OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

Wednesday 26 January 2022

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 26 January 2022

CONTENTS

RURAL AFFAIRS, ISLANDS AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
*Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
*Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
*Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Davidson (Scotland Food & Drink)
Karen Galloway (Seafood Scotland)
Jonnie Hall (NFU Scotland)
Polly Jones (Trussell Trust)
Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland)
Tilly Robinson-Miles (Food Train)
Anna Taylor (Food Foundation)
Claire White (Shetland Food and Drink Ltd)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Emma Johnston

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

Wednesday 26 January 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:02]

Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Finlay Carson): Good morning, and welcome to the third meeting in 2022 of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee. I remind everyone who is using electronic devices to switch them to silent.

Our first item of business is an evidence session on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. I welcome our first panel of witnesses, who will focus on policy outcomes relating to social and economic wellbeing. Polly Jones is head of Scotland at the Trussell Trust; Pete Ritchie is director of Nourish Scotland; Tilly Robinson-Miles is the impact and policy officer at Food Train; and Anna Taylor is the executive director at the Food Foundation.

I ask each member of the panel to make a brief opening statement.

Polly Jones (Trussell Trust): Good morning, everybody, and thank you for the opportunity to share some evidence with you this morning. I am the head of Scotland for the Trussell Trust. We are a United Kingdom-wide anti-poverty charity. We support a network of food banks across the UK that provide charitable aid and campaign to end the need for anybody to access food banks in the UK.

We have more than 130 food bank centres in Scotland, operating in 26 local authority areas. Over the past five years, we have seen a 63 per cent increase in the number of parcels that we give out in Scotland.

We support the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. We have campaigned alongside the Scottish Food Coalition because we support co-ordinated, Government-wide action to end the need for charitable food aid and ensure that everybody can buy the food and other essentials that they need.

We have a particular focus on reducing food insecurity and are keen to see the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill strengthened to make sure that we reduce food insecurity in Scotland.

Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland): Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence.

I am the director of Nourish Scotland. We are a food poverty charity that reaches across the food system. We were established a few years ago and now support the Scottish Food Coalition to create a shared voice across civil society. We have been campaigning for the bill for six years.

Briefly, our view of the bill is that it is lacking in ambition and purpose. We think that there is an historic opportunity to strengthen the bill and lay the foundation for a transformation of Scotland's food system to create one that we can be genuinely proud of and which contributes to the sort of Scotland that we want to live in. We can go over some of the details of that later.

Tilly Robinson-Miles (Food Train): I am the impact and policy officer for the Eat Well Age Well project, which is part of Food Train, a national charity. I am a geographer and a social scientist with a master's degree in food security and food justice, specialising in older people's food security.

Food Train was developed by older people for older people in 1995 as individuals recognised the challenges and lack of support facing their peers in accessing food as they aged. Today I represent the views of and am an advocate for nearly 3,000 older people across Scotland, from Tom in rural Galloway, who relies on carers to cook his meals in short, 15-minute care visits, to Mary in central Glasgow, who cannot easily move about her kitchen and whose arthritis prevents her from doing what she loves, and Mr and Mrs Campbell, whose regular lunch clubs no longer exist. The bill must support those people.

Food Train welcomes the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill as a first step towards prioritising, harnessing the power of and transforming the food system, but we have some key observations. That food security is about more than finance. It is about physical and mental nourishment, laughter and friendship. The incorporation of the right to food into the bill would prioritise a rights-based approach to delivery of the bill. Food should be a core priority for social care, which should prioritise care, dignity and compassion. For example, the integration joint boards should be included as specified public bodies that are required to produce a food plan.

The bill is an opportunity to support Scotland's ageing population. We know that Scotland has high rates of malnutrition and that Scotland's older people have suffered in relation to Covid and food.

Lived experience and co-production must be central to the bill. Local and national food plans must reflect Scotland's population, and the development of targets must involve civic participation.

The bill must recognise and provide a framework for a whole-systems approach. That

would include policy coherence and explicitly recognising food policy initiatives that go beyond that—for example, initiatives as part of the national care service.

Food is about care, food is about joy and food is a connector, but food is also a tool, and I hope to demonstrate that this morning. Ultimately, the sign of a successful and supportive food system is one in which my job and the work of Food Train no longer need to exist. That is the sign of a good food nation in which everyone has support to, and the systems exist to allow everyone to, experience pride in and pleasure from the food experience.

Anna Taylor (Food Foundation): Thank you very much for the invitation to the committee. I am the executive director of the Food Foundation. We are a charity that works at the interface between academics and citizens. We capture citizens' lived experience and feed that evidence to policy makers and businesses to assist the transition towards making it possible for everybody to eat a healthy and sustainable diet.

It is worth noting in this context that I was the chief independent adviser to Henry Dimbleby, who is the author of the independent review that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England commissioned to develop a national food strategy. I have been quite involved in that process over the past three years.

I am particularly excited to be here. The bill highlights the huge opportunity that there now is in Scotland to set out our ambitions for a food system that delivers the health, environmental and justice gains that we are all after. You have a unique opportunity with the bill to set out that purpose in a clear way that sets a north star for businesses and policy makers at a local and a national level, as well as civil society organisations. We know that change in the food system will take time and will require effort and iteration over several decades. The bill can set out that ambition and direction clearly.

I look forward to the conversation.

The Convener: I appreciate those opening statements. We will move to questions, which will take us to approximately 10.25. I would very much appreciate it if questions and answers were kept as succinct as possible.

Within your own areas of expertise what are your experiences of the food system issues facing Scotland? If you work across the UK, what are your views of how Scotland's problems and policy solutions compare with those of other UK nations?

Polly Jones: I think that we all agree that we want to see a Scotland where nobody needs to use a food bank or turn to other forms of charitable food aid. The existence of and growth in many different kinds of charitable food aid—food banks included—is a sign that our food system is not working and that people have not been able to meet their needs for food and other essentials themselves, with charities stepping in to do that.

We can see trends across the UK, and the growth in food banks and, more recently, other kinds of charitable food aid such as pantries and larders is broadly similar in Scotland. Food insecurity data has been measured in different ways in different parts of the UK, but increasingly it has been brought together and we see similar statistics across the UK.

What makes Scotland stand out—and this is welcome—is that there has been concerted, co-ordinated commitment in Scotland to do something to address food insecurity and, in particular, destitution. We know that 95 per cent of people who come to food banks would be classed as destitute. In the few days before we see them at a food bank, they have not had the resources to have heat, lighting or even shelter, or to eat hot meals.

One point that I would make about a co-ordinated food system is that, to begin with, when people started looking in horror at the number of people who could not feed themselves and were turning to the food banks, a lot of the focus was on how to get food to people—how to make sure that people do not go hungry and that they have food. That is why food banks originally provided parcels of dried food—the kind of food that can be stored and distributed easily.

It is very clear that the issue is not the lack of food. As I am sure you will hear in your evidence sessions, Scotland is brilliant at producing its own nutritious, healthy food. The issue for people coming to food banks is that they do not have the money to buy food, which also means that they do not have the money to heat it and cook it or to buy the equipment needed to cook it.

Over the years, we have seen growth not just in food parcels, which often have dried food, tinned food and food that is easy to store for a little while, as we now have to provide parcels for people who only have a kettle available to them to make a meal, which is a pretty damning indictment of the system.

