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## Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

# Legacy Report of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, Session 6



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# Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, with the exception of matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden.



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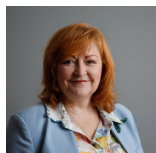
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# Introduction

1. This report, published by the session 6 Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, seeks to inform its successor committee(s) about its work over the course of session 7.
2. The report sets out a summary of the parliamentary business it has considered. It also relates the outstanding or forthcoming issues in its remit to help inform its successor committee's approach to deciding its work programme in session 7. The report also sets out a small number of observations and recommendations based on the Committee's general working practices.
3. The Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee was established at the start of the session to consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands. As responsibility for the natural environment fell within the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport's portfolio and, therefore, the remit of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport (NZET) Committee, the reference to 'natural environment' was removed from Committee's name on 1 February 2023.
4. The policy areas within the Cabinet Secretary's and Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity's portfolios are set out in Annexe A.

# Overview of session 6

## Primary legislation

5. The Committee considered nine bills in session 6.

### Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill

6. The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 7 October 2021.
7. The Bill required the Scottish Ministers and certain public bodies (local authorities and health boards) to consult on, and then publish, good food nation plans. The Bill also required the Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities to have regard to these plans when carrying out certain functions, to be set out by the Scottish Ministers in secondary legislation.
8. In addition, the Bill established the Scottish Food Commission to keep progress towards meeting the good food nation ambitions under review and to advise, inform and assist the Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities with meeting their plan objectives.
9. The Bill became an Act on 26 July 2022. [Further information about the Good Food Nation \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
10. The Committee recommends its successor committee(s) monitor the implementation of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, both in terms of the national and relevant authorities' plans and the Scottish Government's progress towards meeting its good food nation ambitions.
11. The Committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders on the first proposed good food nation plan on 3 September 2025 after it was laid and published for consultation. Due to the Committee's workload at the time, it was unable to scrutinise the plan in any greater detail. Both the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee also looked at the proposed first national good food nation plan.
12. The first national good food nation plan was published on 17 December 2025.
13. [Further information about the Committee's consideration of the first good food nation plan is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
14. The legislation requires the Scottish Government to publish a report every two years setting out the progress it has made towards "achieving the outcomes set out in the national good food nation plan, by reference to the indicators or other measures contained in the plan". The first report is due to be published by 17 December 2027. This Committee suggests the first progress report would be an appropriate point in time for its successor committee to consider how the legislation is being implemented and Scotland's progress towards its good food nation ambitions.

15. The legislation requires the Scottish Government to review the national good food nation plan every five years and, thereafter, the Scottish Ministers “may revise the plan as they consider appropriate”. The deadline for the review of the first national good food nation plan will be 17 December 2030. The revised plan must be published “as soon as practicable”. The Committee suggests its successor committee may wish to consider the Scottish Government's review of the first plan and, if it is deemed appropriate, any revised plan.
16. The Scottish Food Commission has been established, with its chair and three members appointed until mid-2028.
17. The successor committee may wish, early in the session, to invite the chair (and members) of the Scottish Food Commission to give evidence on its initial work programme and set out how they intend to carry out their functions.
18. The secondary legislation relating to the Scottish Ministers' functions when they must have regard to the national good food nation plan – the draft Good Food Nation (Specified Functions and Descriptions) (Scottish Ministers) Regulations 2025 – was laid on 27 October 2025.
19. The Committee held a call for views on the draft specified functions. The Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary and then decided, by division, not to agree to recommend to Parliament that the draft regulations be approved at its meeting on 3 December 2025.
20. The Scottish Government subsequently confirmed it would withdraw the draft regulations and continue engaging with stakeholders ahead of re-laying a revised instrument in the next parliamentary session.
21. [Further information about the Committee's consideration of these draft regulations is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
22. The successor committee may wish to ensure it has sufficient space in its work programme to give the draft specified functions regulations, when re-laid, an additional level of scrutiny to ensure that the concerns relating to the 2025 draft regulations raised with this Committee have been addressed.

## Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill

23. The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 24 February 2022.
24. The Bill replaced the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 which had made it an offence to hunt a wild mammal using a dog except in limited circumstances. The Bill replaced the offence and introduced four exceptions—
  - hunting with two dogs to be allowed for the purposes of managing wild mammals above ground (although hunting with more than two dogs permitted under a licence)
  - hunting with one dog to be allowed for the purposes of managing foxes and mink below ground

