

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

34th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday, 20 December

Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

1. This paper supports the Committee's evidence taking on the [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Bill](#). The Bill was introduced on 28 September 2023 and referred to the Committee for Stage 1 scrutiny. The deadline for completion of Stage 1 is 29 March 2024.

The Bill

2. The policy memorandum states the purpose of the bill is to provide a framework that the Scottish Ministers "will use to develop the support that farming and rural communities need in order to adapt to new opportunities and new challenges, and to prosper in a changing world".
3. The framework is intended to enable the Scottish Ministers to provide conditional financial support to farmers and rural communities in order to achieve the following objectives—
 - the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices;
 - the production of high-quality food;
 - the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation; and
 - enabling rural communities to thrive.
4. The Bill contains five parts. Part 1 (sections 1-3) relates to the overarching objectives of the framework (set out above) and the development of a five-year rural support plan on achieving these strategic priorities.
5. Part 2 (sections 4-18) would enable the provision of support for the purposes set out in schedule 1 relating to agricultural activities, food and drink production, forestry, rural investment and development, land management and the environment.
6. Part 3 (sections 19-25) would make provision for amending the current EU CAP rules.

7. Part 4 (sections 26-29) would make provision for a code of practice on sustainable and regenerative agriculture, continuous professional development, and animal welfare.
8. Part 5 (sections 30-34) relates to interpretative, miscellaneous and general provisions. These are standard provisions included in legislation.
9. The Bill is an outworking of the Scottish Government's consultation on its proposals for future agriculture policy contained in its [Vision for Agriculture](#). The Committee has undertaken [pre-legislative scrutiny](#) of these proposals.

Consideration by the Committee

10. The Committee issued a call for views on the Bill which ran between 27 October and 24 November 2023 and received 71 responses. The [responses are published](#) on the Committee's webpages.
11. At its meeting on 20 December 2023, the Committee will take oral evidence from stakeholders on on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation.
12. The agreed timetable for consideration of the Bill is provided below—

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 27 November | Fact finding visit to SRUC Hill and Mountain Research Centre, Criailarich |
| 29 November | Official Report for the evidence from the Scottish Government bill team |
| 6 December | Official Report for the roundtable on the adoption and use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices |
| 13 December | Roundtable focusing on the production of high-quality food |
| 20 December | Roundtable focusing on on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation |
| 31 January | Roundtable focusing on enabling rural communities to thrive |
| 21 February | Evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands |
| Date TBC | Publication of the Committee's Stage 1 report |
| Date TBC | Stage 1 debate |

**Rural Affairs and Islands Committee clerks
December 2023**