

DRAFT MINUTES: CPG NATURE AND CLIMATE

COMMITTEE ROOM 4, THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 6.00 – 7.30PM

ATTENDEES

Mark Ruskell MSP, Io Hadjicosta (Mark Ruskell MSP), Arina Russell (WWF Scotland), Miriam Ross (LINK), Colin Brown (Ecus), Wilma Finlay (Ethical Dairy), Andrew Midgley (RSPB Scotland), Juliet Caldwell (LINK), Lottie van Grieken (RSPB Scotland), Alex Morrison (LINK), Deborah Long (LINK), Ruth Taylor (WWF Scotland), Kirsty Tait (NFFN), Jonathan Hedges (Scottish Cirfting Federation), Davy MccRaken (SRUC), CNPA, Eddie Palmer, Helen O'Keefe, Babette (Heriot Watt Uni), Gilly Mendes Feeraria (SPCA), Claudia Gebhart, Rachael Richards (Buglife), Steve McMinn (Rare Breeds Survival Trust), Andy Rockall, Rueben (Monica researcher), Phill Knott, Kathy Wormald (Froglife), Bruce Wilson (Scottish Wildlife Trust), Jo Riggall (Plantlife Scotland), Maurice Golden MSP, Mercedes Villalba MSP, Georgia Grainger, Finlay Carson MSP, Steve McMinn (Rare Breeds Survival Trust)

CHAIR

Mark Ruskell MSP

AGENDA & MINUTES

1. Welcome to CPG Nature & Climate

Mark Ruskell MSP welcomed the members to the meeting.

2. AGM – appointment of office bearers

Mark Ruskell MSP was nominated as Convener by Maurice Golden MSP and Mercedes Villalba MSP.

Finlay Carson MSP nominated as Deputy Convener by Maurice Golden MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP.

It was agreed for Scottish Environment LINK to remain as secretariat.

3. Ruth Taylor (WWF Scotland)

Ruth discussed the environmental impacts of agriculture in Scotland. Scotland's food system isn't working which is resulting in price rises. Agriculture is Scotland's dominant land use but Farmers receive only 6p for every £6. Changing farming practices is vital in order to protect and restore nature. We need to increase the scale of action by making farmland more resilient by locking carbon into soils, increasing insects and holding back flood waters. Whilst doing this, we must stay on track to meet legally binding nature targets. Climate Change is impacting Scottish Farming and the sector is having to play catch up to a changing climate. WWF Scotland has just published a new [report](#) on the impact of extreme weather events on Scottish agriculture. It is possible to reduce emissions whilst producing food in Scotland – this can be done via reducing nitrogen fertiliser and introducing trees on farms. Mainstreaming agriculture in the Scottish Parliament is vital to restore nature and tackle climate change. We need more policies that support changing food system. We need this policy to touch on the work of every MSP. There is no food security without nature - moving to sustainable production model is the only option.

4. Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland)

Referenced the [policy map](#) which highlights how different bits of legislation are all related and impact on each other.

There has been a revived interest of people getting connected to food and growing their own food. We must support farmers and support fairness. The Sustainable Wellbeing Goals provide a useful way of what we are trying to do globally – we must come back to this when passing legislation. SPICe have commissioned parliamentarians to look at things through that lense.

Pete discussed the historic point of disruption – new ploughs, new tractors, digging up the ground quickly. This was a response to western Europe growing populations which lasted a couple 100 years. The 3rd revolution was the move towards chemicals. The Biological revolution was working with nature and using natural processes. There is now tension between people who do the historic stuff and the biological methods. The new stuff is embryonic, finding its feet – crossover to renewables industry. Now we must change the way we support farming and recognise what a 'good' farm is. We have capacity to produce far less food and reduce food waste. The EU brought out a statement on the future – tipping point where they haven't gone back to farm to fork but recognising this tension and the need to move forward. We must change incentive and value for farmers in order to keep climate, nature and people safe.

5. Helen O'Keefe (Middleton Croft)

Crofting is a legal system of agriculture tenure in Scotland. Crofting laws give people the right to use the land around them. Crofts vary, you get groups of small fields in townships. There are 19 crofts in Helen's township that are mostly unfenced. They are messy spaces – low intensity – part time. All fields are wildflower meadows.

The powerhouse of crofting for nature is the common grazings. Crofting in high nature value areas. Low intensity communal management of time. People keep traditional knowledge and practices and are connected with the land.

Common grazing – makes it difficult to get changing funds. Any actions for nature – they need people to compromise & agree.

Most people are part time crofters. The small amounts of money they receive is not much incentive. People are doing a lot of crofting and not getting much in return. There is a need for support and facilitation on the ground. Livestock on common grazing are at risk as they aren't economically viable. Young people who have started crofting have realised financially it isn't worth their time. Without livestock and common grazing, you lose benefits of crofting. However, crofting keeps rural areas resilient and can provide high quality food to areas that don't have that access.