- hunting with two dogs above ground to be allowed for the purposes of falconry, game shooting and deer stalking and
  - hunting with two dogs above ground to be allowed for the purposes of delivering a defined environmental benefit (although hunting with more than two dogs permitted under a licence).
25. The Bill also made trail hunting an offence in Scotland (except for the purpose of training dogs to follow animal scents for a lawful purpose).
26. The Bill became an Act on 7 March 2023. [Further information about the Hunting with Dogs \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
27. The Committee recommends its successor committee monitor the implementation of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 and, specifically, the two licensing regimes which would permit the use of more than two dogs for the purposes of managing wild mammals above ground and for the purposes of delivering a defined environmental benefit.
28. The legislation requires the Scottish Government to review both licensing regimes by 31 December 2028 and, thereafter, on a five-yearly basis. This Committee suggests the 2028 review would be an appropriate point in time to consider how the legislation is being implemented and the efficacy of the two licensing regimes in both managing predation control and protecting animal welfare. In this regard, the Committee highlights the concerns raised with it by some stakeholders during the passage of the Bill about the licensing regime for the use of more than two dogs to be allowed for the purposes of managing wild mammals above ground. The Committee suggests any review should consider the extent to which these concerns have been addressed or alleviated.<sup>i</sup>

## **Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill**

29. The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 21 March 2023.
30. The Bill introduced a range of measures aimed to tackle raptor persecution and address animal welfare and environmental concerns associated with wildlife management activities. In particular, the Bill—
- banned the use, possession, supply and purchase of glue traps (with delegated powers for Scottish Ministers to set up a licensing scheme, for authorised persons, where necessary to protect public health and where no other method of rodent control is practicable)
  - introduced a licensing regime for the use of certain types of wildlife traps
  - banned the use of snares

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<sup>i</sup> [Further information is set out in the Committee's stage 1 report on the Hunting with Dogs \(Scotland\) Bill.](#)

- introduced a licensing regime for the shooting of red grouse
  - extended licensing requirements for muirburn to all times of year, with different licensable purposes for land that is peatland and land that is not peatland and
  - expanded the powers of Scottish SPCA inspectors to investigate certain wildlife offences.
31. The Bill became an Act on 30 April 2024. [Further information about the Wildlife Management and Muirburn \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
32. The provisions relating to wildlife traps and muirburn have not been commenced. The licensing regime for grouse shooting came into effect in July 2024; provisions relating to the powers to investigate wildlife crime came into force in October 2024, the ban on snares came into effect in November 2024 and the provisions relating to the ban on glue traps will come into effect in July 2026. A successor committee may wish to note that the provisions on muirburn were originally expected to be brought into force from September 2025 but were delayed to 1 January 2026, then again to September 2026.
33. The Committee recommends its successor committee monitor the implementation of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024, including the efficacy of the legislation in managing predation control and moorland alongside protecting animal welfare, as well as the commencement of the muirburn licensing provisions.
34. The legislation requires that the Scottish Ministers must report on the operation and effect of the licensing regime for grouse shooting on a five-yearly basis. The first report is due in July 2029. Under a separate provision, although not yet in force, the Scottish Government must also review the other provisions in the Act “no later than 5 years after the day on which this Act receives Royal Assent” (30 April 2029). This Committee suggests the 2029 reviews would be an appropriate point in time to consider how the legislation is being implemented.

## **Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill**

35. The Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill was a member's bill introduced by Christine Grahame on 20 June 2023.
36. Part 1 of the Bill required the Scottish Government to consult on, then publish, a code of practice that should be followed by any person who wants a dog to keep as a pet and any person who is considering selling or giving away a dog to someone else.
37. Part 2 of the Bill required the Scottish Government to establish a register of litters where puppies are sold or given away by someone who is not a licensed breeder. Part 2 of the Bill was removed at stage 2.
38. The Bill became an Act on 19 March 2025. [Further information about the Welfare of Dogs \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the](#)

[Committee's web pages.](#)

39. This Committee recommends its successor committee may wish to monitor the introduction of the code of practice. The code is required to come into effect no later than 12 months after Royal Assent, 19 March 2026; at the time of publication, the code has not been published.

## **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill**

40. The Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 28 September 2023.
41. The Bill gave the Scottish Ministers the power to form a new support framework to provide financial and other assistance to farming, forestry and rural communities. This new support framework would replace the legacy common agricultural policy (CAP) scheme and is intended to deliver the [2022 Vision for Agriculture](#) which sets out how the Scottish Government aims to support farming and food production in Scotland. The Bill also required the Scottish Ministers to publish, “as soon as practicable”, a five-year rural support plan which must set out the strategic priorities for providing support during the plan period, as well as details of each support scheme in operation or expected to come into operation during the period.
42. The Bill also repealed the sunset clause in the [Agriculture \(Retained EU Law and Data\) \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#); this repeal enabled the Scottish Ministers to use the powers in the 2020 Act to retain, modify, or simplify the legacy CAP legislation beyond 7 May 2026.
43. In addition, the Bill required the Scottish Ministers to publish a code of practice on sustainable and regenerative agriculture, to make provision by secondary legislation for continuing professional development and updated the regulation of animal identification.
44. The Bill became an Act on 30 July 2024. [Further information about the Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
45. The Committee considered the wider issue of future agricultural support a number of times over the session and several pieces of secondary legislation, made under the 2020 Act, relating to legacy CAP schemes. [A preliminary code of practice on sustainable and regenerative agriculture, to be reviewed following publication of the rural support plan, was published in June 2025.](#) The rural support plan was published on 24 March 2026 and an updated code of practice on sustainable and regenerative agriculture was published on 25 March 2026.
46. The Committee recommends its successor committee hold the Scottish Government to account for its intentions for future agriculture support, ensuring the use of the Scottish Ministers’ powers under the 2024 Act to transition to a new support scheme is in accordance with the objectives set out on the face of the Act. The Committee sets out its recommendations for future work in more detail in the ‘Ongoing or forthcoming issues’ section of this report.

## Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill

47. The Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill was a member's bill introduced by Maurice Golden on 17 February 2025.
48. The Bill made dog theft a statutory offence, as well as making various provisions relating to the offence.
49. The Bill became an Act on 10 February 2026. [Further information about the Dog Theft \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)

## Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

50. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 19 February 2025.
51. The Bill included four distinct parts with the overarching aim to support the protection and restoration of Scotland's natural environment—
  - part 1 of the Bill gave Scottish Ministers the power to introduce statutory biodiversity targets; these targets were the third element of the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity, following the publication of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 and the first in a series of rolling delivery plans. The strategy and first delivery plan had been scrutinised by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. Part 1 also appointed Environment Standards Scotland as an independent review body for the statutory targets. The biodiversity targets are to be set out by the Scottish Ministers in secondary legislation
  - part 2 gave the Scottish Ministers powers to make changes to environmental impact assessment legislation and the habitat regulations; this was to replace the power to amend this legislation lost as a result of the revocation of the European Communities Act 1972. Part 2 of the Bill was removed from the Bill at Stage 2
  - part 3 made provisions to modernise the functions and aims of national parks and
  - part 4 introduced changes to deer management legislation.
52. The Bill passed stage 3 on 29 January 2026. [Further information about the Natural Environment \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
53. The Committee recommends its successor committee(s) monitor the implementation of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026.
54. Draft secondary legislation setting biodiversity targets must be laid before the Scottish Parliament within 12 months of that provision coming into force and all secondary legislation, when laid, will be subject to the affirmative procedure. The successor committee may wish to consider scrutinising the draft secondary legislation and ensuring that sufficient time is allocated in its work programme to

consider the draft affirmative instrument(s), when laid.

55. In addition, the Scottish Government must, at least every three years, prepare a report on the progress made towards meeting the targets during that time period. The first progress report will be due no later than three years after that provision has come into effect. This Committee suggests this first progress report would be an appropriate point in time to consider how the legislation relating to biodiversity targets is being implemented.
56. The Committee notes that scrutiny of the biodiversity strategy and first delivery plan was undertaken by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. This Committee's recommendations should be considered alongside any recommendations that that Committee makes in this policy area.
57. Although part 2 of the Bill was removed at stage 2, this Committee draws the attention of its successor committee(s) to the Scottish Government's view that there remains a legislative gap in this area following EU exit. Further legislative proposals may be brought forward in session 7. This Committee highlights the concerns raised by environmental stakeholders relating to the Bill's proposals so that a successor committee may consider the extent to which these concerns have been addressed or alleviated in any future proposals.<sup>ii</sup>
58. Although the part 3 provisions in the Bill on introduction related to the management of national parks, several provisions were subsequently agreed which related to the designation of national parks. The passage of the Bill ran concurrently to the Scottish Government's proposal to designate a new national park in Galloway and Ayrshire. A successor committee may wish to reflect on the learning points from the designation process, should any future designations be proposed.
59. In relation to part 4, and deer management, this Committee suggests its successor committee should review how NatureScot is using its new powers in relation to control agreements and schemes, noting the finding at stage 1 that these powers have not been used readily in the past. The Committee's stage 1 inquiry also touched on the value of wild venison as a healthy and sustainable source of protein; a successor committee may also wish to review more generally how wild venison could be better integrated into the food supply chain in Scotland.

## **Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill**

60. The Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill was introduced as a member's bill on 23 April 2025 by Mark Ruskell.
61. The Bill made it an offence for—
  - a person who owns or is responsible for a greyhound, to "knowingly cause" that greyhound to run on an oval racetrack in Scotland or "knowingly permit" another person to do so and
  - a person who owns or is responsible for the operation of an oval racetrack in

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<sup>ii</sup> Further information is set out in the Committee's stage 1 report on the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.

Scotland to "knowingly cause or permit" another person to cause a greyhound to run on that racetrack.

62. The Bill passed stage 3 on 18 March 2026. [Further information about the Greyhound Racing \(Offences\) \(Scotland\) Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
63. Following on from its consideration of petition PE1758, the Committee's stage 1 inquiry included more general consideration of the welfare of greyhounds kennelled in Scotland, especially those raced elsewhere in the UK and not, therefore, affected by this legislation. The Committee comments on this in more detail in its section on petition PE1758.