That is why we need to think system-wide about food and what enables people to access the food that they need to eat. Scotland has led the way on making commitments to address the issues, including, in particular, food insecurity. Most recently, there was an announcement last summer of a commitment to develop a national plan to end the need for food banks, on which a consultation closed this week. However, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is a real opportunity for us to do the

things that we need to do, to look systemwide, to co-ordinate things and to make sure that change happens and is not just words but leads to action being put in place. The test of that, as Tilly Robinson-Miles mentioned, will be that we do not see people needing Food Train services or food bank services, because they will be able to manage for themselves.

09:15

Pete Ritchie: This a deep-rooted problem, and it will take a generation to sort it. That is why we need a law and why we need more than policy.

In John Boyd Orr's 1936 landmark publication on diet, health and income, he talked about how people on low incomes spent more of their money on food but got a diet that was deficient in almost every respect. Eighty-five years on, we are in the same position. In that time, the consumption of ultra-processed foods and other foods that are bad for our health has increased, rather than diminished. We have a two-tier food system in Scotland: some of us can afford to choose what we want to eat and enjoy a healthy diet, but a lot of people cannot and do not, and, as Polly Jones said, some people end up running out of food altogether.

We need a universal approach to food, just like we need a universal approach to health and education. We do not want to live in a Scotland where some people can eat well and a lot of people cannot. As Polly Jones said, this is completely fixable: we are not short of food.

Although there is a huge equity problem in Scotland at the core of all this, the food system also generates a major loss of nature and biodiversity around the world. It is the single biggest cause of the collapse of nature at sea and on land. We have to understand that. We cannot fix nature without fixing food, and we cannot fix the climate without fixing food. We will never get to 1.5°C if we do not transform the way we produce food and how we use our land. At the moment, our land is the only get-out-of-jail-free card that we have for net zero. Until other technologies emerge, that is it: how we use our land and our oceans is how we will get to net zero.

Food is also key to jobs. About one in seven jobs in Scotland depends on food. Some of them are great jobs. Whether in small businesses or large businesses, there are secure careers and fantastically productive Scottish food businesses. However, some of those jobs are insecure, marginalised and unsafe. Too many of our citizens are not being paid the living wage. They work in food but cannot afford to eat food.

For all those reasons, we need to change—transform—the food system, and that will take a generation. We need to remember that.

Tilly Robinson-Miles: The huge challenge is that we make an assumption, as a society, that there are systems in place that support these people. However, for older people, things such as meals on wheels and lunch clubs no longer exist—we have eradicated a lot of those services. We know that support networks prevent people from becoming malnourished. At least one in 10 older adults in Scotland is malnourished; that is undernutrition. Eat Well Age Well's data suggests that the figure could be up to 17 per cent and social care data suggests that it is up to nearly 30 per cent of older adults.

Support systems exist to support individuals in ageing well. Social isolation and loneliness are direct risk factors for malnutrition. That shows that the situation is much more complex than just looking at food and why we need a cross-sectoral, whole-systems approach. It is about how the social and economic wellbeing that we are talking about today links to public health. We cannot compartmentalise the food system if we are going to truly transform it and support people.

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill talks about everyone experiencing pride in and pleasure from food. Yesterday or over the weekend, a lot of you will have celebrated Burns night with your family and friends, with the laughter and conversation that the food enabled. A lot of older people do not get that. They do not have the opportunity to socialise with other people through food. This is not just about the food that we put in our bodies; it is about who we eat food with. Someone might get a microwaved meal put in front of them that the carer has cooked in 15 minutes, but that does not mean that that plate of food is appetising, tasty or meets their cultural needs. It is more complex than just physically having access to food. That is a challenge, too, and it is why services such Food Train are absolutely vital to people who cannot carry their shopping or get to the supermarket.

That is an important consideration in the reprioritisation of food and it is something that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill does. We see the holistic value that food gives us. At the start of the pandemic, we all had the personal experience of going to the supermarket and seeing no food on the shelves. If we were in isolation, we asked ourselves, "How will I get my shopping?" Those are challenges that older people and others experience every day. We need to recognise that.

We can see the reframing food as an opportunity. We know that we can tackle the problems by providing support and opportunities,

and the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is a first step towards doing that.

Convener, you asked about the position across the UK. Scotland is world leading on community food. We used to have Community Food and Health (Scotland), and we know what has worked. I mentioned lunch clubs, meals on wheels and wider support services, but we have eradicated a lot of those things. We do not need to look more broadly or further afield; we need to look at what we used to have in Scotland and what works in one area that could be transferable to another context. Great things are happening in Scotland and there is an opportunity if we can see the wider value that food gives us all. Food should be something that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy.

The Convener: I ask Anna Taylor also to touch on her views on Scotland's problems and policy solutions in comparison with those in the rest of the UK in her response.

Anna Taylor: Yes, of course.

Pete Ritchie and Polly Jones have described some of the outcomes of the environmental impacts of the food system and its impact on our health, whether in relation to obesity or the big range of other diet-related diseases that we experience in later life, or in relation to what is happening to children in their development. All those measures show similar patterns across the different nations in the United Kingdom. There are some variations—for example, fruit and vegetable consumption is a little bit lower in Scotland than it is elsewhere—but the patterns are very similar.

The other important point to make is that we have two chunks of challenges. One is around income and ensuring that people have the income that they need to secure a diet that protects their health and wellbeing. The other involves a set of food system problems, which currently make the income problem worse. As others have pointed out, at the moment the food system is oriented to make sure that cheapest foods are those that are least healthy for us. If you are pressed for money and on a low income, you are pushed towards those choices if you shop in a supermarket or go out for a meal. We have a situation where income is a problem, and the food system is making that problem even worse.

We need to think about those two challenges together, and the bill is an opportunity to set out how we want outcomes to improve in those areas so that we can reincentivise the food system. The incentives are misaligned with our goal of trying to improve the environment and health outcomes that we experience now. The food system is oriented towards producing as many calories at low cost as we can. Post-war, that was a very rational approach, and that is how the global food system was created. However, we need to think afresh now that it is not delivering the things that we need, and we must set ambitions for it.

Polly Jones mentioned that we have some outstanding leadership in Scotland on some areas, particularly food insecurity. There is a very long way to go, but you have made some important commitments in recent years to take a stand on protecting citizens who are facing food insecurity.

I have been working on the national food strategy in England, but you have a different set of processes and now have a bill. England has spent two years or more doing an in-depth piece of work to develop a national food strategy. It is an independent review, to which the Government will respond, and it will choose the things that it wants to take forward. The long-term ambition in England is very uncertain at this point as to whether the Government will decide to set in place the infrastructure for a long-term systems change that will stand the test of time and defy electoral cycles. You are in a unique position: you have a bill that you can make set out the long-term ambition. I think that, as drafted, the bill does not get there, but there is huge potential for it to do so. That is the challenge that I urge the committee to grapple with.

The Convener: That is most useful.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I have a question for Polly Jones about our ambition to eradicate food banks. A leaked report says that Glasgow City Council is possibly going to axe a scheme that provides free food for children in the holidays, as part of a £34 million budget cut. The bill does not have any resource allocated to it, but local authorities will have to deliver the actions in the plan. Should there be a specific budget for this work, given that we are already seeing cuts?

Polly Jones: As we heard from Anna Taylor, the bill is the beginning. It represents the bare bones of where we might want to build our ambition. As you all know only too well, a lot of the things that we need to do have a cost associated with them. At the Trussell Trust, we have concerns, given our work in Scotland. Local authorities' actions and services are essential to supporting people and preventing them from having to come to a food bank, yet their budgets for this activity have been cut.

