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Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee Comataidh Eaconomaidh Dùthchail is Co- cheangailteachd

Annual Report



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Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity.



<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/rural-committee.aspx>



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Kate Forbes
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Jamie Greene
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Richard Lyle
Scottish National Party



John Mason
Scottish National Party



Mike Rumbles
Scottish Liberal
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Colin Smyth
Scottish Labour



Stewart Stevenson
Scottish National Party

Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee during the parliamentary year between 12 May 2017 and 11 May 2018.
2. The role of the Committee is to scrutinise the Scottish Government's policies and expenditure on a number of matters including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, crofting, transport (including major infrastructure projects), food and drink, digital connectivity and islands issues.

Meetings

3. During the parliamentary year, the Committee met 35 times. Of these meetings 2 were wholly in private and 7 were partly in private. Items taken in private were to consider the Committee's work programme, approach papers and draft reports. Agendas and minutes of all meetings of the Committee, including details of matters considered in private, are published on the Parliament's website. The Committee met once externally in Orkney, with all other meetings being held in Edinburgh.

Membership changes

4. Two members left during the period covered by this report, as follows:
 - Rhoda Grant (from 8 June 2016 to 9 January 2018)
 - Fulton MacGregor (from 30 March 2017 until 19 April 2018)

They were replaced by Colin Smyth and Kate Forbes respectively.

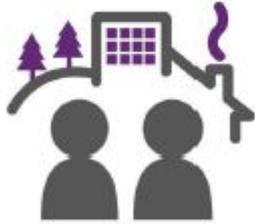




Bills scrutinised



External committee meetings



4 Fact finding visits



Reports published



35

Committee meetings



SSIs considered



1630 followers

2509 tweets

*as of 11 May 2018

Legislation

Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill

5. In last year's annual report by the Committee, it outlined the Committee's recommendation to the Parliament that general principles of the Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Bill be agreed at Stage 1. The Committee considered amendments to the Bill at [Stage 2](#) on 28 June 2017.
6. [The Bill](#) was passed on 9 November 2017 and [received Royal Assent](#) on 18 December 2017.

Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill

7. The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 10 May 2017. It made provision about Scottish Ministers' functions in relation to the management of forestry land and other land; and for connected purposes.
8. The Committee's general call for evidence on the Bill garnered 42 responses, primarily from Regional Forestry Forums, land owners, the forestry industry, forestry policy and environmental stakeholders.



9. The Committee agreed its [Stage 1 report](#) on the general principles of the Bill on 4 October 2017. A response from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity to the Committee's report was received on [3 November 2017](#). The Committee considered amendments to the Bill at Stage 2 in December 2017.
10. [The Bill](#) was passed on 20 March 2018 and [received Royal Assent](#) on 1 May 2018.

Islands (Scotland) Bill

11. On 9 June 2017, the Islands (Scotland) Bill was introduced to create a statutory duty to develop a National Islands Plan and to impose duties in relation to island communities on certain public authorities. As well as making provisions about the electoral representation of island communities, it established a licensing scheme in respect of marine development adjacent to islands.
12. The Committee took oral evidence on the Bill from September to November 2017 from a range of local authorities, national bodies, businesses and communities groups. It launched a call for views on 26 June which ran to October 2017 and resulted in [51 written submissions](#).
13. As part of its evidence gathering the Committee spent 3 days in Orkney for a formal external Committee meeting and visits. It also visited communities and organisations on Mull and the Western Isles, as well as conducting video conferences with islanders on Arran and with students in multiple locations who attend the University of the Highlands and Islands or Heriot-Watt University.



14. The Committee agreed its [Stage 1 report on the Bill](#) at its meeting on 17 January 2018. Stage 2 of the Bill was completed by the Committee on [21](#) and [28 March](#).

UK Parliament Legislation

15. Throughout the parliamentary year the Committee considered

[A Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Laser Misuse \(Vehicles\) Bill](#)

As part of its scrutiny of the Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM), the Committee took evidence from the Minister for Transport and the Islands and his officials. The Committee recommended to the Parliament that it approve the LCM.

Subordinate Legislation

During this parliamentary year the Committee considered 34 statutory instruments of which 31 were negative and 3 were affirmative.