## **Crofting and Scottish Land Court Bill**

64. The Crofting and Scottish Land Court (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 2 June 2025.
65. Part 1 of the Bill made a number of changes to crofting legislation with the aim of modernising and simplifying existing crofting law and streamlining administrative processes.
66. Part 2 merged the Scottish Land Court with the Lands Tribunal for Scotland.
67. The Bill passed stage 3 on 24 March 2026. [Further information about the Crofting and Scottish Land Court Bill, and the Committee's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
68. The issue of the effective enforcement of crofters' duties to the sustainability of crofting communities was raised in the stage 1 inquiry and the Crofting Commission's renewed focus of policy and resources on enforcement was widely welcomed. This Committee suggests its successor committee may wish to monitor the Crofting Commission's renewed focus of policy and resources on the enforcement of the crofters' duties.
69. The issue of crofters' rights in relation to emerging markets also came up in the Committee's stage 1 inquiry. The Committee suggests, therefore, that its successor committee examine how emerging markets, such as carbon credits and other environmental value mechanisms, interact with crofters' rights, particularly in relation to common grazings.
70. Whilst there was broad agreement that the provisions in the Bill were necessary and helpful, there was also widespread support within the crofting community for a more fundamental and structural review of crofting policy and law in modern Scotland. The Scottish Government, in its response to the stage 1 report, supported the Committee's position. The Bill was amended at stage 3 to include a provision that the Scottish Government begin a review of crofting legislation within three years of Royal Assent; this is likely to be mid-2029. The Committee highlights its expectations that further legislation will be introduced following this review and recommends its successor committee ensures it has sufficient time in its work programme to consider the report of this review.

## Petitions

71. The Committee considered three petitions over the course of the session; two referred from session 5 and one lodged this session.

### Petition PE1490 Control of wild goose numbers

72. Petition PE1490 was lodged in 2013 by Patrick Krause on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation—

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes and assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

73. The Committee first took evidence on the petition in April 2022 but deferred further consideration in anticipation of NatureScot concluding its review of the national goose policy framework and then publication of the associated delivery plan. Following evidence on the refreshed national goose policy framework, delivery plan and the wider issues raised by the petition, the Committee agreed to close the petition as the Committee was satisfied the refreshed framework, and associated funding, would help address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas.
74. When closing Petition PE1490, however, the Committee recommended to the session 7 committee which would have responsibility for NatureScot that it should monitor and evaluate the implementation and success of the national goose policy framework and delivery plan, including the progress of the working group, in helping to address this issue.
75. [Further information about Petition PE1490, and the Parliament's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)

### Petition PE1758 End greyhound racing In Scotland

76. Petition PE1758 was lodged in 2019 by Gill Docherty on behalf of Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation (SAGE)—

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland.

77. In 2022, this Committee decided to undertake an inquiry on the issue, taking a 'whole-life approach' by considering the welfare of greyhounds bred for racing across their life, from breeding and early life, through their racing years and into retirement. Before the Committee had concluded its inquiry, however, Mark Ruskell had secured the right to introduce his member's bill and both the Scottish Government, and the Committee, agreed to wait for parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill to be concluded before taking a position on the issues raised in the petition.
78. The Committee published its Interim report on petition PE1758: End greyhound

racing in Scotland on 27 November 2024. [The report sets out the evidence taken over the course of the inquiry and the Committee's conclusions and recommendations relating to the other aspects of the inquiry which it did not anticipate would be part of the proposed Bill.](#)

79. The Committee closed Petition PE1758 on 18 February 2026 following the Committee's consideration of the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2.
80. [Further information about Petition PE1758, and the Parliament's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
81. The Committee highlights to its successor committee those aspects of both its interim petition report and its stage 1 report on the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill which relate to the wider welfare of all greyhounds kennelled in Scotland for racing. In its response to the stage 1 report, the Scottish Government committed to responding to the wider welfare recommendations in the interim report. This Committee recommends its successor committee review this response.

## **Petition PE1951 Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears**

82. Petition PE1951 was lodged in 2022 by Alistair Bally Philp on behalf of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation—

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to re-introduce a variation of the historic 3 mile coastal limit on the use of mobile dredge and bottom-trawling fishing gears to support:

- the recovery of Scotland's inshore demersal fin-fish population and the wider ecosystem
- opportunities to optimise the social, economic and environmental returns within the new spatially managed area
- increases in fishing jobs and the revitalisation of coastal communities.

83. The Committee took evidence from the petitioner on 8 February 2023. The Committee agreed to close the petition and incorporate consideration of a potential coastal limit on the use of mobile dredge and bottom-trawling fishing gears in its wider and ongoing work around inshore fisheries issues.
84. [Further information about Petition PE1758, and the Parliament's consideration of it, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
85. As detailed elsewhere in this report, at the start of session 6 this Committee planned to hold an inquiry into inshore fisheries issues but later deferred this in the light of the Scottish Government's launch of its Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement (IFMI) Programme. The Committee comments on this in more detail in the 'Ongoing or forthcoming issues' section of this report.

