



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

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Dear Aileen

1. Firstly, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to welcome you to your new role as Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. We very much look forward to working with you over the coming months.

2. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee took evidence from stakeholders and your predecessor, the former Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, and his officials on Scotland's climate change targets, in October 2014. The Committee agreed to wait until the former Minister had reported to Parliament on the Scottish Government's response to the shortfall in emissions as a result of the latest missed annual target (that for 2012) before writing with its views. This letter therefore sets out the Committee's views on progress towards meeting our climate change targets – which is ultimately a minimum 80% reduction in emissions by 2050.

3. However, before we move to comments on the detail, and with regard to the former Minister's recent report and statement to Parliament on the missed 2012 target, we would appreciate an update from you on when you will bring forward details of how the shortfall in emissions will be made up in future years, as is required by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

Progress

4. The issue of progress is important for everyone in Scotland to understand. It is easy to see why there may be confusion amongst the public about just what progress Scotland is making in light of successive missed annual targets on one

hand, but encouraging emissions reductions on the other. One issue which complicates matters further is what the former Minister referred to in evidence to the Committee as “paper emissions” related to the European Union Emissions Trading System. The then Minister told the Committee that when these “paper emissions” are removed, Scotland actually met its climate change targets in two of the three years to date.

5. The former Minister also told the Committee that Scotland is on track to meet the target to reduce emissions by at least 42% by 2020 as set in the legislation which is commendable. However, the missed annual targets remain a concern in sustaining confidence that the annual targets as set to 2027, and longer term targets to secure an 80% reduction by 2050, will be met. **The Committee shares the disappointment that the three successive annual targets have been missed. Despite this, the Committee is encouraged to note that overall emissions are reducing. However, in the context of the impact on Scotland’s cumulative emissions, the Committee is mindful of the importance of achieving the absolute reductions as set out by the annual targets and not just the overall longer term percentage targets.**

6. Witnesses were encouraged by overall reductions in Scotland’s emissions since 1990, despite the missed annual targets, and told the Committee that achieving the annual targets was challenging for a number of reasons. It is clear that inventory changes made more recently have made meeting the annual targets a very difficult challenge indeed and we will revisit that issue later in this letter. There also seemed to be consensus on the areas in which Scotland was performing very well, such as in waste and renewables, and areas which required further focus and improvement, such as transport, renewable heat, and energy efficiency. Again, we will return to that issue later.

7. **We heard from most people who gave evidence that responsibility for meeting the targets must be spread across the whole of the country and across all sectors, if progress is to be sustained and improved and the Committee certainly shares that view. Delivering ambitious reductions in emissions and making real progress requires a change in approach and behaviour across all parts of society and cannot be delivered by Government alone. We all have a responsibility to shine a light on those who are not delivering as much as they could and encourage them to engage and improve.**

Future targets

8. The upwards revisions to baseline data and improved methodology mentioned above are clearly providing a very real challenge to Scotland in terms of meeting its annual targets. Stakeholders made it clear to the Committee that the difficulties in meeting annual targets are not behind us, and that significant difficulties lie ahead in meeting the targets for 2013 onwards. Assumptions which were made at the time of the 2009 Act look likely to be inaccurate and some data will end up being quite different to the assumed data used to set the targets. The former Minister told us that it is expected that more statistical revisions look likely, which will further increase the challenge of meeting the annual targets in the years ahead. Stakeholders agreed with this and therefore asked if this meant that targets would have to be revisited on a constant basis and questioned what value annual targets would then have.

9. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) told the Committee that it would be willing to look at this issue in detail and provide advice to the Scottish Government and the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government takes up this offer from the CCC.

10. Some stakeholders felt strongly that the annual targets should not be adjusted in any way to take account of inventory changes. In outlining their view, groups such as the WWF and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland told the Committee that whilst the targets are tough to meet, they set out the ambition Scotland has, enshrined in law, and world-leading, and that any adjustment to these targets could be seen, perhaps globally, as being a climb-down from the ambitious targets set, particularly ahead of the UN climate summit in Paris in 2015. Others also agreed that the focus should be on what more can be done to meet the targets: what measures should be prioritised; what actions can be expedited; and how the second Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP2) can be most effectively implemented.

11. In the light of the CCC preparing to advise the Scottish Government next year, on the annual targets for 2027-2032, with a view to the Scottish Government bringing forward a draft third Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP3) in 2016, the former Minister put two options to the Committee that he said he would welcome our view on—

- adjusting the annual targets in light of the data revisions; or
- responding to the missed targets by increasing efforts to go beyond the current report on Proposals and Policies and the legislation agreed by the Parliament.