Inquiries

16. The Committee undertook the following pieces of scrutiny work during the parliamentary year.

Salmon Farming in Scotland

17. On [31 January 2018](#), the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the farmed salmon sector in Scotland. The remit of the [inquiry](#) is to consider the current state of the 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.
18. A call for written evidence was published and [161 submissions](#) were received.
19. Six evidence sessions were held with aquaculture research bodies, environmental and fishing organisation, regulatory bodies, development bodies, salmon farming representatives and the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity. The Committee also invited major supermarket retailers to provide oral evidence as part of the inquiry, however none accepted the invitation to appear before the Committee.



20. As part of its evidence gathering, the Committee met with the former Norwegian Minister of Fisheries, Per Sandberg and took part in a video conference with the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Committee members also visited a wild fishery, salmon hatcheries and salmon farms to discuss issues relevant to the inquiry.



21. The Environment, Land Reform and Climate Change Committee carried out a related [inquiry](#) into the environmental impacts of salmon farming, to contribute towards the Committee's broader inquiry.
22. The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee expects to publish its inquiry report in early autumn 2018.

Post Legislative Scrutiny

23. At its meeting on 17 January 2018, the Committee agreed to undertake an exercise to identify any pieces of legislation within its remit from sessions 1-3 which might benefit from an assessment to establish if they are delivering their stated policy intentions.
24. The Committee launched a call for views and [9 submissions](#) were received. The Committee will consider its response to these submissions in summer 2018.

Other evidence sessions

Forth Replacement Crossing

25. The Committee continued its scrutiny of the Forth Replacement Crossing over this period, which included its opening on 30 August 2017. The Committee received updates from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy Jobs and Fair Work and the project team on [31 May 2017](#), [28 June 2017](#) and [24 January 2018](#). The project team also appeared before the Committee on [29 November 2017](#).
26. The evidence session on 29 November 2017 resulted in the Committee requesting and receiving a full [breakdown](#) of planned and ongoing works on both the new Queensferry Crossing and the Forth Road Bridge from Transport Scotland.

Transport

27. The Committee has looked at a broad range of transport issues during the reporting year, including those related to air, bus, road, rail, ferry services and active travel.
28. The Committee has paid particularly close attention to the performance of rail services and the management of the rail network in Scotland, including the progress of developments such as the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Project. It took evidence on these issues from Scotrail Alliance on [8 November 2017](#), the Minister for Transport and Islands on [22 November 2017](#), and as part of a wider session on winter resilience on [28 March 2018](#).
29. The session on winter resilience, saw the Committee taking evidence from the Minister for Transport and Islands, the Scotrail Alliance and the Confederation of Passenger Transport. The Committee sought evidence on the management of road and public transport systems during a period of severe winter weather in February and March 2018.
30. The Committee took views from passenger transport representatives on bus and train services on [25 April 2018](#).
31. The Committee also took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Jobs on the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route on [24 January 2018](#), following the collapse of Carillion, which was part of the consortium contracted to deliver the project. The evidence session included discussion on the completion time for this project. The Cabinet Secretary subsequently announced to the Parliament on [22 March 2018](#) that completion of this project would be delayed until late Autumn 2018.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

32. The Committee received regular updates from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity on Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) during the parliamentary year.
33. He provided the Committee with a final update on CAP Payments to farmers and crofters on [28 June 2017](#) . A further session on the impact the failure in the CAP IT systems has had on farming businesses was held on [27 September 2017](#).
34. CAP Payments were also considered during the Committee's scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft budget 2018-19 on [20 December 2017](#).

Implications for Scotland of the UK leaving the European Union

35. Following the sessions the Committee held in early 2017 on the implications of Brexit for the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, the Committee had a subsequent evidence session on [29 November 2017](#) with the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and the Minister for Negotiations of Scotland's Place in Europe.
36. The Committee conducted further scrutiny on these issues as the negotiations to exit the EU progress on [21 February 2018](#) with agriculture and fisheries stakeholders. It also agreed in its work programme to consider issues around the implications of Brexit for the transport, digital and food and drink sectors when suitable opportunities arose.
37. The Committee also invited Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to appear before the Committee to discuss the ongoing negotiations for the UK's departure from the European Union. Despite difficulties in identifying a suitable date for Mr Gove's appearance, it is hoped that this session will take place before the 2018 summer recess.