## Follow-up inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland

86. The session 5 Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee's legacy report expressed disappointment at what it saw as a lack of progress by the Scottish Government in implementing the 65 recommendations it made as part of its wide-ranging inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland. As a consequence, that Committee recommended its successor committee "may wish to consider following up on these matters during session 6 and undertaking continued scrutiny of the regulation, performance and sustainability of Scotland's aquaculture sector".
87. This Committee agreed in 2023 to undertake a follow-up inquiry into salmon farming to take stock of progress in delivering the key findings from REC Committee's 2018 report across four key themes—
- fish health and welfare
  - environmental impacts
  - interactions between wild and farmed salmon
  - salmon farm consents and planning.
88. [This Committee published its \*Follow-up inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland report on 17 January 2025\*](#). It drew a number of conclusions about the rate of progress in implementing the REC Committee's recommendations and made a number of further recommendations for improvement of the salmon farming sector to reflect the changing context and challenges faced by the industry since the REC Committee inquiry.
89. This Committee concluded that, although the 'status quo' has changed to some extent since 2018, the slow rate of progress in improving the regulation and enforcement of the industry needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency to future-proof the industry and to enable it to grow sustainably. The Committee asked the Scottish Government to set out a clear timetable for the implementation of its own January 2025 recommendations over the next 12 months, including information about how implementation would be measured. The Committee committed to revisiting the progress made on the issues raised in this report after one year.
90. The Committee held an evidence session with a panel of stakeholders, including industry, regulators and Fisheries Management Scotland on On 25 February 2026 and, on 11 March 2026, took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary. [Following these sessions, the Committee wrote to the Scottish Government with its final comments on progress in meeting both the REC Committee and its own recommendations.](#)
91. [Further information about the Committee's follow-up inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland can be found on the Committee's web pages.](#)
92. The Committee supports a sustainable salmon farming industry in Scotland which supports and protects jobs and rural communities as well as the marine environment and wild salmon population. This Committee recommends a successor committee should, at some point, return to this issue to monitor progress.
93. This Committee suggests that the implementation and enforcement of the sea lice

framework, currently subject to appeals and a judicial review, should be monitored at an appropriate point.

94. The Committee also highlights the conservation status of wild salmon in Scotland as a potential inquiry topic for session 7.

# Ongoing or forthcoming issues

## Agricultural support

95. As a result of the UK's exit from the EU, agricultural support payments in Scotland are changing. The Scottish Government's plans to transition from EU CAP legacy schemes to a new system of agricultural support is set out in its March 2022 [Vision for Agriculture](#)—
- ” We will transform how we support farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. This commitment will sit at the heart of a robust and coherent framework to underpin Scotland's future agriculture support regime from 2025 onwards.
96. Some changes have already been made to existing legacy support schemes under existing powers through secondary legislation.
97. The legislative framework for the new system of agricultural support was provided for in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024; the Committee's scrutiny of this legislation is set out earlier in this report.
98. [The Committee took evidence from stakeholders and the Scottish Government a number of times relating to the Scottish Government's plans for future agricultural support](#). During these sessions, the Committee heard concerns from the farming sector about the impact of delays in transitioning from legacy CAP schemes to a new system of agricultural support and the need for a clear timetable for transition. In this regard, the Committee notes a reference in the goose policy delivery plan 2025 - 2030, under recommendation 6, to "the transition from current arrangements towards future rural support (unlikely to be ready before 2030)".
99. The Committee recommends its successor committee take evidence from the Scottish Government at an early opportunity to understand the wider programme and timescale for the transition to a new support scheme. The Committee was unable to scrutinise the rural support plan, which sets out how the Scottish Government will support agriculture, as this was published on 24 March 2026. The Committee recommends its successor committee consider the rural support plan in detail.
100. The Committee also recommends its successor committee maintain oversight over the agricultural budget, noting the recent change to providing agriculture funding as part of the block grant, rather than as a separate ring-fenced sum. As part of this, the Committee recommends that a successor committee scrutinise the proposed distribution of funding under future agricultural support schemes. During the passage of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, the Committee received a number of representations around how budgets should be distributed, but a full discussion of this issue was not possible due to the framework nature of the Bill. The Committee noted in its recommendations, however, that the Parliament should be given an opportunity to scrutinise these funding decisions and thus expects to see details of the evidence and justification for funding decisions set out in the rural support plan and, where relevant, in documents accompanying secondary legislation.

