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Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Annual report of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee 2022/23



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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 and Islands; and on matters relating to rural land use, wildlife crime and animal welfare falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport.



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Committee Membership



Convener
Finlay Carson
Scottish Conservative
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Scottish Liberal
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Scottish National Party



Ariane Burgess
Scottish Green Party



Jim Fairlie
Scottish National Party



Christine Grahame
Scottish National Party



Rhoda Grant
Scottish Labour



Rachael Hamilton
Scottish Conservative
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Introduction

1. This report outlines the work of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee ("the Committee") during the parliamentary year from 13 May 2022 to 12 May 2023.
2. The role of the Committee is to scrutinise the Scottish Government's policies and expenditure in relation to:
 - rural land use, including farming and crofting;
 - food and drink supply chain;
 - fisheries and aquaculture;
 - animal welfare and wildlife crime; and
 - issues relevant to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Committee name and remit

3. On 1 February 2023, the Parliament agreed to the Committee's name to be changed from Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee to Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.
4. The Parliament also agreed on 1 February 2023 to amend the Committee's remit. It was agreed that the Committee's remit would be to consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands; and on matters relating to land use, wildlife crime and animal welfare falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport.

Membership changes

5. The following changes to Committee membership occurred during the course of this parliamentary year—
 - Jenni Minto resigned from the Committee on 31 March 2023 and was replaced by Christine Grahame (18 April 2023 to date).
 - Mercedes Villalba resigned from the Committee on 25 April 2023 and was replaced by Rhoda Grant (25 April 2023 to date).
 - Colin Smyth (substitute member) left the Committee on 25 April 2023 and was replaced by Mercedes Villalba (substitute member) (25 April 2023 to date).

Meetings

6. The Committee met 33 times during the reporting period. Of these meetings two were held entirely in private and 25 meetings included at least one item taken in

private. Six meetings were held entirely in public. The reasons for taking business in private were—

- to consider the Committee's work programme;
 - to consider draft reports; and
 - to consider the evidence heard during committee meetings.
7. The agendas and minutes of all meetings of the Committee, including details of the Committee's work plan, are published on the [Parliament's webpage](#).
 8. During the reporting period, the Committee heard evidence from 106 people, representing 62 organisations.



33

Committee meetings



106

Number of people who gave evidence representing 62 organisations



Reports published



Bills scrutinised



SSIs considered

Legislation

9. This section covers the Committee's scrutiny of primary legislation, secondary legislation and legislative consent memoranda for UK primary legislation.

The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill

10. The [Hunting with Dogs \(Scotland\) Bill](#) and its accompanying documents was introduced by the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport on 24 February 2022.
11. The Bill sought to repeal and replace the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 which made it an offence to hunt a wild mammal using a dog in Scotland except in limited specified circumstances. The Bill broadly replicated the provisions of the 2002 Act, but made certain modifications to further limit the circumstances in which it is permitted to hunt a wild mammal using a dog and to prohibit trail hunting except under limited circumstances. It also aimed to address deficiencies of the 2002 Act, in particular with regard to inconsistencies and ambiguities in language and terminology.
12. Following the introduction of the Bill, the Committee issued a call for views to consider the general principles of the Bill and received 71 responses to a detailed questionnaire and 2,692 submissions to a survey. The Committee took evidence at Stage 1 over five meetings in June 2022 and published its Stage 1 report on 27 September 2022. The Stage 1 debate took place on 25 October 2022.
13. On 2 November 2022, ahead of Stage 2 consideration, the Committee issued an additional call for views on the specific issue of rough shooting under the Bill and received 232 responses. Evidence sessions on rough shooting were held on 16, 23 and 30 November 2022.
14. The Committee considered the Bill at Stage 2 at its meetings on 7 and 14 December 2022.
15. Following the Stage 3 debate in the Chamber on 24 January 2023, the Bill passed by a vote of 90 for, 30 against, and zero abstentions. The Bill became an Act on 7 March 2023.

Committee roundtable session on the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill



Source: The Scottish Parliament

Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

16. The [Wildlife Management and Muirburn \(Scotland\) Bill](#) and its accompanying documents was introduced by the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport on 21 March 2023.
17. The policy memorandum states the purpose of the Bill is "to address raptor persecution and ensure that the management of grouse moors and related activities are undertaken in an environmentally sustainable and welfare conscious manner". The Bill seeks to implement the recommendations made by the independent [Grouse Moor Management Review Group which reported](#) in November 2019.
18. The Committee issued a call for views to consider the general principles of the Bill which ran between 31 March and 5 May 2023. Over 5,700 responses were received; 100 of these were from organisations or businesses, the remainder from individuals.
19. The Committee expects to take evidence at Stage 1 at its meetings during May and June 2023.

Secondary legislation

20. During this reporting period, the Committee considered 20 Scottish statutory instruments of which four were considered under the affirmative procedure, 15 under the negative procedure and one was laid only with no procedure.
21. The Committee also scrutinised 14 consent notifications whereby the Scottish Government sought consent for the UK Government to legislate in the UK Parliament on matters which are within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament.

Legislative consent memoranda

22. At its meeting on 25 January 2023, the Committee considered a legislative consent memorandum (LCM) from the Scottish Government on the Shark Fins Bill. The [Committee's report, published on 3 February 2023](#), recommended that Parliament approve the legislative consent motion.
23. At the same meeting, the Committee considered an LCM from the Scottish Government on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill. The Committee [published its report on 25 January 2023](#) and agreed with the Scottish Government's position to not recommend consent to the Bill.

