coverage as well as broadband; I am sure that I

speak for many when I talk about how extremely frustrated we are in rural communities at the lack of mobile phone coverage in many areas.

Alongside the information superhighway, there is the challenge of travelling along the regular highway. The cost of fuel for road travel and home energy in rural Scotland continues to place a much bigger burden on households and businesses in rural Scotland than on those elsewhere in the country. We have already pressed for a lower rate of fuel duty in rural areas: the UK Government will introduce a pilot to reduce fuel duty in many of our island communities, but we will continue to make the case that help should be extended to mainland rural Scotland and not just islands. We originally thought that that was going to be the case, so we will continue to push for it.

As well as removing disadvantages in access to finite fuels, we are acting to ensure that communities benefit from the renewable energy revolution. Renewables provide a fantastic economic opportunity for rural and coastal Scotland through income generation, job creation and strengthened communities. As well as powering the nation, they should help to empower our communities, so it is important that communities realise that they can control their own natural resources and distribute income from projects for their own benefit.

It is also important that Scotland benefits from the massive natural resources on its doorstep, which is why we are pressing the UK Government to give the Scottish Parliament greater responsibilities over energy including, of course, the devolution of responsibility for the Crown estate. Existing Scottish Government funding to support investment in renewables is increasingly being anchored with a guarantee of community benefit from successful projects. We will now look to deliver a simpler system for developers and communities in order to give communities—I hope—the certainty and confidence that they need to initiate and take forward projects.

To help communities to achieve a greener Scotland and to meet our climate change targets, we will continue to maintain the climate challenge fund for the duration of this session of Parliament. Since the election, we have already committed to supporting 130 new community-based projects, which brings to 461 the total being funded, with more than £30 million of investment in the last parliamentary session alone, and that extended funding will help more communities across Scotland to come forward with their own solutions to the climate challenge and help to secure the benefits of a low-carbon economy.

The issue of climate change rose in prominence like no other during the previous parliamentary session. With the world-leading Climate Change

(Scotland) Act 2009 in place, our focus now turns to delivery, and the minister and I will work with colleagues across Government and Parliament to ensure that all sectors in Scotland make their contributions. Stewart Stevenson will say something shortly about the on-going programme to deliver emissions reductions, but I want to cover the role of this portfolio in providing solutions.

First, the land use strategy, which was published in March, provides an opportunity to look at how we will achieve the sustainable—in every sense—use of our land resources as well as, of course, protecting biodiversity. After all, many Governments across the world failed to achieve their 2010 targets and we are now looking towards the internationally agreed 2020 targets. However, our land use strategy sets out a vision of a Scotland that fully recognises, understands and values the importance of our land resources. We want land-based industries and businesses that work with nature, and we want responsible stewardship of Scotland's natural resources and better connections between communities and the land.

The land itself is vital to our efforts to reduce climate change's worst impacts. As we know, Scottish soil contains around 3 billion tonnes of carbon; given that 1.6 billion tonnes of that is in our peatlands alone, we are committed to protecting our peatlands and soils and have engaged with international effort on peatlands by supporting the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's technical development work on peatland carbon sinks. We have also joined an international pledge on forestry and climate change and, as part of our initiative to plant a tree for everyone on the planet, we will continue to plough ahead with planting 100 million new trees to lock up more carbon than ever before.

Of course, we cannot talk about land management without referring to agriculture. Scottish farmers have shown a real commitment to reducing on-farm greenhouse gas emissions. Implementing sustainable farming practices can save money and cut carbon at the same time and we should pursue such win-win moves. Our farmers are on board and will continue to support our efforts; indeed, I am sure that we are all looking forward to meeting many of them later this week at the Royal Highland show.

Our farmers' commitment to responsible stewardship of our land supports another of Scotland's great strengths: our food and drink industry. They provide the raw materials for an industry that in sales alone is worth £11 billion a year to the Scottish economy. Food and drink's record growth in recent years has been buoyed by increased recognition of premium Scottish goods at home and abroad. I am sure that I speak for the

committee when I say that everywhere I go I want to see quality Scottish produce on sale that is clearly labelled as Scottish, with everyone prepared to pay a premium because it is clear that it is Scottish. We want to push for the Scottish brand on food and drink to be seen as the number 1 choice at home and abroad; after all, Scotland's producers and processors turn out quality products that we know the world wants to buy.

The success of Scottish food and drink has been demonstrated by indicator after indicator, from Scottish salmon to Scottish beef to, of course, our peerless Scotch whisky sector, but we want to do more. We want to add extra value to the process and our raw materials and to provide a further significant boost to our rural economy. Our food and drink policy, which was published in 2009, has been greatly successful in linking for the very first time economic growth to environmental sustainability and health and wellbeing. We need to take that to the next level over the next five years.

Given that Scotland's image helps our food and drink sector, we need to manage carefully our natural capital: our clear waters, our green pastures, our fertile soils and our abundant seas. We have some of the best natural resources on the planet. The rural and coastal communities can use those natural advantages to boost Scotland's economy in a globally competitive environment.

10:45

Of course, the future success of the men and women who work on the land or whose livelihoods depend on our seas all depends on successful negotiations in the new common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We are approaching a very important point in advancing our relationship with Europe on agriculture and fisheries. Formal negotiations on the future of the CAP will start later this year. I will argue for fairness, flexibility and simplification as our priorities for the future of the CAP. We need a fair share of the overall CAP budget, we need the flexibility to address disadvantages that Scottish farmers and crofters face in working in less-favoured area lands and we need a simplified CAP that cuts out the red tape as much as possible and also allows a proportionate monitoring and enforcement regime.