## Climate change plan

101. The Committee considered the agriculture and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) chapters of the draft climate change plan in early 2026.
102. [Further information about the Committee's consideration of the draft climate change plan, including the Committee's report, is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
103. In relation to the LULUCF chapter, the Committee agreed the new tree planting and peatland restoration targets represented “a clear commitment by the Scottish Government to develop these sectors over the long term” but felt that more clarity was needed on how the targets will be delivered. In particular, it requested further details about how high-emitting sites will be prioritised as part of pursuing area-based targets and how tree-planting and peatland restoration activities will be financed over the long-term.
104. In respect to the agriculture chapter, the Committee's report highlighted industry concerns that “efforts to decarbonise the sector are being impacted by a lack of clarity regarding the Scottish Government's agricultural reform programme” and concerns that the 45% uptake of mitigation measures will be difficult to achieve. The Committee also felt its scrutiny had “been hindered by delays to the Scottish Government's rural support plan” and, thus, it felt unable to “come to a view on the emissions reduction pathway for agriculture in the draft CCP”.
105. The Committee's report also examined cross-cutting issues relating to both chapters. It highlighted the work of Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) in delivering an integrated approach to agriculture and land use policies through enabling collaboration between the Scottish Government and a variety of local stakeholders regarding how best to manage the land within their localities. The Committee recognised the importance of RLUPs “in accelerating progress on peatland restoration and tree-planting at the scale needed to deliver the Scottish Government's LULUCF targets” and added that they offered “an effective tool for developing a localised and spatial approach to land management”.
106. The Committee recommends its successor committee monitors the implementation of the 2026 climate change plan, especially the linkages between the final CCP, the rural support plan, the wider agricultural reform programme and the food and drink supply chain, as well as the Scottish Government's progress against its agriculture, forestry/tree planting and peatland restoration targets. The Committee suggests this strand of work could be taken forward on a rolling basis through integrating CCP scrutiny into any wider scrutiny and considering the annual monitoring reports published by the Climate Change Committee on the Scottish Government's progress made in delivering its CCP's ambitions.

## Fisheries science and management

### Statutory obligations and fisheries management plans

107. Early in the session [the Committee scrutinised the Joint Fisheries Statement](#) which, following the UK's exit from the EU, sets out how the four UK administrations intend

to achieve the fisheries objectives set out in the Fisheries Act 2020 and to use fisheries management plans as part of this process.

108. The Committee suggests its successor committee may wish to scrutinise the Scottish Government's statutory obligations under the Fisheries Act 2020 relating to fisheries management, and the development of fisheries management plans (FMPs), in session 7. The Committee notes the Cabinet Secretary's update to the Committee, dated 20 November 2025, which referred to the current consultation on 11 draft FMPs for demersal fish stocks and stated that "a significant amount of work on the remaining Scottish-led FMPs, including two Nephrops and eight pelagic stocks, has already been completed and consultations will be launched next year".

## Management of inshore fisheries

109. At the start of session 6, the Committee planned to hold an inquiry into inshore fisheries issues. The session 5 Committee's legacy report highlighted "the continued need for action, including through specific legislation and improved spatial management, to modernise management of Scotland's inshore fisheries". As mentioned earlier in this report, the Committee closed Petition PE1951 asking for the Scottish Government to reinstate an inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears on the basis that it would incorporate this issue in the planned inquiry.
110. Spatial management and pressures associated with 'spatial squeeze' in fisheries has been a recurring theme in the Committee's scrutiny. The Committee notes that the Scottish Government's consultation analysis on the National Marine Plan (NMP) 2 planning position statement identified an expectation among some stakeholders for the NMP2 to be used to implement spatial management to inform decision-making on the Scottish Government's priorities for the use of marine space to reduce the likelihood of conflict where there is competition for space.
111. The Committee recommends its successor committee monitors progress on the development of NMP2 and, following its publication, consider how spatial management of fisheries and mitigation of spatial squeeze will be addressed.
112. The Committee held a round table evidence session on inshore fisheries in October 2022 with a view to informing the inquiry's remit but, following the Scottish Government's launch of its Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement (IFMI) programme, the Committee agreed to defer the inquiry until the conclusion of the IFMI programme.
113. The Committee recommends that its successor committee monitors progress of the IFMI programme early in session 7, with a view to undertaking its own scrutiny of inshore fisheries management at an appropriate point. As part of this, this Committee highlights the overfishing of key shellfish stocks, lack of quotas for crab and lobster, spatial management and gear conflict issues raised by Petition PE1951.

## Scientific evidence and bycatch reduction

114. Much of the scrutiny the Committee undertook on fisheries issues was in relation to secondary legislation, primarily around the seasonal closures in the Firth of Clyde, other closures or prohibition of specific gears and the introduction of remote electronic monitoring (mandatory for pelagic vessels from 9 March 2026). Consideration of seasonal closures in the Firth of Clyde in 2022, 2024 and 2026 raised several issues in relation to the Scottish Government's consideration of scientific evidence to underpinning policy decisions and the lack of resources within the Marine Directorate to resolve knowledge gaps.
115. This was further reinforced by the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny for 2025 to 2026 which focused on the Marine Directorate's budget. The Committee identified concerns that structural changes to the delivery of science within the Marine Directorate, real-terms cuts in budget, and deteriorating facilities were weakening Scotland's fisheries research capacity and international reputation.
116. The Committee recommends its successor committee continues this focus on the scientific evidence base underpinning fisheries management policies and the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate's budget for fisheries science. The successor committee may also wish to monitor the implementation of remote electronic monitoring for compliance monitoring and scientific research purposes.
117. Scrutiny of the seasonal closures in the Firth of Clyde also highlighted the issue of bycatch in mixed fisheries. Responding to this issue, the Scottish Government noted that selectivity proposals are subject to a public consultation under the Future Catching Policy, running from 16 February to 11 May 2026. The Committee recommends its successor committee monitor the Scottish Government's progress in developing improved selectivity measures in accordance with its legal obligations to avoid or reduce bycatch.