12. The Committee agrees with stakeholders that revising the annual targets at this time would not send the right message globally about Scotland's commitment to achieving those targets and significantly reducing its emissions.

13. The Committee is concerned about the cumulative negative impact of the missed annual targets and would therefore like to see increased efforts across all sectors and parts of society in Scotland to make every effort possible to try and achieve each annual target. The Committee encourages the Scottish Government to consider what more can be done to meet the targets, what measures can be prioritised, what actions can be expedited, and how the second Report on Proposals and Policies can be more effectively implemented. The Committee would also hope to see responsible reporting of, and engagement with, climate change issues by Government, Parliament, local authorities, and the public, private and third sectors to ensure a cross party, cross sector and societal approach.

Additional policies and areas of focus

14. Some stakeholders felt that additional policies were required in the areas that had been identified as areas to improve on, such as transport, renewable heat and energy efficiency. Others felt that it was not so much a case of developing new policies or proposals, but rather implementing those already identified more vigorously, and also prioritising them more effectively.

15. One example given is an issue very close to this Committee's heart, that of peatland restoration. It was disappointing to learn that money made available for restoration has not, to date, been fully taken up, which shows that more effort is needed to make sure that the money available is spent timeously. Another example given was that of agriculture, where the ideas, policies and proposals have been well rehearsed. The Committee has spent a great deal of time learning more about, and scrutinising, the Farming For a Better Climate scheme; greening of agricultural support; fertilizer efficiency measures; and carbon audits for farms, but much relies on voluntary uptake. There is a view that the agriculture sector could be doing more to increase emission reductions, especially given the significance of the emissions abatement attributed to land use policies in RPP2. In addition, the former Minister told the Committee that as emissions are reduced in other sectors, agriculture will become a larger part of the overall emission levels and therefore will need to shoulder a greater burden in terms of reductions – at the same time as trying to sustain livestock numbers and output.

16. We need to better understand the uptake of climate measures in the agricultural sector and the Committee would welcome an update from the Scottish Government on precisely how it intends to monitor and evaluate the success of current schemes, and of new schemes such as the farm carbon audits. The Committee believes that making such measures mandatory should be considered prior to the mid-term review of the CAP in 2017 if robust evidence shows that voluntary measures are not being taken up and having the required effect.

17. Dr Ute Collier, the team leader for devolved Administrations in the Committee on Climate Change, told us that—

“A couple of the big areas for abatement savings, such as domestic energy efficiency and renewable heat, depend very much on Great Britain-level policies such as the energy companies obligation renewable heat incentive. As we have shown in our reports, there are big issues with those policies not delivering as much as they could. We said that the energy companies obligation should be more ambitious. In the current situation in which more devolution is being discussed with Westminster, you could look at those areas. If you really want to deliver in Scotland, you might need to push for more control over those issues; otherwise, it is very difficult because you cannot do much about the energy companies obligation. I know that the Scottish Government has tried to influence DECC, but it is not delivering.”¹

18. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government gives careful consideration to the specific powers and responsibilities with regard to climate change which could be devolved to Scotland from the UK as part of the current considerations. The Committee also encourages the Smith Commission to consider this issue carefully in its deliberations. The Committee will send a copy of this letter to the Smith Commission, and also to

¹ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Official Report, 1 October 2014. Available at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9561&i=86751>

the recently established Devolution (Further Powers) Committee in the Scottish Parliament.

19. **The Committee is under no illusions about the scale of the challenge facing Scotland, where there are many older, hard to heat and hard to treat, houses, and significant rural and fuel poverty in many parts of the country. The Committee would welcome further comment from you about what more can be done to try and meet this challenge, particularly in terms of working with private landlords and the role regulation needs to play in this area in the future.**

20. The Committee heard that emissions are still around 1990 levels in the transport sector and that the RPP2 only has one formal policy at present aimed at tackling emissions from the sector which is around emission standards for vehicles. The Committee heard evidence about developing technologies and opportunities, such as use of electric and hybrid vehicles. The Committee is aware of some basic barriers which currently exist in terms of helping bring about the shift in perception and behaviour that is needed to switch to using such vehicles on a wholesale basis, such as charging points being different in different countries. **We welcome the former Minister's commitment to raising this issue at an upcoming EU Environment Council meeting, and look forward to hearing of the outcome of those discussions.**

21. Another area the Committee has commented on before is that of blue carbon, where the Committee sees great potential in in terms of carbon abatement over the next 10-20 years. We were pleased to hear the former Minister's expectation that projected possible blue carbon abatement would form part of the next RPP – RPP3 in 2016. **However, we also note the then Minister's comments about the early stage that the thinking around blue carbon is at, and the further work that is required, and we therefore recommend that money from the research budget is specifically allocated to helping develop thinking and technology in this area.**

Data

22. The impacts of changes to data have been discussed in detail above. Another issue relating to data is the current time lag of 18 months or so in reporting on annual targets for Scotland. The CCC told the Committee that it has asked the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) if this delay could be reduced but were told that was not possible. It seems that provisional data is made available for the UK, but is then not broken-down to the level of each of the four countries until the final data is confirmed, which is at a much later stage.