In my view, we cannot stand back and rely on the UK to deliver for Scotland on the CAP. We all know that the coalition wants Europe to cut the overall CAP budget and to phase out direct payments. We accept that some reform is clearly needed, but I believe that Scotland's farmers are not safe in the UK's hands. For that reason, it is essential that Scotland be at the heart of the European negotiations.

The story on fisheries is the same; frankly, the common fisheries policy is broken. I expect that we all accept that. A radical overhaul of European Union fisheries policy is needed if we are to guarantee a sustainable industry in the future, a healthy marine environment and vibrant fishing communities. The Commission will come out with its proposals in July, and the implementation of the final policy will follow in 2013. That is a long lead time with plenty of scope—I hope—for Scotland to influence the decisions that lie ahead.

I will continue to promote Scottish priorities during the reform process. I want greater responsibility for fisheries management to be returned from Brussels to Scotland. We have been at the front of the crowd in making that point to the Commission. Most of all, of course, Scotland wants an end to the wasteful practice of discarding good-quality fish overboard—to the waste of a precious food resource. There might not be simple solutions to that, but we must try to achieve that outcome.

Our experience of the conservation credit scheme and catch quotas shows that behaviour can change when Government and industry work in partnership. I also want to protect Scotland's historic fishing rights. Unrestricted international quota trading will lead to our national resource being sold to other countries. Those with the deepest pockets will win out, be they overseas multinationals or anyone else. If that happens, Scotland's fishing communities will be left to pick up the pieces and face long-term social and economic implications.

On both the CAP and the CFP, it is vital that Scotland has a strong voice in Europe, which includes Scottish ministers attending and participating in meetings of the European Council of Ministers. That point was tested just last week by my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs in discussions with the Foreign Secretary at the joint ministerial committee.

In the meantime, we will keep our channels of communication open with other member states and the European Commission as we face up to negotiations in the months and years ahead. It is important for us all to recognise that it is not just some distant and remote industry that is affected by the kind of decisions to which I have referred, but communities the length and breadth of Scotland. It is important that we listen to those communities. Likewise, I will always be very keen to hear from rural communities or anybody with a stake in the health of rural Scotland. I am sure that the committee feels the same way. I will certainly speak to many people during my summer tour of rural Scotland. Of course, I always meet many people from rural Scotland when fulfilling my

duties as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment. As an MSP from a rural constituency, like many people around this table, I understand and am connected directly to rural Scotland.

Our thriving rural communities are punching above their weight and are a crucial part of realising our purpose, which is for all Scotland to flourish through sustainable economic growth. In addition, our rural communities and our precious environment are, of course, crucial parts of our nation's success.

Thank you very much. I will hand over to Stewart Stevenson, who will make a few brief remarks on his lead responsibility for climate change.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Thank you, cabinet secretary, for warming up the audience so effectively, and thank you, committee and convener, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words. Some of this will be familiar, some will be a restatement of what you have heard and some will be a development of what we already know.

Let me just draw your attention to “Low Carbon Scotland”, which is the report on policies and proposals that we published in March. It is an important underpinning for our actions over the next decade. Previous committees, of course, were helpful in their scrutiny of the draft report. Roseanna Cunningham—my successor and predecessor, being, as I am, a retread—reported on and delivered that to Parliament. That was part of what we committed to do when we passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

We have put in place annual targets up to 2022, which set the strategic direction to take us to a 42 per cent reduction by 2020 and the longer-term goal of an 80 per cent reduction by 2050. The report shows how that can be done, but it also shows that it will not be easy. Current policies will get us most of the way there, but additional measures will be needed. Proposals will be developed into policies during the coming years and months and new proposals might well emerge to support us. We will keep the viability of proposals under review.

In certain areas, we are dealing with issues that are not yet fully understood, and technological changes might help or hinder. We will consider whether we need further measures in the future. We do not underestimate the challenge, and we will work within the constraints of the spending restrictions that have been put in place by the UK Government. Our key focus as a Government remains to deliver effective public services and a

successful country, so sustainable economic growth is an important part of our consideration.

In the context of climate change, there are key opportunities for us to build a low-carbon economy. That is now inevitable; how successful we are will depend on how we engage in the matter. The low-carbon economy is already worth some £9 billion per year and we think that the figure will rise by some 50 per cent by 2015, so that the low-carbon economy will account for more than 10 per cent of the entire Scottish economy, creating 130,000 low-carbon jobs by 2020 and bringing huge benefits across a range of policy areas.

We need to use the energy that we have more efficiently. We need energy efficiency measures, to reduce fuel bills and create warmer homes and we need greater levels of active travel and improved air quality, which will bring health and lifestyle benefits. We cannot do that alone, by Government fiat; we need to engage people throughout Scotland. In addition to our statutory duties, we have prepared a low-carbon economic strategy and zero waste plan, which we are engaged in delivering. We want to maintain the enthusiasm and commitment that there has been throughout civic Scotland and among many people in our communities, to ensure that we deliver. The public engagement strategy, which came out in December, is the first in a series of steps.

We also want to be consistent on the international stage and to look for ambition from others. We are close to discussions in Europe. I spent yesterday at the environment council and I had breakfast with Chris Huhne and other ministers from the climate-change-ambitious community. This morning I had a telephone conversation with Richard Benyon, and I had lunch with Caroline Spelman yesterday. I also met the Slovenian environment minister and—in relation to the comments that the cabinet secretary made—we established that the Slovenians share our interest in peat, so it is good to have allies in that regard. Similarly, when I spoke to the Latvian environment minister later in the day, I found that peatlands are an important asset for Latvia. We had a successful and useful day. I also had a brief meeting with my old friend the Maltese Minister for Resources and Rural Affairs, who will visit Scotland at the end of next month to look at some of the things that we are doing, as a result of a suggestion that I made to him—I think in June last year.