Pre-legislative scrutiny

Future agriculture policy in Scotland

24. With the Scottish Government's Agriculture Bill expected in the second half of 2023 to replace the temporary post-EU exit arrangements for agricultural support, the Committee agreed to undertake [pre-legislative scrutiny of future agriculture policy](#). The purpose of this scrutiny is to understand what farmers, crofters and food producers need from future agriculture policy in Scotland.
25. The Committee took evidence on future agriculture policy over eight evidence sessions from February to April 2023. The Committee has heard from farmers, crofters, stakeholder organisations and academics on the Scottish Government's proposals. This pre-legislative scrutiny work has included a roundtable with agriculture sector stakeholders, evidence from the farmer-led groups and the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board, and sessions exploring how future agriculture policy needs to intersect with issues around climate change, biodiversity and supply chain resilience
26. The Committee expects to continue its pre-legislative work through farm visits and further evidence sessions in advance of the introduction of the Agriculture Bill.

Impact of EU exit on the Committee's remit

27. At its meeting on 18 May 2022, the Committee took evidence from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on issues relating to the impact of EU exit on the Committee's remit. The evidence session covered UK internal market legislation, import requirements and border controls, labour shortages and food supply chain issues.

UK Common Frameworks

28. Following EU exit, the four UK administrations agreed to maintain UK-wide approaches, or 'common frameworks', in some policy areas previously governed by EU law and which intersect with areas of devolved competence. Eight provisional common frameworks fall within and impact upon the Committee's remit.
29. The Committee launched a call for views on the common frameworks which ran from 6 June to 29 July 2022 and received 14 responses.
30. At its meeting on 2 November 2022, the Committee then took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands on the operation of the common frameworks, the management of divergence and regulatory alignment, engagement with stakeholders and the role of Parliament in scrutinising the frameworks.
31. The Committee expects to consider and agree its response to the Scottish Government on common frameworks early in the next Parliamentary year.

Advisers

32. To support its scrutiny of the impact of EU exit on certain areas of its remit, the Committee appointed the following advisers at its meetings on 15 and 22 June 2022—
- Professor Paul Fernandes, Heriot-Watt University, as adviser on post-EU exit fisheries policy; and
 - Dr Mary Dobbs, Maynooth University, and Dr Ludivine Petetin, Cardiff University, as advisers on post-EU exit agriculture policy.

Other evidence sessions

33. During this parliamentary year, the Committee also held evidence sessions on various subjects within its remit, including—
- Budget 2023-24;
 - Regulatory review of aquaculture and salmon farming;
 - Inshore fisheries;
 - Avian flu; and
 - Petitions.

Budget 2023-24

34. The Committee considered and agreed its approach to [scrutiny of the 2023-24 budget](#) at its meeting on 29 June 2022. The Committee agreed to take a dual approach to pre-budget scrutiny which focused on—
- the impact of the resource spending review on the overall Rural Affairs and Islands budget; and
 - detailed scrutiny of the policies and funding commitments made in relation to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the islands plan.
35. To inform its pre-budget scrutiny, the Committee held evidence sessions with representatives of local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust on 28 September 2022, and with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands on 5 October 2022.
36. Following the publication of the draft Scottish Budget 2023-24, the Committee held a further evidence session on 11 January 2023 with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands and Scottish Government officials.
37. The [Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary outlining its comments and recommendations relating to its pre-budget scrutiny on 3 November 2022](#).

Regulatory review of aquaculture and salmon farming

38. On 22 June 2022, the Committee held an evidence session with Professor Russel Griggs on his recommendations following his independent review of the regulatory process involved in fish farming.
39. The Committee also held an evidence session about salmon farming with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands on 10 May 2023. The session focused on the Scottish Government's progress in responding to the

recommendations made by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in its session 5 inquiry report on salmon farming in Scotland and Professor Griggs's regulatory review of aquaculture.

Inshore fisheries

40. At its meeting on 26 October 2022, the Committee held [a roundtable with stakeholders on issues affecting Scotland's inshore fisheries](#) including fishing industry pressures, scientific developments, sustainable fisheries management, and governance and community empowerment.

Committee members with representatives of inshore fisheries stakeholder organisations



Source: The Scottish Parliament

Avian flu

41. The Committee has continued to correspond with the Scottish Government to monitor the outbreak of avian flu in Scotland and the measures taken to contain its spread. On 30 November 2022, an evidence session was held with Scotland's Chief Veterinary Officer to provide an update on the situation and the effectiveness of the Government's avian flu prevention measures.

Petitions

42. The Committee considered three petitions during the reporting period.

PE1490: Control of wild goose numbers

43. The Committee continued its consideration of [petition PE1490](#) which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese. The Committee took evidence from NatureScot on 9 November 2022. Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to await publication of the five-yearly review of goose management in Scotland - expected to be published in early 2024 - and consider the issue again at that point.

PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland

44. The Committee continued its consideration of [petition PE1758](#) which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland.
45. Following receipt of a report by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland, the Committee agreed to undertake a short inquiry into the issue. The Committee opened a call for views on the petition and recommendations of the SAWC report. The call for views ran from 17 March to 7 April 2023 and received 1,317 responses. Evidence sessions were held with the SAWC, greyhound industry stakeholders, and animal welfare organisations on 29 March, 26 April and 3 May respectively.

PE1951 : Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears

46. The Committee considered [petition PE1951](#), which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to re-introduce a variation of the historic three-mile coastal limit on the use of mobile dredge and bottom-trawling fishing gears, and took evidence from the petitioner, at its meeting on 8 February 2023.
47. Following the meeting, the Committee agreed to close the petition and incorporate consideration of a potential coastal limit in its wider and ongoing work around inshore fisheries issues.