We have spent a lot of time engaging with local authorities on how they deliver the Scottish welfare fund. We know what they want to do and what we want to support them to do, but they do not have the resources to deliver that. We will not be able to deliver anything that we ask local

authorities and other public bodies to implement that has a cost unless we attach a budget to it.

Given that there is limited information in the bill, which contains a commitment to deliver a national plan but does not say what it will be, it is hard to say what the budget should be. However, if we do not recognise that a budget will be necessary, the bill will not have the impact that we want it to have or deliver what we want it to deliver.

Anna Taylor: You have pointed to a vital part of the picture. There are things that need to be in place in order to drive change in the longer term, and one of those is of course adequate resourcing, whether that is at the local authority level or the national level.

The bill sets out requirements for a national plan and plans by the various relevant authorities. The national food strategy that has been developed for England, which we could argue is like a plan, although it is not exactly that, was a hugely resource-intensive piece of work. It took two years and involved a big team at DEFRA and a much wider team of consultants supporting the work. It involved deliberative dialogues in five regions, workshops in person and online with citizens, and a big youth consultation involving 400 young people and a set of workshops in schools.

You have a really exciting opportunity to involve citizens in creating a better future for Scotland around food, but it will require investment in order to ensure that what we get is not just a set of words on paper that ticks a box at this time, but something that drives the transformation that we need and enables us to win the many prizes that are on offer at the end of the rainbow when we get there.

Pete Ritchie: I echo that. This is about investing in food system change so that we can have a healthier and happier population and be more at ease with ourselves in how we do food in Scotland. It is an investment over time. The cost of ill health from food is staggering, but we can reduce that and have a much happier population. Local government is key to that. Some local authorities have very progressive food plans or are developing local food plans. Lots of innovation is already happening at the local level, but it needs a budget. It needs clear accountability at the local level, which the bill will create, and an assured funding stream over time to support local action on food system change, as well as national action.

09:30

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am interested in what Polly Jones said about the causes of hunger and the connection with incomes. There is obviously a great deal that the bill can do and it will be interesting to see what is in the plan. Can you say any more, given your experience of running food banks, about the impact on nutrition and on incomes of measures such as universal credit?

Polly Jones: Our evidence is really clear that what drives people to food banks is a lack of income, primarily from the social security system, and universal credit is one of the biggest drivers of people visiting food banks, particularly given the in-built wait at the beginning of a claim before people get a payment. It is often called the five-week wait but, unfortunately, it is not often only five weeks.

The £20 cut to universal credit that came in for many people in October is extremely disappointing for us, as an organisation that has been campaigning on the matter, and it is devastating for people who are in receipt of universal credit, given the day-to-day consequences for them. Of course, that has been a massively increased group of people since the beginning of the pandemic.

We are looking at the data at the moment. We collect data from food banks across our network in Scotland and the UK all the time, and we release it every six months. The last data that we released covered the period to the end of September, so it does not capture the impact of the £20 a week cut to universal credit. We know anecdotally that many food banks across Scotland have had an extremely busy winter period. Winter is always very busy because people's costs are higher. In particular, the cost of heating is higher, and we are, of course, very concerned about rising energy costs.

We are collating data at the moment to see what the impact of the most recent cut to universal credit has been. We remain resolute that we want the Westminster Government to take action to put the £20 a week back into universal credit and do the many other things that could be done.

There is something that the Scottish Government could look at with regard to universal credit. The Scottish Parliament has powers over Scottish choices. We know that people who are in receipt of universal credit want to have more options for how often they get their payments, and they would appreciate being offered those options at every meeting with their work coach. I urge the Scottish Government to think about how it can use its existing powers to require that.

I will also mention something that we could do, again using the powers that we have, that would make a big difference to people's incomes. We have the very successful model of the Scottish child payment, which is a new benefit in Scotland that is targeted at children who are at particular risk because of low incomes. How can we use that

model to get money into people's pockets to cover the wait for universal credit? That is something that we could do if we had the budget.

I want to draw out why we focus on income. As I said, when food banks started to grow, the focus was on how we could get food to people, rather than on the resources that people need to buy food. There was a real focus on how we could support people to budget and to cook. However, let me be absolutely clear that the reason why people come to food banks is, in the main, not because they do not know how to cook or how to budget. The people whom we meet are excellent budgeters and they can do things with very little money. I think that many of us in this meeting would be amazed by how people can make a very little amount go a long way. How many of us can cook with a parcel of mostly dried and tinned food? It is really difficult. The issue is absolutely about income. Does that answer your question?

Dr Allan: It does—thank you. I was keen to bring that into the conversation early on. You make the important point that some of the issues are about income and money as much as they are about any other policy. I am keen to know our other witnesses' views on what we understand a good food nation to look like and whether income is part of that.

Tilly Robinson-Miles: Income is absolutely part of it, but it is important to recognise that that is not the case for everyone. For most older people whom Food Train works with, finance is not the main barrier to them accessing food. The barrier might be physical access. They might have arthritis and be unable to use a peeler. They might have really short care visits, so the carer can only cook a microwave meal for four minutes, and then they have to sit and eat it on their own. We need to recognise that there is so much more to this than just finance. I value everything that Polly Jones says, but we need to recognise that wider complexity if we are to support Scotland's older population. We must recognise that, as a population, we are ageing very quickly, and we need to have systems in place to support people.

At the height of the pandemic, Food Train saw a 70 per cent increase in people requiring access to the grocery delivery service and the wider support that we give. We have had to intensify that provision over the past 25 years because of increasing demand for that wider support, including befriending and the provision of one-to-one meals. Some people have never had the opportunity to eat with another person. When people lose that, they lose their interest in food, which has a wider cost to society in terms of public health, malnutrition levels, mental health, social isolation and loneliness.

Finance is key, but it is also about dignity, choice and access to culturally appropriate food—all the principles that make people food secure. Michael Fakhri, the United Nations special rapporteur, says that really well. People should have the opportunity to celebrate food, and that should be the aim. If we are to eradicate food banks and the need for the other services, the goal should be that everyone has that opportunity. We need to recognise that there is no single solution. We are all different, and we all have our own tastes and our own dislikes. We all have our own personal relationship with food. To make sure that that is captured in this complex system is a great goal and we will achieve it, but we need to recognise the diversity of Scotland's population.

Anna Taylor: I have a point to add about universal credit. The evidence points to the fact that it creates a unique vulnerability in terms of food insecurity. The family resources survey is the big UK-wide survey that the Department for Work and Pensions commissions, and it produced its first evidence on food insecurity last year. When we look at patterns of food insecurity across variables around receipt of benefits, we see staggeringly high levels of food insecurity among those who receive universal credit—more than among those who receive other forms of benefit. Some 43 per cent of universal credit recipients report food insecurity in that survey.

Polly Jones described very clearly some of the reasons for that, but the fact that that evidence is now being produced through a really robust survey using standardised methods that are used across the world to measure food insecurity means that we have no excuse for not properly working out how we are going to reduce those levels and make sure that the benefits system protects people in the way that we need it to. Of course, many of those people will be working. They will be juggling jobs as well as being on universal credit, so this point is as much about wages, which Pete Ritchie covered well, as it is about the benefits system.

We have to grab the opportunity that the bill creates to set some good targets for the direction that we need the numbers to go in, and to put the measures in place to make that happen.

Pete Ritchie: We need to build the affordability of healthy, sustainable food into our public policy. A House of Lords committee said that recently, and it was also mentioned in the Dimbleby report. The idea that everybody should be able to afford healthy and sustainable food must be built into how we set our social security levels and the living wage. We must make those calculations. We used to make them 50 years ago, but we do not make them any more. We need to build that in.