Crofting and small landholdings

38. In 2016 and 2017, the Committee carried out a short, focussed review of priorities for crofting law reform. On 23 March 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity [wrote to the Committee](#) outlining proposals to take forward crofting law reform in two stages. The Cabinet Secretary appeared before the Committee on [2 May](#) on the Scottish Government's proposals for crofting legislation reform.
39. The Committee had an evidence session to consider the Scottish Government's Review of Legislation Governing Small Landholdings in Scotland report on [13 September 2017](#), taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity.

Digital Connectivity

40. In 2017, the Scottish Government published its latest digital strategy, [Realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world: A Digital Strategy for Scotland](#) which the Committee has continued to monitor the implementation of during evidence sessions on [20 December 2017](#) as part of budget scrutiny and on [31 January 2018](#).



Budget Process

41. On [13 September](#) the committee agreed to undertake scrutiny of support for the food and drink sector in advance of the Scottish Government's publication of the Draft Budget 2018-19.
42. It therefore agreed to hold a pre-introduction budget evidence session to hear from stakeholders with an interest in the food and drink sector on [15 November 2017](#).
43. The Committee subsequently took evidence from Fergus Ewing MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity and Humza Yousaf MSP, Minister for Transport and Islands, on [20 December 2017](#), following the publication of the draft budget documents. This session included discussion of all areas of the draft budget pertinent to the Rural Economy and Connectivity portfolio, with a focus on the food and drink sector.
44. The Committee received [14 responses](#) to its call for written evidence on food and drink. In addition, the Committee received 3 general submissions on the Draft budget.
45. The Committee published its [report](#) on 19 January 2018 and made a number of recommendations on food and drink, transport, EU support and related services, rural services, forestry and digital connectivity. The Scottish Government responded to the Committee's report on [27 February 2018](#).

Petitions

46. Over the course of the parliamentary year the Committee considered the following public petition:

[PE1598: Protecting wild salmonids from sea lice from the Scottish salmon farms](#)

47. The Committee considered the petition on [21 June 2017](#) and agreed that in early 2018 it would conduct an [inquiry into aquaculture in Scotland](#), which would seek to include consideration of the issues raised in the petition. The Committee decided on [31 January 2018](#) that this inquiry should focus on the farmed salmon sector in Scotland.

Engagement and Innovation

48. The Committee was grateful to the wide number of individuals and organisations who engaged with the Committee's work this year.
49. The Committee undertook a number of engagement activities particularly as part of its scrutiny for the [Islands \(Scotland\) Bill](#) and [Forestry and Land Management \(Scotland\) Bill](#).
50. On the Islands (Scotland) Bill engagement activities included Committee visits in Orkney, Mull and the Western Isles, video conferences with other islands (including multi-location video-conference), and a formal committee meeting in Orkney. An Instagram story of the Committee's visit was developed to assist in engaging younger audiences. This received 319 views.



51. A Facebook live session was also broadcast on the winter resilience session of [28 March 2018](#), receiving just under 3,000 views. A further session with public transport representatives was streamed on Facebook live on [25 April 2018](#), receiving over 2,500 views. Facebook live allowed the public to provide commentary as evidence was being taken.

Equalities and human rights

52. The Committee mainstreamed equalities and human rights issues throughout its work in the parliamentary year. It also took evidence from members of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland on access to bus and rail services to on [25 April 2018](#).
53. The Committee also sought to understand the equality and human rights implications of Bills it scrutinised during this period. For example, on the Islands (Scotland) Bill, the Committee heard about inequalities that exist between protected characteristic groups on islands, and the potential for the Bill to enhance equality and address human rights issues. The Committee was keen to hear from a range of people on the Bill, such as young people and community members, and ran accessible discussion events, including through video conference, to support this. The Committee, on this Bill, also made Gaelic translations of its call for views and its executive summary of its report, to make this accessible for Gaelic speaking communities.