6. David Finlay (Ethical Dairy)

David is a 5th generation dairy farmer. He owns a farm of 850 acres in south west Scotland. It is an upland farm – 500 acres is permanent pasture. 250 is scrub and 100 acres of mixed woodlands which have been planted in 25 years. 25 years ago, he started to feel anxious about the nature and climate crises, animal welfare issues and social issues. He did an audit on the plant life on the farm. He did another one in 2023 by the same person. He hasn't been using fertilisers and hasn't been plowing. The farm is 100% pasture. The farm has a good Buglife assessment. He has doubled the species of plants on the farm. Bugs are at 40% above the neighbouring SSSI. He has planted thousands of trees. The carbon content of the soils started at 11% and is now 14%. Ethical Dairy decided to re-think the way they farm. He started a programme of monitoring the farm using organic matter. He went from intensive farming to organic farming. The livestock are pasture fed 100% and the farming is without antibiotics. Dairy cows are kept with their calves.

7. Q&A

Finlay Carson MSP

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee visited the Ethical Dairy Farm. There is a place for both types of sustainable and intensive methods. We should decide how much food we want to produce in Scotland and where we want to produce it. The question is where do we start with that.

David Finlay

Achieved outcomes in terms of biodiversity and carbon sequestration – productivity has returned to the level they had before. Productivity fell before 30% when stopped using fertilisers. It took time to understand how to better manage the land. You lose money in the early days so there is a need for more financial support. Costs of production were equivalent to big dairy farms after using good practices – however support is needed. The result is more resilient food systems in terms of climate change and food commodity. It takes at least 5 years for soils to recover.

Pete Ritchie

Post war the focus was on producing food. E.g., chopping down trees in America to produce soya to ship to UK to send to China. Helping farmers/crofters through the J curve – people need support. Banks are wanting to support farmers via private finance. We produce on 10% more land than we need. We have designed a system that is less dependent on imports and building capacity.

David Finlay

Farmers are sympathetic to the nature/climate crises. It can be difficult to build that into your farm business without risking your business. Money is needed but also about a clear path to get to the other side.

Mark Ruskell

Highlighted the role of the market, organic conversion and whether Scottish Government should have aspirational targets.

David Finlay

The wave of conversions crashed down to conventional price for organic producers. Ultra processed food in hospitals/young people/prisoners is unfit for purpose. Why is the public sector not stepping in?

Helen O'Keefe

The local market is key for crofting. Most of the population in Helen's township can't charge higher value as people can't afford it – the premium market can be negative. Infrastructure is important as well as support from environmental health officers. Scottish Government needs to do more than tweak edges of financial system. We need to think about what we want and where it is grown.

Andrew Midgley

Farmers delivering carbon sequestration, looking after peatlands – the picture isn't just food. This takes us back to the Land Use Strategy and thinking clearly about what we want to produce. High Nature Value Farming has its challenges such as marginality and profitability. We need to ask Scottish Government how they are going to support HNV farmers/crofters in the new agriculture framework.

Finlay Carson MSP

There is a cost to this. The concept of statutory biodiversity credits is being explored. This involves developing projects to be biodiversity positive, however if you can't do it onsite you can buy credits from projects that do.

Kirsty Tait

Biodiversity credits is a live conversation with Nature Friendly Farmers Network in England. There isn't trust from farmers to use this yet. Markets aren't developed enough yet for farmers to have trust in them. There is a long way to go with these markets. Trust can be lost easily. We need a clear payment framework for farmers and crofters before we explore biodiversity net gain.

Bruce Wilson

Biodiversity credits must be additional to the payment framework as the credits can't just fund existing habitat on farms. We need to be careful about conflating BNG which is compliance with planning. We don't yet have a biodiversity metric in Scotland.

Finlay Carson MSP

There is a concern about environmental schemes. Funding so far has been adding value to a product rather than improving food in supermarkets.

Helen O’Keefe

There has been a decline in common grazing and shareholders. It’s hard to get more crofters on the ground. Crofters don’t have a legal entity and there are grey areas around agricultural rights. Getting common grazing to work via building relationships – we need people on the ground to talk to them and meet them to get the buy in and engagement.

Deborah Long

Public funding and private funding needs market regulation and leadership from government. We need to look at what the vision is and how we get there. We aren’t using public procurement the way we should be. We need to build local trusted relationships. M about future generations.

David Finlay

A trading platform approached Ethical Dairy to trade biodiversity credits. You have to sign up for 20 years and you can’t guarantee the carbon has peaked. We need a system change as this is expensive and difficult. After 5/10 years this can deliver food in equal quantities at least the same cost –but we need to find a way of sustainably getting through that transition.

8. AOB & Closing Remarks

It was suggested that we should explore topics such as natural capital, carbon markets and investment.

CPG members to get in touch with Io (io.hadjicosta@parliament.scot) or Juliet (juliet@scotlink) with thoughts on future meeting topics.