Such meetings always present a good opportunity to have high-level and sometimes detailed discussions with a wide range of international partners. We made progress at the environment council yesterday. The key issue was a discussion about the Commission's low-carbon

road map to 2050 and in particular the EU's current target for emissions reductions to 2020, which is 20 per cent. We, the UK and other leading countries in Europe want the target to go to 30 per cent. A proposal that included a 25 per cent target was put forward yesterday, which represents substantial progress, and 26 out of the 27 countries were prepared to support it. That is a substantial shift of opinion in favour of climate change ambition. Unfortunately, at the very last moment, the Poles concluded that they could not support it. We made progress, even if we could not achieve unanimity yesterday.

We play a full and active part in the UK delegation at the environment council and I look forward to working with Chris Huhne in the run up to the Durban United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change summit in December.

We are demonstrating real leadership and persuading people of the value of our position. The UK, similarly, is with us; we are pretty much in the same position. The delivery of policies and the assessment of the proposals to which I have referred will be integrated into our policy development, and that will be very important.

The next thing that the committee will see is the report from the UK Climate Change Committee that will provide advice on the next range of targets from 2023-27. I must introduce a Scottish statutory instrument to Parliament by 30 October, and we are on target with that. That will be followed by a second report on policies and proposals to cover a further five-year period; we will talk to the clerks to make sure that we find the best way to allow the committee to deal with that.

I look forward to working with the committee and to receiving its support and critical encouragement to further action. Thank you, convener.

The Convener: That could be a stimulating relationship and to focus it, I invite members to let me know if they want to ask questions.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, as you rightly pointed out in your opening remarks, one of the key issues that is affecting rural communities across Scotland is the extent of their digital connectivity. Superfast broadband and mobile phone 3G coverage are of crucial importance for improving the economic opportunities for enterprises that are located in our rural areas. They will also help to reduce the outward migration of people from rural areas, encourage more people to stay and new people to come in, not to mention their potential impact on carbon emissions reduction. What progress has been made with the UK funding for broadband delivery and extending broadband to other parts of rural Scotland, particularly the south of Scotland?

Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council, along with NHS Borders, NHS Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Enterprise, are putting together a bid through the development of the local broadband plan for a share of the funding from broadband delivery UK. What support is being given to that bid?

Richard Lochhead: Thank you for the question; it is a good topic. We all agree that broadband has to be higher up the agenda for the next five years than it has been in the past because there is an opportunity to get funding from the UK Government. As you will be aware, the first tranche of that funding is earmarked for the Highlands and Islands. However, work is being done with the south of Scotland alliance, and the public sector is involved in that. We must maximise Scotland's share of the UK funds and the work of the UK body that is responsible for the funding.

A lot of work is being done just now. We had a rural broadband summit a few months ago, and we will follow that up shortly with another event to catch up with where we are and start planning ahead. The Government's digital strategy aims to bring Scotland up to scratch by 2020, with 2015 being a major landmark on the way to that overall target. We have to make progress in rural Scotland.

Aileen McLeod: Thank you for that. I also welcome the £50 million next generation digital fund that was set out in the SNP manifesto during the election campaign. How will that be rolled out? Will there be any obstacles to rolling it out?

11:00

Richard Lochhead: The next spending review will look at the budget headings and the £50 million that you mentioned. It is fair to say that we hope that the focus for that money will be on broadband in rural areas and on bringing rural communities up to speed. That is a major opportunity and it signifies the importance that the Parliament will attach to the issue.

The Government will, of course, speak to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee and every other committee about what our priorities should be for the next spending review, and you will also have input into the budget. As the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, I am certainly determined that we do our best to ensure that the focus is on our rural communities.

The difficulty so far has been that the markers laid down by UK policy for what should be achieved indicate that 80 per cent of the UK should be covered by broadband. That means, of course, that most of the remaining 20 per cent is in

rural Scotland, which is always the last area to benefit from UK policies on broadband and many other issues. We have to change that and ensure that rural Scotland is advancing on broadband at the same pace as urban areas of Scotland. That is a big challenge, but we have to do our best to achieve that between now and 2020.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I have a question for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. What action is the Government taking to achieve Scotland's ambitious target, which was put in legislation two years ago, of reducing emissions by 42 per cent? Perhaps in answering that, the minister could address what is being done to encourage the greater levels of active travel that have been talked about, as well as demand reduction for energy.

Stewart Stevenson: The first thing that I draw to the committee's attention is that we are half way towards the 42 per cent target, with a 21.2 per cent reduction on the 1990 baseline and the 1995 baseline for some gases. However, the target is over 20 years; we have 10 years to achieve the other half. A clear uplift is now required in the actions that we need to take.

Ms Marra specifically asked about active travel. That allows me to highlight a point that committee members are likely to be aware of, which is that every minister must be a climate change minister. Last week, we got the climate change team in to speak to all the ministers to help them to formulate their responses in different policy areas. Active travel is the responsibility of my colleague Keith Brown, the Minister for Housing and Transport. We have increased the amount of money that is being invested in cycling infrastructure following a successful long-term programme by Sustrans to develop cycling facilities throughout Scotland. In addition, the new rolling stock that has just been introduced to Scotland's rail network is capable of carrying more cycles than its predecessors.

Walking is, of course, a health issue. We are seeking to get more kids to walk to school. That has an important part to play in changing adult behaviour, because whenever a parent takes a kid to school by car, the odds are that they will do the rest of their commute by car. If, however, kids are able to walk to school as a result of the safer routes to school initiative or other initiatives, it is more likely that more people will travel by public transport.