That also means changing the rules of the game for how the private sector and the food system operate so that, as Anna Taylor said, healthy food becomes more affordable and unhealthy food becomes less affordable. Getting that basket right so that people can afford healthy, sustainable food is crucial.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): My question follows on from my colleague Dr Allan's point. I was struck by Polly Jones's comment about how people who are in food insecurity are good at budgeting and that visiting a food bank is a last resort.

Scottish Government decisions and spending priorities have been highlighted. For example, it has introduced the child payment, which is unique in the UK and will be doubled from April, and has rolled out free school meals. I am interested in Anna Taylor's and Polly Jones's thoughts on what other countries have been able to do with the full fiscal levers and powers to bring in legislation that is suitable for the people who live there.

Anna Taylor: That is a good question. It is difficult to answer it from a global perspective. For the purposes of the national food strategy in England, we looked a lot at the international experience. I can send to the committee information on some of the experience in other countries that might be of interest and value to your process.

To build on Pete Ritchie's previous comment, many wealthier countries across the world are grappling with how to reincentivise the food system and in particular the food industry—in essence, food companies—so that it puts its energy into healthier and sustainable foods and tips the balance of prices so that such foods become most affordable for everybody. At the moment, prices are skewed in the wrong direction, as unhealthy calories are three times cheaper than healthy calories. There is a lot of evidence describing that problem. We might point to the fact that pulses and root vegetables are cheap, which is true, but you need to put quite a lot of time and energy into cooking those foods. Particularly in the context of a fuel price crisis, that is pricing people out of that option.

The system is oriented the wrong way, so we have to think about those fiscal measures, and countries are starting to do that. They are thinking about how to use levies and taxes to make it harder for companies to produce energy-dense unhealthy foods at such low cost and to dampen down that approach. Those countries are also thinking about how to use that revenue to subsidise healthier foods in different ways, whether that is through targeted things such as free school meals or more generalised subsidy mechanisms. That is the space that countries are in at the moment, and it is the space that we need to think about across the UK. Given that many of the companies involved operate UK-wide, it is difficult to intervene on a more local scale.

That is the challenge. In recent months, we have done a lot on restricting promotions, not having them on the end of aisles and restricting advertising. All those measures are important, but they require us to have detailed legislation on what category applies and what does not. We need to think about how we can simplify the fiscal measures to hardwire into the system that reorientation of the economics. We are in this trap that Henry Dimbleby calls the "junk food cycle", whereby we want to eat energy-dense foods, they taste delicious but they do not fill us up, so we buy more of them and companies produce more of them and their markets grow and efficiencies of scale happen. We are stuck in that cycle, which as individuals we cannot get out of, and nor can companies get out of it. That is why we need leadership from Government.

The Convener: Jim Fairlie has a brief supplementary question.

09:45

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The question is for Pete Ritchie, who talked about the affordability of food. We are hearing from all the panellists about food insecurity—for example, we have heard that 43 per cent of universal credit claimants feel food insecurity—and the ability to buy food. How do we marry up the point about the affordability of food with the cost of production in this country? We want to produce good-quality food here locally. How do we get the income of the people who desperately need the food to marry up to the cost of producing it in the first place?

Pete Ritchie: It will take time, and a measure such as the Scottish child payment is a great start. To follow on from the comments about international experience, this is part of a global change that is going on. The European Union had the farm to fork policy that came in a couple of years ago. The Commission is now working on a sustainable food law to start making the big shift from producing calories at the cheapest cost to delivering nutrition to populations. That shift is under way in the EU. It will be a long-term process. We have a fundamentally unequal society in the UK, including in Scotland, and we have to start rebalancing that with long-term policies to reduce inequalities. The Scottish Government is working on that, but it will take time.

At the same time, in the way that we produce food, we need to make progress on including the

externalities in the price of food. At the moment, the health, environmental and pollution costs of the food that we produce do not appear in the supermarket price of that food. In general, we do not yet have a system in which the producers who are doing the right things—producing to high animal welfare and nature standards, locking up carbon and reducing their emissions—are necessarily rewarded for making those changes. The incentives are not yet right in the system, because all the costs to the environment get dumped on the environment. They do not come back to the person who produced those costs.

That is another part of trying to reconfigure the food system so that farmers and producers who are doing the right thing can make a living out of that. At the moment, a lot of the incentives still push the other way. Things are changing, however. At the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties, the big UK supermarkets signed up to reducing the environmental footprint of the food system by half. There is work in progress, but there is a lot of work to do—it will come with the agriculture bill—on how we support producers in Scotland to do the right thing and make a living through food.

I am not sure whether that answers your question.

Jim Fairlie: It leaves me with more questions, but we do not have time to go into them all today, unfortunately.

The Convener: We will move on to a question from Karen Adams.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Thank you, convener. It is “Adam” with no S, but people like to put an S on the end of it.

The Convener: I beg your pardon.

Karen Adam: Part of the question that I want to ask further down the line has been answered, but, while we are talking about that issue, I feel that I could amalgamate both of my questions. One is about in-work poverty and one is about targets, which I have concerns about.

Polly Jones spoke about people in food insecurity being quite creative with their food. I spent many years in a food-insecure home, so I understand that. I used to buy an eight-pack of the value shop-brand sausages to fit between five of us. I had to squeeze the sausage meat out of the skins and mix it with breadcrumbs to make some kind of meatballs, mixed with a 9p value tin of soup on some rice, to try to get round five of us in the home. I do not know that that was completely nutritious for us. It was probably high in salts and in natural carbohydrate sugars to bulk up. I have direct experience of that. I had a full-time worker in the house at that time—I was not a single parent.

That is where my concerns come in with regard to the targets. What targets are we talking about? In the processes around food policy, there is a lot of disjointedness and disagreement between certain organisations on what the targets should be. Even if we can agree on a target relating to obesity, for example, obesity is not just food driven. It is driven by stress, mental health, poverty and so on.

In my view, the bill should help to support a real holistic change in culture in our country. I cannot see how that will be achieved by inviting targets in at such an early stage. We could be led by the nose by targets, instead of seeing the natural consequences of changing culture. If we have a target to reduce obesity just through food, that will not work. We will not hit the targets and we will see the bill as a failure, when in fact that is not what it is about. Could we have a more organic and holistic approach to a good food nation and be guided and overseen by a plan rather than led by the nose by targets?

I open that up to the panel. Who would like to come in?

Tilly Robinson-Miles: That is an interesting point. Malnutrition includes obesity as well as undernutrition, and recognising that those are social problems is key. However, targets allow us to follow the progress on the bill. The Scottish Government has already committed to lots of things that could be part of the bill. Civic participation is key to the process. Lived experience should be central to that and it is important to have an independent food body that engages with people with lived experience on the ground and with experts. It is also important to recognise that there should be flexibility within that. The whole food system changed almost overnight as a consequence of Covid and the closing of hospitality. Having that steer is important.

For instance, one specific target is that all older adults should have access to one hot meal a day. Some older people sit there and have six digestive biscuits in a day. How is that even acceptable? Having things that can be measured holds the Government to account; otherwise, it can just say, “It’s great—food is brilliant.” How do we know that that is happening for everyone across Scotland? Many people are ignored and missed in the system. I am not saying that targets are the solution or the be all and end all, but they are a start in allowing society to hold the Government to account in relation to the bill and ensuring that we deliver the aims of having a good food nation for everybody.

