



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**Rural Economy and Connectivity
Committee**

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Dear Paul,

As you will be aware, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have cross-party support across the Scottish Parliament. The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee is committed to playing its part to help achieve these goals both in Scotland and overseas.

Our commitment can be demonstrated by the actions we have taken to support certain SDGs relevant to our Committee's remit. I have provided some examples to give you a flavour of our activities below. This includes actions to date as well as our future plans.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Actions to date

The Committee took a particular focus on spending for food and drink in its scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft budget for 2018-19. It has also scrutinised the Scottish Government's Food and Drink Strategy ("Ambition 2030: A growth strategy for farming, fishing, food and drink").

The budget scrutiny of the food and drink sector considered whether sufficient and effective resources and public sector support were in place to meet the targets for growth set out in the strategy. The Committee called on the Scottish Government to review the overall package of funding provided to the food and drink sector to ensure that this is sufficient to support the step change required to realise its growth targets.

Further issues around sustainable agriculture and agricultural productivity have been explored through Committee scrutiny of the implications of the UK leaving the EU and the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The Committee has taken evidence from stakeholders and the Cabinet Secretary about the implications of Brexit for the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors and seeks to engage in the evolving discussions following Brexit. The Committee has also scrutinised the implementation of the CAP in Scotland. This has highlighted the technical problems involved in processing CAP payments and the challenges and implications this has for farmers.

In addition, the Committee carried out a focused Review of Priorities for Crofting Law Reform and published a report containing a range of recommendations intended to assist and complement the reform process.

Future actions

The Committee will continue to monitor the progress of the Scottish Government and the food and drink industry while they work to meet the targets set out in the food and drink strategy. The Committee also expects to consider the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation Bill, later in the session.

The Committee will continue to monitor the impact of farmers in relation to the administration and distribution of CAP payments.

The Committee will conduct further scrutiny on the impact of Brexit on areas relevant to its remit. In particular, the Committee will explore possible UK Frameworks in relation to agriculture and fisheries. The Committee will seek regular updates from relevant Scottish and UK Government Ministers on the progress of negotiations and the development of post-Brexit policy. The UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been invited to give evidence to the Committee.

The Committee will monitor the development of an updated crofting policy and preparation of a crofting bill by the Scottish Government.

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Actions to date

The Committee takes regular evidence on transport and digital infrastructure issues. On transport, the Committee monitors developments and progress on roads, rail, ferries, air and buses and community transport. For example, on 28 March 2018, the Committee held an evidence session with the Minister for Transport and the Islands and transport bodies on the winter resilience of our transport services. The Committee also regularly receives oral updates from the Scotrail Alliance on rail service delivery and network issues, including on the progress of improvements and investments. Moreover, the Committee has closely scrutinised the development of Scotland's major transport infrastructure projects, such as the Queensferry Crossing, the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, the A9 dualling project

and the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP). The Committee also takes a close interest in the development of cycling infrastructure in Scotland.

On digital infrastructure the Committee regularly takes evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity on the Scottish Government's Digital Strategy and Infrastructure Programme. The Committee also takes evidence from Ofcom, in particular on regulation of fixed-line telecoms and mobile.

Future actions

The Committee is likely to be the lead Committee in scrutinising a forthcoming Transport Bill later in 2018. The Committee will continue to monitor the progress of major infrastructure rail and road projects

The Committee will closely monitor the Scottish Government's progress in achieving its digital goals, with a particular focus on how the challenge of providing access to superfast broadband to 100% of premises by 2021 and improving mobile coverage in Scotland will be met.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Actions to date

The Committee is the lead Committee to scrutinise the Islands (Scotland) Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to create a sustained focus on islands by the Scottish Government and to improve outcomes for island communities. The Committee undertook a substantial programme of face to face engagement and visits to speak to people on the islands. The Committee also sought views directly from islanders and other affected stakeholders in writing and orally at meetings.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Actions to date

The Committee contributed to Parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Government's "Draft Climate Change Plan - the draft Third Report on Policies and Proposals 2017-2032". This included the effectiveness of policies to meet targets in the first two reports.

The Scottish Parliament took a joint approach to reviewing the Plan, with four Committees playing a role. The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee focused its scrutiny on agriculture, forestry and transport and took evidence in writing and orally from stakeholders and the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity.

Future actions

The Committee will include questions with a focus on climate change and the environment in all possible areas of scrutiny.

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Actions to date

The Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Salmon Farming in Scotland. This inquiry will consider the current state of salmon industry in Scotland, identify opportunities for its future development and explore how the various fish health and environmental challenges it currently faces can be addressed. The Committee is currently taking evidence on this topic.

As mentioned above, the Committee is continuing to scrutinise the impacts of Brexit for sectors within its remit, including fisheries.

Future actions

The Committee will take further evidence on its Salmon Farming in Scotland and set out its conclusions in a report.

The Committee will also monitor developments as the Scottish Government brings forward its proposed inshore fisheries legislation. It will also monitor the Scottish Government's progress towards meeting its marine finfish and farmed shellfish targets.

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Actions to date

The Committee was the lead committee in scrutinising the Scottish Government's Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill (now passed). This dealt with the devolution of forestry management to Scotland. The Committee took evidence orally, in writing and on site in forestry related land. The Committee also scrutinised forestry and broadband budgets, in advance of the Scottish Government's publication of the Draft Budget 2017-18.

Similar to the above, the Committee also took evidence on the impact of Brexit on the forestry sector.

Future actions

The Committee will monitor the Scottish Government's progress towards meeting its planting target for woodland cover.

I trust you will find this information useful.

Kind regards



Edward Mountain
Convener