We also saw an increase in people moving to public transport when fuel prices went up, and a proportion of that has been sustained.

Therefore, we are making progress, but getting messages across and making people more aware of the options that are available to them, so that

more people will use public transport and walk, are among the aims of the public engagement strategy.

Jenny Marra: Will you address the demand reduction point as well, minister?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry, but can you clarify specifically what demand reduction you were referring to? Perhaps I did not write that down.

Jenny Marra: I understand that, to achieve the 42 per cent reduction in emissions, we need to reduce the amount of energy that we use. That is key to meeting the 42 per cent target. What is the Government doing to address demand reduction domestically or in businesses? I am sorry that I was not clear.

Stewart Stevenson: No—it may have been me who failed to tune into what you were saying.

On demand reduction, we are investing £35 million in renewable energy efficiency, which is an important thing. The home insulation scheme and the energy assistance package will be supported with £48 million in 2011-12. A secondary point worth making is that those schemes also serve the fuel poverty agendas. When we reduce the amount of fuel that is required to heat homes, we also reduce bills.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth is engaged with the energy companies in the face of some quite draconian price increases, which will prove formidable. When the price goes up, demand may well go down, but that is not an ideal way to achieve demand reduction.

We can reduce demand for energy if more people use public transport. We are providing £61 million for bus services. The £185 million for concessionary travel plays its part in sustaining routes that are used by people outside the concessionary travel scheme. We have a £25 million budget for sustainable and active travel.

We can also make reductions through waste policies, for which we have £26 million—which is £2 million more than in the previous year. There is a wide range of initiatives.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I wish to address two policy areas if I may, but we will see how we get on—depending on the look on your face, convener.

The first subject that I wish to touch on, cabinet secretary, is forestry. The Scottish Government has understandable and ambitious targets of increasing forest cover to 25 per cent. The fact is, however, that the rate of planting is reducing, not increasing. One of the reasons for that appears to be the huge hectareage of forestry that is being

felled to accommodate onshore wind farm developments—but perhaps that is another subject area. Anyway, how are you planning to address the forestry issue? In particular, it seems to be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to achieve that target of forested cover without impacting on agricultural production on the available land.

Richard Lochhead: That is a good question—it is very topical, and raises some interrelated issues, including climate change and the forestry industry.

First, I will pick you up on your wind farm point: for most, if not all, wind farms where it is necessary to fell trees, the trees have to be replanted elsewhere. However, I will check out that point and get back to the committee to ensure that the information is accurate.

The big picture is that Scotland has 17 per cent forestry cover, compared with a European average of about 33 per cent. We used to have a lot more forestry cover than we have today. In most people's minds, there should be a lot of scope for increasing forestry cover, both to ensure continuity of supply in the forestry sector and to help achieve our climate change targets.

You spoke about the impact on agriculture and about planting rates. We have taken steps over the past couple of years to improve planting rates by making it easier to apply for the relevant funds, and we hope that the improvement will now come to fruition. Many more big schemes are being funded through the Scottish rural development programme. We are trying to ease the process in respect of some of the obstacles that people have found in applying through the SRDP.

When the SRDP got off the ground about three or four years ago, there were some issues with forestry and woodland applications, which we have done our best to iron out. Given the economics at the time, there were other, more profitable activities for people than planting forestry. Thankfully, the economics have improved, and we have made it easier for people to apply for funding. We hope that planting rates will increase—I think that the latest statistics will show an upward trend—although there was a downward trend in planting throughout the 2000s. It is a 10-year issue; the trend has not just developed over the past couple of years, and we must do our best to reverse it in order to achieve our targets.

We need the support of the agriculture sector to achieve our targets on planting rates. There are many good examples of farmers getting involved in woodland expansion. Quality Meat Scotland is involved and the Forestry Commission works with farming organisations. The work is moving

forward, although I accept that many people see a tension in using land that is good for food production for forestry planting. I will make an announcement at the Royal Highland Show about how we will take forward that debate. During the election campaign, I pledged that one of the first stages in delivering our land use strategy would be to consider the debate between the agriculture and forestry sectors and to ensure that they work together. I hope that that will address some of the agriculture sector's fears about prime land being used for forestry planting.

As a farmer, Mr Fergusson, you will be aware that there are many examples of why forestry is good for any farming operation. For example, woodland can help as a shelter belt for livestock. We can move forward constructively on the debate.

Alex Fergusson: Absolutely. I do not disagree with anything that you said. I hope that your vision of a turnaround in planting acreages comes true—I am not convinced that it will, but time will tell.

How will you keep a check on the impact of an increased acreage of forestry on food security, which I am sure you will agree is important for us in Scotland, particularly if the Government's ambitions on food and drink are to be realised? If the vast increase in the number of acres that are planted has a negative impact on our food production, by the time that we realise that, it will be too late because the land will already have been planted. What checks and balances do you hope to have in place as the policy progresses to ensure the security of our food supplies?

Richard Lochhead: As you will be aware, there are regional forestry strategies in Scotland. We must ensure that they work and are enforced to a degree by the planners. In turn, the land use strategy looks at the overall situation with Scotland's land and aims to address some of the conflicts and competing demands for the coming decades. We have now laid down the principles of the land use strategy and we are moving into the delivery phase. We need the strategy to be taken into account by planners in Scotland, and a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that that happens. The Forestry Commission already plays a role—it has guidelines in place to ensure that, when it buys land for planting, it does not buy good-quality or prime land that should be used for food production.