23. **We were encouraged to hear from the former Minister that the Scottish Government is developing its own macroeconomic model which we hope would give a better understanding of the impacts of different types of investment and therefore inform policy and funding decisions. However, we would welcome more detailed information of how this work is progressing and would also welcome regular updates from you on this issue.**

24. The Committee is also mindful of the balance which needs to be struck between timely data and accurate data. Receiving inaccurate data at an earlier stage

would not be in anyone's best interests. **However the Committee is firmly of the view that the current situation can and must be improved, to allow for better data, or indicative data to be available for Scotland at an earlier stage and recommends that the Scottish Government raises this issue with DECC as a matter of urgency and reports back to the Committee on the progress and outcome of those discussions.**

25. Another issue discussed has been a perennial topic for discussion since the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed in 2009, that of the EU target, and whether it would move from 20% to 30%. Many stakeholders have noted that the RPP2 states that for targets to be met Scotland would need to implement all policies and proposals and the EU would need to move to a 30% target. The Committee was told that a move to 30% was "off the table" at an EU level and that the debate had now moved to the possibility of a move to 40% over a longer time period. Subsequently EU leaders have agreed to an EU greenhouse gas reduction target of a least a 40% compared to 1990 by 2030. **The Committee would therefore like to know what the implications of the EU not moving to a 30% target by 2020 are for Scotland in terms of meeting the annual targets described in RPP2.**

26. **Finally, some stakeholders were concerned about the compatibility of data being gathered and published by different sectors. The Committee shares these concerns and believes that it is essential to ensure that data from the public and private sector is compatible and comparable.** Reporting from across Scotland's 32 local authorities, for example, should be compatible and consistent in terms of gathering and presentation. We very much support the creation of the Public Sector Climate Leaders Forum, and are pleased that a member of this Committee, together with an official, sits on that group with observer status. **It is essential that good practice from this group rolls across to the private sector, and the Committee believes that the 2020 Group has a key role, as a member of the PSCLF with strong business influence. It was interesting to hear from the former Minister that the Scottish Government is considering developing a template for private sector companies to follow to ensure greater consistency and the Committee supports this development.**

Role of Government and Parliament

27. The Committee has always been of the view that tackling climate change in Scotland is not just the responsibility of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament, but for all of us in Scotland. However, the Government, and the Parliament, have key leadership and coordinating roles to play in the setting and scrutinising of policy to help Scotland achieve its targets and deliver substantial abatement.

28. **The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Climate Change (and the other structural developments made by the Government) and is pleased to see so many ministers and portfolios represented on that group. This is especially important as the Committee believes that improvements can be made in both the Government and the Parliament with regard to working together across portfolios and departments to deliver the outcomes we all want to see. We all need to ensure that phrases**

such as “all Ministers are climate change Ministers” and “all committees are climate change committees” are not just words.

29. For our part, this Committee has not shied away from setting an example in the Parliament and we have put a great deal of work into mainstreaming consideration of climate issues across all other relevant committees of the Parliament. I attended a recent meeting of the Convener’s Group in Parliament to update my colleagues on climate issues and to emphasise the importance of all committees being climate change committees. We have had a mixed response to this work as some committees still do not seem to fully appreciate the relevance and importance of considering climate change. In that regard it was interesting to note the former Minister’s recent comment of the involvement of—

“... ministers that you might not think of, such as Alasdair Allan. He is responsible for education, but he has a role with the academic research community, and schools and education institutions have a role to play in helping to deliver climate change targets.”²

30. We hope that this commitment filters through to the committees scrutinising such Ministers. **It is essential that the Government and the Parliament keep doing all they can to keep climate matters near the top of the political and public agenda.**

31. **We were struck by the former Minister’s remark to us that, in many respects, he felt that the RPP2 was already out of date, which leads to the question – is the current arrangement and timing of RPP documents fit for purpose and how could it be improved to be more flexible and up to date? We would welcome your views on that.**

32. Like the stakeholders we spoke to, the Committee believes that Scotland is making encouraging progress with its bold and ambitious targets. It is vital that we do not pull back from leading on this issue globally, and that we all look at how we can continue to make improvements and identify and maximise opportunities. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Rob Gibson MSP
Convener

² Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, *Official Report*, 8 October 2014. Available at:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9578&i=86884>.