Polly Jones: That is a good question. I thank Karen Adam for sharing her first-hand experience

of trying to make sausages go round the whole family.

I understand why she asked that important question about how we measure what a good food nation is. If she set it for us as homework, we would give a long list of all the things that are important, which is why we focus on targets. Is there one thing that pulls it all together? Is there one target that can do that? I am not sure.

I have a preference for targets generally, because they have been helpful in our experience with the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. Much as those targets are extremely ambitious and will be hard to deliver, that act has focused the whole of the third sector, the public sector, the private sector and everybody who engages in trying to reduce child poverty. The targets have been helpful at keeping up the momentum and the drive for change. That is the value of targets.

In the context of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, the target that is most important for us as a food bank network is reducing food insecurity, and particularly ending severe food insecurity, but maybe, as part of the bill and the plan, the Government could be tasked with finding the best way to measure how Scotland is a good food nation overall and the sweet spot between all the different priorities and targets.

Pete Ritchie: Karen Adam made an important point. Do targets help in this context? As Polly Jones said, targets can simply sum up the direction of travel. The targets that we have suggested are linked to the broader sustainable development goals, to which Scotland is signed up. It is not like we are talking about new targets.

Karen Adam makes a much more important point, which is about the right to food. Rights are universal. The point about bringing the right to food front and centre in the bill is to emphasise that it is a universal right. Everybody in Scotland has a right to be food secure, not to worry about where the next meal is coming from and to have a healthy and sustainable diet. We have more than enough food and resource in the world to do that. It is not technically difficult. It is about a statement of intent, a direction of travel and the sort of Scotland that we want to live in.

The right to food has to be universal, whether someone is going through a difficult time or is in care, or whether someone lives in a rural area, a remote area or an inner city area. Everybody in Scotland should be able to eat well and enjoy their food, as Tilly Robinson-Miles says. Everybody should be able to feel good about food and to take pride and pleasure in their food, and nobody should be worried sick about where their next meal is coming from. Making the right to food universal in Scotland, as we have done with healthcare and education, should be the core purpose of the bill.

Anna Taylor: I thank Karen Adam for that thought-provoking question. To build on the previous comments, I would look at targets alongside a purpose statement. The purpose statement has to encapsulate the ambition and vision and the sorts of things that Karen Adam and Pete Ritchie touched on around what we want from our food system and the role that we want food to play in society and our lives.

That is qualitative, so it is difficult to pin a target on it and not easy to measure. However, targets are vital for setting the bottom line. We will know that things are not going in the right direction if levels of food insecurity or obesity do not go down. Targets are not the summation of everything that we are trying to achieve, but they are helpful tools for judging whether we are going in the right direction.

Karen Adam pointed to a broader set of challenges around culture and how to measure or articulate the cultural changes that we want. That is notoriously difficult to do, but the role of citizens in the process will bring that challenge to life. That involves talking to citizens about their hopes for the food system and how it can help them to meet their social aspirations and goals and fulfil their values. Maybe you could co-develop with citizens ways of measuring whether you are getting there on that more cultural aspect. That would be an inspiring and exciting process to go through, which could be set alongside the more quantitative and easier to measure aspects that tell you whether you are going in the right direction.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): It has been an interesting discussion so far. In his response to Karen Adam, Pete Ritchie has started to answer the question that I was going to ask about the right to food. Could I get the panellists' views about the merits or weaknesses of incorporating the right to food in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill? If it is not incorporated, could the bill be strengthened in other ways to address the issues around access to food?

10:00

Polly Jones: We fully support incorporating a right to food in the bill. As we touched on when discussing targets, it is important that we set a standard for what people can expect. Putting the right to food into Scots law gives everybody an opportunity to claim their right and say, "This is what I expect but it is not what I am getting, and you have a duty to address this." Along with all members of the Scottish Food Coalition, we have been clear that we have a unique opportunity with the bill to put the right to food into Scots law. We

were disappointed that it was not in the bill, given that there was such a lot of public support and response to the consultation calling for that.

I appreciate that there is a much wider piece of work that is looking at how we incorporate a number of different human rights into Scots law, and I can understand the committee's questions about whether we should do that with the right to food now, given that the result of that work is coming down the line. From our point of view, I am concerned that, if we do not put it in now and something develops with the human rights legislation later on, the right to food might not be prioritised and incorporated at that point. The situation might change.

When we have been looking closely at the experience of people who are visiting food banks, we have seen that there is an urgency about the matter. In every year and every parliamentary session that we have not taken action, tens of thousands of people have spent nights hungry because they have not been able to get the food and other essentials that they need. For the sake of urgency and for the sake of clarity, I fully support and urge the committee to think about incorporating the right to food in the bill.

The Convener: Would Anna Taylor like to address that question?

Anna Taylor: I do not really have anything to add. I completely agree with everything that Polly Jones said. The conversations that we have been having about setting targets and accountability and having organisational resourcing in the form of some kind of independent body all form a vital part of the picture of making sure that the right to food can be properly incorporated in Scotland. Articulating what we mean by a good food nation has to have the right to food at its centre. I urge you to grasp that challenge, because the bill has the potential to be world leading.

The Convener: I think that we have heard Pete Ritchie's opinion on the matter. Would Tilly Robinson-Miles like to respond?

Tilly Robinson-Miles: I echo everything that Anna Taylor and Polly Jones have said. A delay to incorporation of the right to food is a delay in protecting human rights, essentially. The core purpose of the bill is centred around the right to food. It is important to recognise that the right to food is not just about an economic right to food. It has to capture the wider complexities and protects those wider complexities. That is important if the legislation is to truly protect everyone in Scotland.

I wanted to add an additional point on the second half of the question. Beatrice Wishart asked what else can be done. The right to food is one thing, but it is not the only answer. It has to come within a wider context, with other elements.

We have talked a lot about health. Social care is not referred to in the bill as it stands, despite the fact that we will have a national care service. In addition to the incorporation of the right to food, integration joint boards could be included as specified public authorities under the bill, because that would provide protection to people who are in receipt of social care in Scotland. Currently, health boards have to produce food plans but IJBs do not. The food, fluid and nutritional care standards that do exist only support those who are in receipt of national health service care. We need all those wider systems to work interconnectedly, and the right to food must be a central component of that.

The Convener: Before we move on to the next theme, we have two brief supplementary questions from Jim Fairlie and Alasdair Allan. I ask you to address your questions to specific panel members.

Jim Fairlie: Pete Ritchie, I will come back to you but this question could land with anybody. If someone is going to have the right to food, they would want all the other rights, including the right to shelter, the right to health and the right to education. Rather than singling out the right to food in this bill, surely we would be better to have it in the overall human rights bill that is coming later this year, so that it is incorporated with all those other rights. Rather than making that single provision for the right to food—not that I dispute the idea that we have a right to food; I absolutely agree with that 100 per cent—would it not be better for it to be tied into a bill that incorporates all our rights?

Pete Ritchie: That is a strange argument. We are waiting on the Supreme Court and the UK Government, but we have incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child after years of campaigning from children's organisations. We referred to the convention in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We set up the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. We brought all those things into law ahead of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill. Human rights are indivisible but we make progress when we can to improve and enhance them.

The Scottish Government does not have any problem with the principle of the right to food. The issue is about what we can do in this bill to advance that right ahead of any possible future bill. The human rights bill will not come this year or next year, but will come towards the end of the parliamentary session, and it will be a hugely complex and challenging piece of legislation. Putting the right to food clearly at the centre of the bill would progress human rights for everyone in Scotland.