I am not saying that there is no room for improvement. The debate is a new one but, as a country, we must face up to the fact that we have signed up to ambitious climate change targets and that we require forestry cover to achieve them. We are doing that. Further, we have to achieve the outcomes that the forestry sector wants, as it is responsible for employing thousands of people in

rural communities. The forestry sector needs continuity of supply. There are competing demands. I will not say that the Government has all the answers about how to achieve all that for future generations but, as a nation, we are beginning to address the issue of using our land effectively. We have to consider how the planning system takes into account the land use and forestry strategies and we must ensure that we get that right.

Alex Fergusson: Much of the blanket planting that was done in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is coming to maturity and being extracted, to the considerable detriment of a number of small rural communities because of the limited roads infrastructure and the size of the roads. I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware that that is becoming a real problem. Do you have any ambitions to restore the strategic timber transport fund to allow the expansion of in-forest roads to alleviate some of the problems?

Richard Lochhead: We are giving that attention and we will look at it as part of the spending review. There have been a number of difficult budget decisions in the past year or so, but we recognise that the fund plays an important role and we will do our best to see what we can do about it.

Stewart Stevenson: To supplement that, there are a couple of good examples of alternative transport. We have given support to railway transport, and we supported a project on Raasay in which timber was extracted by sea. There is a range of options, some of which are applicable only in specific circumstances. The Government is considering all the options and is trying to be imaginative in doing that, but it is up to the industry to produce good-quality proposals. In my previous role as transport minister, I had difficulty spending some of the money that was allocated because proposals did not come forward.

11:15

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, I will ask you a question about the key issue of the CAP reforms, which you were right to highlight at the outset. Further to conversations with farmers during the election campaign, it is clear to many of us that farmers would much prefer you, their cabinet secretary, to lead the negotiations on their behalf, because of the marked divergence of views between our Government here and the Westminster Government. Given that getting the reforms right for Scottish farmers is vital, what practical steps—including a leading role for you as the Scottish Government's representative in the negotiations—could be taken to secure the best result for our farmers? Do you have thoughts on that?

Richard Lochhead: The issue is important, because we must do our utmost to get the best possible outcome for our agricultural sector from the CAP negotiations. Scotland has distinctive needs and a distinctive agricultural profile. In some ways, it is the reverse image of south of the border. About 15 per cent of Scotland is non-LFA land, and—obviously—85 per cent is LFA land, whereas the situation is almost exactly the opposite south of the border. Therefore, Scottish agriculture has distinctive needs, which means that we need a distinctive voice. The Government has worked closely with our farmers and crofters in the past couple of years to formulate a Scottish position on what the new CAP should look like.

Our distinctive needs must be taken into account. We have approached that in three ways. First, we set up the Pack inquiry—I urge new committee members in particular to look at its report. The Pack inquiry made an impact not just in Scotland and across these islands but in Europe—a European commissioner is now directly familiar with Scotland's views on where the CAP should go, as are many other policy makers.

Scotland can rally around some key principles of the Pack report, such as the important principles that more fragile areas should have help and that safeguards should ensure that the CAP delivers for active agriculture. The Pack report was our first initiative to make an impact on Europe and to formulate Scotland's position and it was a success. Of course, we must negotiate the key principles as time goes on.

Secondly, we have dealt directly with the European Commission and other member states as far as has been possible. Thirdly, we have tried to influence the UK position. That three-pronged strategy is how we have tried to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard in the CAP negotiations.

You raised a general point about how Scotland's voice might be heard directly in the negotiations. We attend European negotiations, which is important, because it means that we are in the room when decisions are being taken. However, it is important to be in the room when decisions are being negotiated—a subtle difference exists. It is one thing to be in the Council of Ministers, which is helpful—we welcome the UK Government's constructive work with us on that. However, when crucial negotiations take place in the next couple of years, I would like Scotland to be in the room, too. Such negotiations happen in side rooms, when the UK Government meets the holder of the EU presidency and the EU commissioner.

Stewart Stevenson: I will make a wee supplementary point on the basis of what happened yesterday, when the Danish environment minister invited Scotland to be present at a grouping of interested nations. I do

not know whether that was for the first time, but our continued engagement in Europe at different levels is building relationships. If we say the right things and engage in the right ways, we are drawn in. However, that depends on individuals taking such initiatives and is not the formal position, from which we might be able to deliver even more.

Richard Lochhead: We should be at the heart of the negotiations because the UK Government's position is being dictated by the UK Treasury and that position is a million miles from what Scotland hopes to secure from the CAP negotiations. My fear is that, if we are not at the heart of the negotiations on agriculture and fisheries, our position will not be reflected in the negotiations. That is extremely dangerous from the point of view of not only Scotland's farmers and fishermen but the Scottish economy.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary and minister for their answers, and I will add just one point. In my view, if the UK Government fails to recognise the distinctive Scottish position in what are crucial negotiations, it will have to live with the consequences. I do not think that the farming community in Scotland will put up with such a veto any longer.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The cabinet secretary and the minister both mentioned peatland restoration and I know that the convener is extremely interested in the issue. From memory, I think that the restoration of 60,000 hectares would save 2.7 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually. I think that the price tag for that was something like £100 million, although the programme would bring in European money, which is presumably why Latvia and Slovenia are also interested. Has there been any discussion as part of the spending review about finding the money to get that programme off the ground?

Richard Lochhead: The first point to make is that the spending review is just getting under way, so we have a lot of negotiations in the months ahead. It is a good question that highlights one of our big challenges and how we build it into our policy making and budget decisions. I agree that it is important to do that.

We will have a new Scotland rural development programme from 2013 onwards, in which, as a country, we have to look at what we want to deliver. We have to look at the land use strategy and how it will be delivered. Protecting peatlands is part of that strategy. It is premature to give you any answers, as I am not really in a position to do so, other than to say that I accept that we have to build into the rural development programme the way in which our land managers and others protect our peatland and ensure that that is part of the budget negotiations.