## Stakeholder engagement and co-management

118. Across its scrutiny of fisheries management policy and legislation, the Committee heard repeated calls for improved industry and stakeholder involvement in scientific research and co-management. This requires strengthened local mechanisms to enable engagement. The Committee notes the Scottish Government's 2024 evaluation of regional inshore fisheries groups (RIFGs) which concluded that RIFGs have drifted away from their initial, specific remit and noted the potential for reshaping the RIFG model so they could become more useful. The Committee also notes that the first statutory regional marine plans were adopted in the Shetland and Orkney Isles in December 2025, but progress on roll out across Scotland's 11 marine regions remains slow.
119. The Committee recommends its successor committee seeks an update on actions to deliver the Scottish Government's commitment to strengthening its co-management system under the Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030.

## Management measures in inshore marine protected areas

120. The Committee scrutinised legislation implementing fisheries management measures restricting the use of specified fishing gear in offshore marine protected areas (MPAs). Stakeholders, on the whole, noted extensive and positive engagement on the development of these measures. The Scottish Government has committed to bringing forward fisheries management measures for inshore MPAs and priority marine features outside the MPA network. The Scottish Government notified the Committee in December 2025 that the planned consultation on these measures would be delayed until after the election.
121. The Committee recommends that its successor committee monitors progress on consultation and stakeholder engagement on these measures.

## National islands plan and Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

122. The Cabinet Secretary's portfolio in session 6 included responsibility for islands, including island connectivity (cross-government co-ordination).
123. The Committee's scrutiny on this issue focused around the 2019 first national islands plan, its related annual reports and associated funding. The national islands plan sets out “the main objectives and strategy of the Scottish Ministers in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by, the carrying out of functions of a public nature”. The first national islands plan set out 13 objectives, including digital connectivity, transport, housing, healthcare and education, and over 100 commitments to be delivered over the five-year lifetime of the plan. A dedicated £30m budget was established in February 2021, allocated to island local authorities on an annual basis via a competitive bidding process.
124. The legislation requires the national islands plan to be reviewed every five years. The Scottish Government undertook a review of the first islands plan in 2023 and published its analysis of the consultation responses on 23 April 2024; it found that, for example, a majority of respondents thought there had been no progress on 11 of the 13 objectives.
125. The Scottish Government published its draft second national islands plan on 4 December 2025, along with an implementation route map. The Cabinet Secretary stated that the consultation showed a “clear preference among island stakeholders for the publication of a new plan” but that the second plan contains fewer strategic objectives and commitments than the first, with “tangible, relatable and island-specific” actions. [The second national islands plan, and accompanying implementation route map, was published on 23 February 2026.](#)
126. In the first half of the session, the Committee took evidence on the first plan's annual reports and considered the budget as part of its pre-budget scrutiny. Due to its legislative workload, however, the Committee did not consider this issue further and did not have time to consider the draft second national islands plan before it was finalised.

127. [Further information about the Committee's scrutiny of the first national islands plan, and its related annual report and associated funding is available on the Committee's web pages.](#)
128. The Committee recommends the second island plan, and progress against delivering its objectives, commitments and budget, should be scrutinised in session 7.
129. Successor committees may wish to consider the new approach to impact assessments in the strategic integrated impact assessments in the context of the plan. Successor committees may wish to consider whether this legislation could usefully be the subject of post-legislative scrutiny.
130. During its scrutiny of the plan and its budget, the Committee found it challenging to scrutinise the wide scope of the plan. The Committee believes that mainstreaming scrutiny of the national islands plan, with relevant subject committees leading on scrutinising the objectives, budget and progress relevant to their remits, would allow more detailed scrutiny of the plan. The Committee makes wider recommendations regarding the mainstreaming of issues facing rural and island communities later in this report.

## Post EU-exit developments

131. The Committee has scrutinised developments in its remit following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, particularly in its consideration of the Joint Fisheries Statement and fisheries management plans, as well as the transition to a new system of agricultural support. [The Committee also considered the UK common frameworks](#), agreements between the UK government and devolved administrations to manage policy, regulation, and law in specific areas following EU exit.
132. The Committee recommends its successor continue to monitor post-EU exit developments in its remit.
133. The UK Government, at a summit in May 2025, made an agreement for closer relations between the UK and the EU, including a commitment to agree an SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) agreement to dynamically align with specified areas of EU law, particularly in relation to food safety, plant and animal health.
134. [The Committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders on the proposed SPS agreement at its meeting on 18 June 2025.](#)
135. It is expected that the agreement would be implemented by primary UK legislation, likely to require legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament, and a significant volume of secondary legislation, possibly laid in both the UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament.

## Wildfires in Scotland

136. The Committee held a round table to discuss issues around wildfires in Scotland at its meeting on 4 March 2026.
137. The successor committee may wish to monitor this issue in session 7, including considering the impact of land management policies on wildfire risk and the financial and other support and resourcing of public agencies and rural communities to address future wildfire risks in Scotland.