The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament are completely committed to progressing human rights. The Scottish Government is a world leader on aspects of human rights. For us, there is a fantastic opportunity, as Anna Taylor said, to make this a world-leading food bill that has the right to food at its heart.

Jim Fairlie: Is your point that the UK Government could challenge the Scottish Government's plans to bring in stronger legislation later on?

The Convener: Jim, I will stop you there, as we need to focus on this bill. We have little time, so we will move on to the supplementary question from Alasdair Allan.

Dr Allan: I have a brief question for Tilly Robinson-Miles. You mentioned the idea of a delay regarding certain rights around food, which I agree are important, but the bill that we are dealing with has a plan associated with it, and surely that plan would make rights to food tangible and real in the here and now. Perhaps the plan is where our focus should be. The bill that we are dealing with now provides for a plan, and we have not talked much about what might be in that. Surely we have something in the here and now to deal with, and we are not really dealing with a delay.

Tilly Robinson-Miles: It is a delay to showing that true commitment and showing everyone that the right to food is theirs. Incorporating the right to food provides legal protection that is not provided by just saying that something will be done. However, you make an important point about how the plans in the bill ensure that everyone has a right to food.

It comes back to my point about integration joint boards. They control the commissioning of all social care in Scotland, so the issue concerns all the people who access food through social care. The boards do not, in the current bill, have to produce food plans, but health boards do. If we are to support all the people who access social care and ensure their right to food, whether that is incorporated in the bill or not, it still needs to be delivered in such plans. There need to be multiple scales of plans and they need to recognise the different ways in which people interact with food, which are not necessarily always through a health board—there are all the other ways.

We need to think about scales. Context matters when we are talking about the plans and we need to recognise that there is not one solution. Every part of Scotland is different and the plans should enable the local delivery of a right to food, but national legislation that puts the right to food into law would provide protection.

The Convener: Our next theme is participation, oversight and accountability, on which Jenni Minto has questions.

Jenni Minto: I want to move on to the issue of creating plans to ensure that we have a good food nation. I am interested in hearing your thoughts on whether there is sufficient provision in the bill to ensure that people can engage with and get involved in creating the plans.

Tilly Robinson-Miles mentioned lunch clubs and meals on wheels and how all of that connects. We need to reflect the Scottish population. Anna Taylor talked about lived experience, suggesting that one size perhaps does not fit all. Are the provisions good enough to ensure that there is engagement? How would you like that engagement to happen? I ask Polly Jones to start, please.

Polly Jones: We, in Scotland, have great knowledge of how we involve people with direct experience of poverty in our policy making. We have seen that through the advisory groups that have been set up around Social Security Scotland, through the advisory groups that are supporting the work of a steering group on ending the need for food banks and through the fantastic work of the poverty truth community across Scotland. There is a lot more that we could do—we could put this in the bill and in the plans—to make it clear that people with direct experience of different parts of the food system should be central to the development of what engagement looks like in practice.

In my experience, when we have brought together service providers to think about how we improve our service, we inevitably make mistakes, because we are not seeing things from the perspective of somebody who uses the service or who has tried to use it but has given up because it has not worked. We should definitely lean on the experience and the strong track record of other parts of our policy development in Scotland. We need to hardwire into the bill and the plans a central role for people with direct experience of working in the food industry and people experiencing food insecurity, including the older groups that Tilly Robinson-Miles mentioned, who face challenges in getting the food that they need. If we do that, our policy will be much more effective and we will stand a better chance of moving closer to our ambition.

Establishing an independent food commission through the bill would strengthen that. An independent food commission would give an opportunity—as we have seen with the work of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, which is linked to the delivery of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017—to have commissioners who not only represent direct experience in different

ways but can have a timetable for taking evidence and reporting on the delivery of the good food nation legislation. That is my strong recommendation as well.

Jenni Minto: Thank you, Polly. You have pre-empted my second question, so I turn to Anna Taylor and put to her my question about public engagement. I would also like her view on which body should oversee matters. I think that I am right in saying that the Dimbleby report has a proposal about the Food Standards Agency in that regard. I am interested in what you think should be the structure in Scotland.

Anna Taylor: On the point about public engagement, I agree with Polly Jones's points around lived experience—that aspect is vital. However, public engagement can go a lot further than that and be beneficial to the policy development process.

We found that doing the public dialogues for the purposes of the national food strategy helped us to think about the interventions that would be publicly acceptable. For example, when we were talking about sugar and junk food, the citizens in the dialogues were prepared to say that they did not mind taxes or restrictions on advertising and that they did not like the pester power that kids have over them when they are shopping and so on. They were quick to go there.

When you start to talk about meat reduction, it is a very different type of conversation. Even though it is clear from the evidence that we need to reduce our meat, the citizens in the dialogues did not want to go down the same routes that we were going down for sugar and fat. That was an incredibly useful insight into the public's thinking about what they are ready to embrace and where we have to take a slightly different track or explore other avenues. Knowing that was vital, too.

10:15

In the national food strategy process, we used deliberative dialogue styles of processes. They are resource intensive—you cannot get away from that—but they are hugely valuable.

The other opportunity that you have with the development of the local plans is not only that that enables you to consult; it also allows a greater level of participation in the process, with a tangible difference in the quality of that public engagement. If we want those local level plans to really come to life, we will need citizens to participate and feel that they have power and ownership of some of those processes. That is the prize, if you like, when thinking about how you engage citizens. The fact that Scotland is a relatively small country means that you have proper possibilities for doing something meaningful along those lines.

On whether there should be an independent food commission, this is always a difficult conversation because establishing such structures creates resistance for a good reason. You have to start with the purpose that you want to try to achieve and consider where that could be best achieved.

We have in mind quite a substantial role for such a body in helping with the consultation and the plan development, and driving that coherence. At the moment, it is hard to see how you would not end up with a whole set of local plans pointing in different directions and a national one pointing in another direction without having that overarching sense of purpose in the bill.

That body—whatever it might be—would be a resource that could help to drive some of that coherence and support the citizen involvement process. Vitally, it would have to help with tracking progress, whether through a broader set of metrics underpinning the bill, through the targets or through whatever. There needs to be a touch point with Parliament where progress is reviewed. That way, we would be able to say, for example, that we are making progress on obesity but food and security levels are sticking.

It will be a process of iteration. At the end of the day, this is hard work and there are no poster-child countries with amazing ways of doing things that we can copy. Each time, we are trying to iterate and learn what things we can do. The body will create that function, which includes getting feedback, so that it can inform policy makers about what they need to be grappling with next.

I think that an independent body is needed. There may be other options that can be considered in relation to where that sits, but that function is vital.

The Convener: We will move on to Rachael Hamilton, who has a further question.

Rachael Hamilton: My question is about procurement. Can I ask about that issue now?

The Convener: That is fine. You can continue.

Rachael Hamilton: One of the submissions to the consultation mentioned that building local indigenous food-growing culture is very important. Later on, we will take evidence from NFU Scotland. As part of its submission, NFUS said that we need to bring the whole supply chain closer together. How can we strengthen the links between farming and, for example, cities where there are levels of deprivation? I am not saying that there is not deprivation in rural areas—I hope that you understand my meaning. I ask Tilly Robinson-Miles to start.

Tilly Robinson-Miles: In terms of deprivation, I do not know whether that is necessarily relevant in

relation to older people. However, we know that people should have opportunities to socially engage with food. That does not just have to be eating a meal with someone; it could be opportunities to grow food together. Lots of Scottish men's sheds have done great work in reconnecting with the land, with people growing and eating food together. There are more unconventional opportunities for older people to re-engage with the land to experience the wider social wellbeing values that food can enable.