Stewart Stevenson may wish to supplement what I am saying, but most of the work so far has been to understand the importance of peatlands. The importance of the peatlands in Scotland has risen up the agenda in the past 12 months alone. We have had major conferences and events in Scotland, including in the past few days, and peatlands now have a much higher profile. As a country, we now have a greater understanding of the massive role that Scotland can play in the European context in protecting our peatlands, because Europe's peatlands are generally found in Scotland.

We are moving on from the understanding and knowledge stage to looking at the policy stage and asking what our understanding means for policy in Scotland. How do we protect our peatlands, who does that, and how is it paid for?

Stewart Stevenson: I have several things to add. Elaine Murray's suggestion about the specific benefit from peatland is not yet underpinned by sufficiently robust science. There will be a meeting in Scotland, which many countries from across Europe will attend, before the end of the summer recess—I cannot quite summon to mind the exact date. Part of yesterday's engagement at the environment council was to establish who else it may be useful to bring to the meeting. We share the view that peatland has a substantial contribution to make to the climate change agenda, but there is a wider issue.

At the moment, the contribution of peatland to the sequestration of greenhouse gases is not enumerated in the accounting under the Kyoto protocol, so part of our early objective, via the UNFCCC and another body whose name temporarily escapes me, is to seek to get peatland included. Although restoring peatland to sequester greenhouse gases is the right thing to do, it will be disappointing if our efforts are not reflected in our progress towards our targets because the accounting does not include peatlands.

Part of our continuing international engagement will be to address that issue, which is why I was particularly pleased yesterday to find another couple of allies, which we had not previously identified, that similarly wish to gain the benefits from changing the system of accounting for climate change. I am sure that, as we have further engagement, we will find others.

Elaine Murray: Actually, a number of greenhouse gases were missed off the Kyoto protocol.

With regard to what the cabinet secretary was saying, this is also all about the financial implications of restoring degraded peatlands instead of simply protecting existing peatland.

Given that Scotland has a huge amount of Europe's blanket bog, we have an enormous contribution to make in that respect and I hope that the Government is looking at what is an important issue.

Finally, as the cabinet secretary pointed out, we, like much of the rest of Europe, failed to meet our biodiversity targets. Given that, are you able to give us a progress report on the second national planning framework's commitments on establishing a national ecological framework and on large-scale habitat restoration?

Richard Lochhead: If members are happy for me to do so, I will write back to the committee on the specific point about habitats. Indirectly related to the member's question, however, is a recent report from Scottish Natural Heritage, which is more or less an inventory of Scotland's natural capital showing that over the past 10 years the country's environmental assets have improved.

Stewart Stevenson: During a substantial debate on the EU's biodiversity strategy to 2020 at yesterday's EU environment council, there was substantial recognition that across Europe effort to underpin the ambitions adopted in 2010 had not been sufficient. Although Scotland clearly faces a challenge, we are in many cases ahead of the pack in Europe. The strategy that was proposed and agreed yesterday has six targets and the Polish presidency will take it forward when it takes over in July.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary said, the population in rural areas is increasing. That is to be welcomed, but the fact is that services—be they post offices, banks, buses and, more recently, rural schools—are on the decline in many rural communities. I should say that I welcome the current moratorium on rural school closures. The cabinet secretary has rightly highlighted the kind of afterthought mentality that exists at Westminster and in the boardrooms of the companies that provide those services. What can the Government do to try to change that mentality and ensure that in attempting to increase the rural population—and I point out that structure plans in Aberdeenshire, for example, are predicting vast amounts of new housing in the area—we safeguard communities as vibrant places to live and do not see them simply as dormitory communities where people sleep and from which they travel elsewhere to access services?

Richard Lochhead: You make a very good point that relates to the rural development policy. I am aware of reports over the past few weeks on the impact of potential local authority budget cuts on rural services, and we have people looking at and trying to understand the issues. In the spending review, the Scottish Government will be

negotiating with local authorities, which are responsible for delivering many of the rural services that Mark McDonald referred to, and we must monitor the situation to ensure that our rural communities' needs are being taken into account.

However, that leads us into a wider debate. Today's discussion is by and large about the next five years; the committee is considering its work programme and we as a Government are certainly very keen to explore how, over that period of time, we empower communities in having more of a say in designing local services and, indeed, their own future; owning their own assets; capitalising on the natural resources that they have on their doorsteps; and getting the income to do all that. We want to make that happen and I encourage the committee to consider the many examples around Scotland of communities enhancing their services and assets through renewable energy, community benefit or whatever it might be.

11:30

That is a big debate and, as part of our rural development policy, we want to see how we can empower communities to have more say over their assets and services. In terms of the budgets for rural services, the funding formulas for local authorities take such provision into account and we have to ensure that the concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities takes rural needs into account.

I know that Stewart Stevenson has been involved with planning issues and people designing their own communities, so I invite him to make a couple of comments on the matter, given that you gave an example from Aberdeenshire Council.

Stewart Stevenson: We have, in particular, done a trial of the charrette approach to developing communities. We ran three charrettes across Scotland: one in Dumfries, one in Lochgelly and one at Grandhome, which will be of greater interest to Mr McDonald. They were intended to be representative of different challenges. The Dumfries one, in particular, addressed rural issues.

They were very successful and they engaged members of the communities before the planning proposals assumed concrete form, so people genuinely felt that they were contributing to the development, rather than simply being asked to judge whether to accept or reject something developed elsewhere without their input.