## Other comments, observations or recommendations

138. Whilst the Committee notes that every committee since 1999 with responsibility for agriculture and fisheries policy has been referred to as the rural affairs/development/economy committee, this Committee suggests a different approach is taken in session 7. **The Committee's name – rural and island affairs – does not reflect its remit.** The Committee's remit reflects the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands portfolio, this has changed over the course of the session and further information is set out in Annexe A. For example, at the start of the session, the Cabinet Secretary's portfolio relating to islands was the cross government co-ordination on islands, the islands bond and carbon-neutral islands policy areas. Thus, the Committee's remit does not include the policy issues – for example, housing, digital connectivity, transport, access to healthcare, education and employment – important to people living in rural or island communities. It would not be possible for one committee to look at the rural and island dimension of these issues; they are the responsibility of different ministerial portfolios and mainstreamed across the relevant policy committees. To some extent, the Committee's name has caused confusion in terms of which committee has responsibility for holding the Scottish Government to account in these policy areas.
139. The Committee also notes that the Committee's name, at the start of the session, included 'natural environment', despite environmental policy falling in the remit of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. This also caused confusion and, at the Committee's request, the reference to 'natural environment' was removed from the Committee's name on 1 February 2023.
140. The Committee asks the Parliamentary Bureau to reflect on these comments when agreeing the names of committees at the start of session 7.
141. Like many of its predecessor committees, the Committee found its work programme, particularly towards the end of the session, dominated by Government-referred business which impacted on the **Committee's capacity to undertake inquiries** and manage its own work programme.
142. The Committee raised these concerns in its [letter to the Minister for Parliamentary Business, dated 1 April 2025](#), and [letter to the Conveners' Group, dated 29 May 2025](#). The Committee highlighted its decision not to scrutinise both the second national islands plan and the first good food nation plan. In its letter to the Conveners' Group, the Committee stated that this decision “does lead to a very real risk of a scrutiny deficit, however, whereby there's no detail to scrutinise during the passage of the [framework] primary legislation and limited or no time to scrutinise effectively, or at all, the secondary legislation or laid documents at the implementation stage”.
143. The Committee draws this concern to its successor committee's attention. The Committee recommends its successor committee undertake a scoping exercise early in session 7 to look ahead to its expected workload across the five years of the session. In anticipation of the second half of the session being filled with legislation, the successor committee may wish to focus on inquiry work in the early

part of session 7.

144. The Committee wishes to highlight the benefits it feels it has had from its **broad and participative approach to evidence-gathering**. In particular, the Committee has made regular use of round tables as a means of evidence gathering, which members feel has enabled them to discuss issues more thoroughly by allowing for a range of voices to be heard at the same time. The Committee has also sought to compliment its formal evidence gathering with informal sessions with groups, communities and practitioners who have been directly impacted by legislation. Although travel was more difficult at the start of the session when Covid restrictions were still in place, Members travelled to Oban for a range of visits and meetings as part of its follow-up inquiry into salmon farming, the Cairngorms national park to consider issues relating to the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and the Isle of Skye to consider the Crofting and Scottish Land Court Bill. The Committee also meet, separately, with deer practitioners and crofters at online meetings to discuss the direct impact of these bills on them.
145. The Committee also recommends its successor committee develop constructive inter-parliamentary relationships with its counterpart committees in other UK legislatures and assemblies.
146. At the start of the session, the Committee agreed to appoint **standing advisers** to support the Committee's anticipated business relating to EU exit. Professor Paul Fernandes, Heriot-Watt University, was appointed as adviser on post-EU exit fisheries policy and Dr Mary Dobbs, Maynooth University, and Dr Ludivine Petetin, Cardiff University, were appointed as job-sharing advisers on post-EU exit agriculture policy. The Committee found the advisers' input invaluable to support its scrutiny and thanks all three advisers for their work.
147. The Committee recommends its successor committee considers appointing standing advisers for fisheries and agriculture at the start of the session to help inform its work programme priorities. The Committee may also wish to consider whether an adviser is necessary to support its consideration of the implementation of the SPS agreement between the UK and EU.

# Annexe A

The following responsibilities fell within the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands at the start of session 6—

- Cross government co-ordination on islands
- Islands Bond
- Carbon Neutral Islands
- Food and drink supply chain
- Scottish Food Agency
- Agriculture
- Fisheries and aquaculture
- Marine Scotland
- Animal welfare
- Crofting

The post of Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity was created on 20 February 2024 and the following responsibilities fell within the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands and the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity portfolios at the end of session 6 —

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands—

- aquaculture
- fisheries
- food and drink
- forestry and woodlands, including Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry
- islands, including island connectivity (cross-government co-ordination)
- marine operations, science and compliance

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity—

- agriculture
- animal health and welfare
- crofting
- plant health

- rural portfolio impacts of Brexit and Retained EU Law Act
- wildlife management and crime