I will let others answer the wider part of your question.

Rachael Hamilton: Other issues in that regard include opening up land for allotments and improving wellbeing through working in green spaces. Those aspects cut across the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. We need to open up access to our indigenous food-growing culture.

Polly Jones: Our experience as a network of food banks does not give me much expertise to share with you about wellbeing through growing. I know there are others on the panel who have a lot of experience in that.

To be clear, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is so exciting because it brings together areas around food insecurity that are focused particularly on income and all the many other valuable things that food can bring into our lives.

Rachael Hamilton: You talked earlier about food banks having cans and dried foods. Replacing those types of foods is an area that could be opened up in terms of how we support people who are possibly less well educated about cooking and getting access to fresh food. Access to fresh food is an area that I am very interested in.

Pete Ritchie: That is a hugely important area. It is worth noting that, where the Dimbleby report talked about the purpose of the food system, it talked about resilience. We have to remember that that is an important part of this whole policy mix. Covid showed us that, across the world—not just in the UK and Scotland—we rely almost entirely on very long food chains and we have disconnected farmers and cities. At the time of COP26, we ran some interesting dialogues between farmers and cities in different parts of the world to look at how we can help each other and work together.

We have to understand that the processing supply chains are not set up for local food systems. They are set up for long chains, big accumulators and multiple retailers. Re-engineering that will take time, but there is passion to do that. We recently did some consultations on Scotland's local food strategy. The interest was phenomenal, especially in islands and remote communities, which are at the far end of a long food chain bringing stuff to them, where people are saying, "We could produce a lot more of our food locally. We could create jobs and build a local economic multiplier and create wellbeing if we could secure some of those connections." There is a huge opportunity to bring the idea of having a stronger and more resilient local food system into the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

How do we get that food from farmers to support people who are food insecure? It is a big challenge, but we have seen that cities around the world are doing just that. São Paulo is doing stuff and we heard from Lyon during our fork to farm dialogues. The local authorities there are enabling that sort of direct connection between producers and local communities. They are subsidising the transaction costs, subsidising transport or finding some other way of making both those things work. Brazil's zero hunger project focused a lot on that—how to support primary incomes and support low-income communities to access food. There are possibilities there. They are not simple, because that is not the way our food system is set up, but we should certainly explore that.

Anna Taylor: I have a couple of further comments to build on what Peter Ritchie said. I think that the resilience point is a vital one. We did a piece of research looking at sources of fruit and vegetables across the United Kingdom and the extent to which those supply chains are coming from countries that either are very vulnerable to climate change or have severe water problems. It is only a matter of time before some of those supply chains become even more threatened by some of those challenges. The impetus to think a little bit more about the extent to which we can, in particular, grow fruit and veg, in which we have such a high trade deficit in the United Kingdom, is huge from a resilience perspective, setting aside the other reasons why we might want to be growing things closer to home and eating and enjoying them.

The other point, of course, is the potential for public procurement. As Pete Ritchie says, the supply chains are not well set up for local food systems at the moment, but public procurement can help to drive some of that transformation if you really set goals for local purchasing and ensure that the benefits of those public contracts are felt in local communities, building on the anchor institution idea and the kinds of things that have come out of Preston and that whole experience.

Specifically on low income, just before Christmas I visited what you would probably call a food club or a food pantry in Margate and Thanet in Kent where, obviously, there are a lot of fruit and veg farmers. As well as getting a supply of food from FareShare on a more classic food bank

model, it has relationships with gleaners and it takes a lot of the slightly less than perfect fruit and veg from local farms and makes it available in bundles through the food club. That is not free food provision; people pay for their food, but it is at a much lower cost and it is a great offer without any junk food included.

There are various ways in which communities are innovating and breaking the boundaries, but, as Pete Ritchie says, the systems are not favourable to that at the moment, and that is the kind of innovation that we need to push for.

The Convener: Alasdair Allan has a supplementary question.

Dr Allan: I suppose that it is just a comment. Given what we have just heard today about the ingenuity that has been used and is used by many families who are struggling to pay for food, I wonder whether Ms Hamilton would reconsider the phrase that she used about families who are hungry possibly being "less ... educated" in how to cook.

The Convener: I am sorry—

Rachael Hamilton: I can explain that.

The Convener: No, we will move on. I ask Ariane Burgess to ask her questions. We have only five minutes left—we are very tight for time.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I will direct this to Pete Ritchie and then to Anna Taylor, and I will put my questions together for the sake of time. Pete Ritchie began to touch on this, but I would like to ask the panel's views on the role of public authorities in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. What should they be doing around procurement, health, supply chain resilience, food education and community empowerment and, in your view, to what extent does the bill enable or encourage them to do that? My other question is similar but is about the private sector. It certainly needs to be part of the solution, so in what ways can businesses play a leading role in transforming our food systems?

Pete Ritchie: Absolutely, the public sector has to show the way and lead by example. There is some great stuff happening in Scotland, and we can do more and we can do better. As Anna Taylor said, we could increase the proportion of local food. We can do more on educating young people about food systems—not just on how to cook but on how the food system works—and creating a higher-end food system. There are lots of things that we could do, but we have to remember that public food is a maximum of 1.5 to 2 per cent of the food supply. The elephant in the room is the private sector, which delivers most of our food and, as Anna said, is operating on rules that generate ill health and environmental degradation because the rules to which it operates generate that sort of food system. We have to change the rules. If you changed the offside rule in football, it would change the game. If you do not change the rules, people keep playing the same game, because that is what the incentives are set up for. That is what shareholders expect and that is how the market works. Fundamentally, it is a global challenge to change the rules for food supply chain actors, but what the bill can do is make it clear that the Government intends to use powers to help work with the food system that wants to change to do things better.

Mandatory reporting from supermarkets on what they are selling is important—that is in the Dimbleby report. The carbon report is important. The nature report is important. Over time, we have to align what is sold to us in our supermarkets, in our restaurants, in our food chain companies, in our canteens and in our takeaways with our health imperatives for a healthy diet and with our climate and nature imperatives for living within our climate nature boundaries with our food system. We have to align those two systems, or we will not make net zero, we will not get any healthier as a population and we will continue to see the devastation of nature by the food system.

10:30

Anna Taylor: I am conscious of the time, so I will be very brief. I think that you asked to what extent the bill encourages and enables local authorities to take action in this area. I would say that it encourages but that it does not do so enough, in the way in which it is drafted and in the level of resourcing and capacity support that is in there.

I completely agree with Pete Ritchie about the private sector. I think that the bill must set out the expectations of the private sector. However, it goes back to that purpose statement. It is vital that the private sector sees a clear direction from the Government. The thing that causes all kinds of problems is constantly shifting direction. If a clear direction is set, that is a vital step. Then, of course, we have to follow through with creating the right incentives and realigning the incentives for change. Importantly, many of the more progressive companies will say, "We want to do this, but you have to create a level playing field. If I step in that direction, I will immediately be taken over by my competitors. I will just lose market share, and what is the point of that?" They are right. What is the point of that if you end up with the same outcomes?

The point is how you move progressively. To move the set of standards forward by realigning the incentives for change and having mandatory reporting is an important first step. It will not solve

all the problems, but it brings a level of transparency and accountability to the private sector that I think we desperately need and, hopefully, it will also equip policy makers. I will be urging you to ask Westminster, if it is progressing with mandatory reporting, how the data can be cut for Scotland so that you can use it in a way that informs your thinking about policy development. It will create an ecosystem around it of campaigners pushing companies to move faster. That is all good. That is all that we need in order to shift the system in the right direction.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of the session. There are one or two questions that we would like to follow up in writing and I hope that you will be able to respond to the committee with written responses. Thank you very much for your input today, which has been most valuable.