When the previous Administration reformed the planning system and when we took that forward through secondary legislation in the previous parliamentary session, the emphasis was clearly moving towards community engagement in

advance. As the cabinet secretary said, when communities want to benefit from wind farms it is particularly important that the bodies that are undertaking such developments engage with communities, get appropriate locations that minimise disturbance—be it visual or otherwise—and get the best possible deal for communities.

Our charrette approach seems to have been very successful. Of course, one will not get the full picture until the developments that come on the back of it are complete, but the way in which planning law has changed to try to front-load engagement before you get entrenched positions on proposals is the way to go forward. When the planning law was revised, there was very much a broad consensus across the Parliament and across political views. I hope that we are able to sustain that consensus.

Richard Lochhead: It may be helpful if we send you a briefing note on the charrette approach, which we are happy to do.

Mark McDonald: I was about to say, convener, that I am familiar with the Grandhome charrette, as the Grandhome area is in the council ward that I represent on Aberdeen City Council. In general, a briefing to members on the charrette approach would be welcome, because it is a novel approach to planning and it debunks some of the old theories that still exist about planning. It is an approach that we should certainly consider as we move forward.

It is welcome that, through the Deputy First Minister, there is now to be a cities strategy. Obviously, through the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, there will be a strategy for rural Scotland. There is a point at which those two interlink, particularly when you look at city regions.

I would like an assurance from the cabinet secretary that he will work closely with the Deputy First Minister, so that city regions and urban fringe areas will be worked into both the cities strategy and the rural strategy and that the two will be complementary, particularly when it comes to areas such as commuter belts, which can often find themselves falling between the two.

Richard Lochhead: That is a good point. I have always struggled with the many definitions of rural that we have in Scotland. We have to use different definitions of rural for European funds, Scottish domestic funds, UK issues and all kinds of things. The interconnect between our urban and rural areas is very important and we have to get that right. Accessible rural areas have certain needs—I know that the Environment and Rural Development Committee examined that specific issue a few years ago, so you might want to dig

out its report. We must ensure that that is taken into account.

I return to your previous question, because something popped into my mind when Stewart Stevenson was speaking. In Aberdeen, the Macaulay, as it was known under its old guise, had an exercise—it will still have the software—whereby communities could design their futures: their own communities, buildings and the layout of their villages and towns. Communities can get together in the village hall and use the software to look at themselves and their future. The committee might want to look at that exciting piece of software, because we are certainly keen to find out how we can use it in rural development policy.

Mark McDonald: I might not have to, but at this point I should perhaps declare a minor interest. My wife is an employee of the James Hutton Institute, formerly the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

Stewart Stevenson: As someone who has spent 30 years in computers, I have always been impressed by the “planning for real” system, which relies totally on post-it notes, paper and pencils.

The Convener: Perhaps we will learn more about that at some point in the future when a charrette comes trundling towards you, minister.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, you talked about securing a proportionate monitoring regime for CAP. Is it possible—or, indeed, desirable—to reduce the bureaucracy and what some might call the pedantic approach to the scrutiny of grant payments under the SRDP without compromising the system’s integrity?

Richard Lochhead: Yes. [*Laughter.*] It might allow me to free up several hundred officials for other, productive jobs.

The SRDP was plagued, particularly in its early days, by a number of bureaucratic issues. I am not saying for a second that those issues have disappeared—indeed, some still remain. The SRDP, particularly the rural priorities element, was designed by the previous Administration. When we inherited it, it was like being given a car with a new engine that no one had started up to see whether it worked. As a result, we have spent the past two or three years changing bits here and there to make things easier for applicants, because, obviously, we do not want to put obstacles in the way of applications.

Although the SRDP has many success stories in not only its rural priorities element, but many business development projects, there have been a number of bureaucratic problems and I assure the committee that one of the priorities, if not the

biggest priority, of the next rural development programme will be to try to eliminate some of those obstacles, simplify the system much more and, of course, speak to the European Commission about the matter. Although we have to put our hands up and accept some of the responsibility for the bureaucratic problems that we have had in Scotland, many such problems emanate from European Commission rules and regulations. The biggest problem is that funds are not allowed to be paid out to applicants until you have checked every single detail of every single application and ensured that everything has been adhered to; after you do that, you can, several months down the line, pay out the money. That is all very bureaucratic and difficult for applicants, who have to find bridge funding or borrow from local councils or other bodies before they get money back from the Government. We have tried to find some ways around that but it has not been easy. We have to fix what we can fix in Scotland and persuade the European Commission to let us fix some of the other issues as well.

Graeme Dey: I seem to recall a commitment in the manifesto to review the role of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board at some point in this parliamentary session. If that happens, will it be possible to strike a balance between addressing the possibility of Scottish soft fruit producers being placed at a disadvantage as a result of the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board in England and protecting the income of vulnerable workers?

Richard Lochhead: The dilemma of how we balance both interests is an interesting one. However, we have committed to reviewing the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board in this session. We will do so and take into account representations from the soft fruit sector and everyone else involved in the debate. A few weeks ago, I visited a soft fruit farmer in Laurencekirk to look at the impact of the recent appalling weather. The devastation was breathtaking, and that farm was only one of many that were affected.

Thankfully, though, the soft fruit sector is still open for business and it is important to get that message out there. I hope that any damage will be minimised. Nevertheless, you are right to say that we have to take into account all the pressures facing the sector.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I remind the committee of my farming interests and the fact that I am a past trustee of the Borders Forest Trust.

Alex Fergusson mentioned meeting the ambitious targets for planting forestry. I will be interested to hear the cabinet secretary’s announcement at the Royal Highland Show about land use. You mentioned that if wind farms are situated in forests and trees have to be felled, the

developers have to replant. I have been talking to the Confederation of Forest Industries and others about that and the view seems to be that there is a lack of clarity for developers—they are keen to replant, but are not sure how. I am not 100 per cent sure that replanting is happening on the ground. I ask for clarity about that.

Current planting guidance from the Forestry Commission does not allow planting on hill tops and, if there is even a trace of peat in the soil, there can be no planting. There are, however, peaty soils and peaty soils. A trace of peat might be an advantage when planting to prevent climate change, whereas pure peat bogland would not be. Perhaps we need some science in there. I offer the example of a 100 hectare block—by the time you take the hill tops off and rule out planting in soil with traces of peat, you are down to a 50 hectare block. Perhaps we are missing an opportunity here. Are you interested in reviewing those matters?

Richard Lochhead: Those points highlight some of the issues that we have to sort out and I take them on board fully. Your question was quite detailed and I cannot give you an answer off the top of my head about 50 hectare blocks and peatland, but I will do my best to look into it.

I have asked officials previously about wind farms, the necessity of clearing forestry and ensuring that replanting happens. I am told that it should happen, so if it is not happening, I will be concerned. I am glad that you raised that point; I will take it away and see what we can do about it.

You made an important point about looking scientifically at the impact of renewable energy or any other developments on peatland. I was going to mention the science, but you beat me to it. We have fantastic expertise in Scotland and will get the James Hutton Institute to help us understand the issues. As I said previously, in this 21st century our country is facing many new debates that we have not yet addressed, such as the role of peatlands, how we restore and protect them and the impact on them of renewable energy developments.

Jim Hume: I realise that the Forestry Commission has been reprovioning in the past few years, but more non-core forestry estate land has been sold than bought in the past few years. Do you hope to balance that out in this Governmental term?

Richard Lochhead: If I understand the member correctly, reprovioning is where the Forestry Commission buys and sells land. It sells off forestry to keep up the national stock, buys more land to plant more forestry, and keeps up that circular process. That process ebbs and flows and has done so every year since devolution. I am not

convinced that there has been a new trend in recent years—

Jim Hume: I did not say that there was a new trend.

Richard Lochhead: Okay. I think that your question was about whether we will balance the buying and selling of forestry land. We monitor the situation and will continue to do so. I am happy to drop a note to the committee on what has happened in recent years and take your views on that.

The Convener: Thank you. I have a couple of questions. The SNP manifesto talks about a land reform review taking place. Has the Government any ideas about what form that will take and when it will happen?

Richard Lochhead: Land reform is firmly on our agenda and has a role to play in the future of rural development in Scotland. We have to look at the success of or learn lessons from previous legislation. We will make an announcement about a review in due course, once we have reached a view on how to take it forward. We welcome the committee's views on the land reform agenda. It is related to what I said before about communities owning their assets and having more of a stake in their futures. There are some issues with the bureaucracy of registration for the right to buy and other issues have been brought to the Government's attention. We have to look at those and see whether they need to be ironed out. We have an open mind on the wider land reform agenda and will make announcements in due course.

11:45

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. Legislation will come our way in due course. Can you give us any indication of what it will be at this stage or do we have to wait for formal announcements from the First Minister? Given that we are having our business planning day in August, are there any particular areas that we could take an early look at?

Richard Lochhead: The First Minister will lay out the legislative programme in September. We are working on a number of issues at the moment, as are my other Government colleagues. I am sure that you will be in the picture in a matter of weeks.

We have already said publicly that some secondary legislation on landfill bans as part of our zero waste agenda will come to the committee. The agriculture sector has made some proposals to us that would help address containment and other issues that are important to the future of the agriculture and fresh water fisheries sectors. We

are currently looking at those issues. I can confirm that the zero waste agenda will require legislative action in the near future.

The Convener: We have had a good round robin session. This might be a steep learning curve for many of us; thank you for your help along the way. I am sure that we will see each other quite a lot. I thank all the witnesses for their evidence and for the follow-up information that we will receive on agreed areas. Thank you, cabinet secretary.

Richard Lochhead: If the committee would find it helpful to get informal briefings from officials or ministers at any point in the next few weeks and months as you consider your work programme, please let us know and we will be happy to oblige.

The Convener: Thank you.

11:46

Meeting suspended.

11:51

On resuming—

Reporter (European Union)

The Convener: Item 3 is the appointment of a European Union reporter. I refer members to paper RACCE/S4/11/2/1, and I ask someone to nominate a possible reporter.

Mark McDonald: I looked at the job spec in the paper. We are fortunate to have someone in our midst who is something of an expert in the area, so it would be remiss of me not to nominate Aileen McLeod to be our EU reporter.

The Convener: Are there other nominations? *[Interruption.]* I warn members that we are still on the record. Does Aileen McLeod want to comment?

Aileen McLeod: I thank the committee for nominating me. I am a member of the European and External Relations Committee and I think that the two committees can do good work together. I would be delighted to take on the role of EU reporter for this committee.

The Convener: We will be happy to adopt Aileen as our reporter. Does the committee agree?

Members indicated agreement.

Subordinate Legislation

Aquatic Animal Health (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/259)

Rural Development Support Measures (Control Procedures and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/260)

Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (Scotland) Amendment Scheme 2011 (SSI 2011/262)

11:53

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of three items of secondary legislation that are subject to the negative procedure. I refer members to paper RACCE/S4/11/2/2. Members should note that no motion to annul has been lodged in relation to any of the instruments. If members have no comments, do we agree that we do not wish to make any recommendation in relation to the instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you. We move into private session, so anyone who is in the public gallery will have to leave. Jean Urquhart is also leaving us, and I thank her.

11:54

Meeting continued in private until 12:19.

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