10:33

Meeting suspended.

10:40

On resuming—

The Convener: We resume our evidence taking on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. With our second panel, we will focus on policy outcomes relating to supply chain resilience and economic development.

I welcome John Davidson, chief—I am sorry; deputy chief executive and strategy director at Scotland Food & Drink; Karen Galloway, head of retail and insights at Seafood Scotland; Jonnie Hall, director of policy for NFU Scotland; and Claire White, manager of Shetland Food and Drink Ltd.

I invite each of you to make a brief opening statement, starting with John Davidson.

John Davidson (Scotland Food & Drink): Good morning. Thank you, convener. I thought that you were giving me a promotion there—I was excited about that.

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence. I am the deputy chief executive at Scotland Food & Drink. Scotland Food & Drink is a membership organisation with 440 members. We play a key leadership role in taking forward the growth of the food and drink industry, working with a range of partners.

The context for the bill is that food and drink businesses across the industry have faced an incredibly difficult past two years in responding to Brexit and Covid. Many businesses have barely survived and now face enormous market pressures from rising costs and market competition.

That said, we think that the future for our industry is positive, and we are optimistic. Therefore, anything that we can do to support the recovery is a good thing. That being the case, we support the bill, and we believe that its scope and purpose are about right. Specifically, we see it as providing a good opportunity for greater policy and operational alignment across the public sector, by giving the various bodies a clear shared focus on how we support local suppliers and, in turn, how we support the local economy.

My comments today will be made through the lens of food and drink businesses. We have made some suggestions about how we think that the bill can go a bit further to enable and facilitate more local sourcing across the public sector. We think that more local sourcing makes it easier to talk about and to access good-quality local food, and improves people's understanding of where our food comes from, all of which underpins a strong food culture in Scotland.

Karen Galloway (Seafood Scotland): Good morning. I am the head of retail and insights at Seafood Scotland, which is a trade body that represents the whole of the seafood industry. It was set up by the industry to represent industry views. Our role is to look to develop a sustainable, economically viable seafood sector across the board.

Following on from John Davidson's comments, we whole-heartedly support the spirit and nature of the bill. As John mentioned, between Brexit and Covid, the past two years have been exceptionally challenging, especially for some parts of the seafood industry. The bill provides a real opportunity to embed recovery for the sector.

In setting out the vision and strategy for the food system across the board in Scotland, I acknowledge that it needs a huge degree of policy cohesion across a range of dimensions. When it comes to public procurement, local food sourcing, food safety and so on, we need to look at the situation holistically rather than through just one lens.

We would strongly encourage partnership working through the existing systems and partnerships within the food sector in Scotland so that we can co-create the strategy to make sure that we get buy-in from industry stakeholders and businesses in the industry and make that difference. For me, the issue is about how we can add value to that process, and that is why I am here today.

10:45

Jonnie Hall (NFU Scotland): Good morning. I am director of policy with NFU Scotland. As, I think, most of you will be aware, NFU Scotland is

the lead representative body for agricultural producers across Scotland, whose interests range from crofting interests right through to soft fruit production in Angus and Fife. We cover the gamut of primary producers in Scottish agriculture.

As previous speakers have mentioned, we remain in extremely challenging times—it is almost a perfect storm, in which we need to find a post-Brexit landing place and deal with the impacts of Covid on supply chain issues and so on—yet while Scottish agriculture remains extremely challenged as we move into a new policy environment and policy context, there is also a significant opportunity. The key thing for NFU Scotland in relation to any aspirations for a good food nation is the primacy of the role of the primary producer—if that makes sense—and how it is fundamentally important to ensure that the interests of the primary producer are front and centre of those aspirations.

We will undoubtedly come on to a more technical discussion of some of the challenges and issues, but the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement, the new UK legislation on the internal market and subsidy control, and the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 are all very pertinent to where the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill might sit in domestic legislation and policy as we move to a new agricultural support settlement. The key thing for us is to ensure that the bill acts in support of, and is complementary to, all those other things that are going on, instead of doing something in isolation.

Claire White (Shetland Food and Drink Ltd): I am the manager of Shetland Food and Drink Ltd. It is one of 18 regional food groups across Scotland that are orchestrated by Scotland Food & Drink. We are a membership organisation—we have 100 members—and we exist to increase the production, profile and profitability of Shetland food and drink by providing public-facing promotion, quality assurance and collaboration opportunities.

We are broadly optimistic about the bill but, like Jonnie Hall, we are eager to see the specifics and to find out how it will work in practice; in particular, we want to know what it will mean in practice for small local businesses.

The Convener: We now move to questions. Given the experience that each of you has in the food production and supply sector, what do you think are the most difficult challenges that the sector faces? Are those challenges unique to the sector in Scotland? What are the opportunities? Could you compare the situation in Scotland, where we have policies such as the delivery of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, with what is happening in the rest of the United Kingdom?

I invite Jonnie Hall to come in first.

Jonnie Hall: From an agriculture point of view, fundamentally, the challenges are to do with the fact that we are moving out of the familiar and comfortable context of the common agricultural policy, which has largely dictated behaviour as regards the practice of agriculture in Scotland for the best part of 50 years, to a new context of more active agriculture, not just in sustainable food production but in what it delivers in terms of climate ambition and restoring nature and addressing the biodiversity challenges.

In that sense, it can be argued that Scottish agriculture is looking at delivering simultaneously on those three fronts: food, climate and biodiversity. That is challenging, but it is certainly not impossible.

However, that goal will remain elusive unless we start to change the way in which we support agriculture through incentives, regulation and advice, so that farmers and crofters understand what is expected of them in delivering high-quality food, at the same time as reducing emissions, sequestering carbon and delivering for wildlife and nature. That requires a significant shift in how agriculture and land use policy is developed and applied in Scotland. Obviously, a significant amount of work is being done at the moment, which involves us, the Scottish Government and others in an endeavour to get to that new place. That will be challenging for a lot of agricultural businesses.

I think that there will be a significant restructuring of agriculture over the next few years. As part of that, we need to have more resilient businesses that can withstand the volatility of the marketplace and that can achieve a fairer return in the supply chain so that we are not as reliant on direct support from the public purse but can guarantee an improved share of the income from the supply chain, so that we can operate as businesses but deliver public interest outcomes.

John Davidson: I will answer the question in two parts, starting with the challenges and moving on to the opportunities.

As we see it, there are two strands to the current challenges. First, there are the market challenges that we face in recovering from Covid. The UK is one of the most competitive retail markets anywhere in the world. We have fantastic retailers that are doing great work in supporting many of our suppliers, but because our market is so competitive, that is putting enormous pressure on the suppliers who supply that market and, at times, it is putting major pressure on their margins.

We also face challenges with the international export market, which is valuable, but because of

the implications of Brexit, is a bit harder to get into. As other countries seek to recover, the competition in international markets is extremely challenging. We have really tough market conditions out there to navigate.

The flipside of that for our businesses, given what they have experienced over the past two years, is that the situation is tough at the moment, as I said in my opening remarks. People have lost market share and have had pressure put on their workforce over the past two years, so business cash flows have been eroded. Typically, they are 10 to 15 per cent down on labour supply and they face increases in costs of 20 to 30 per cent for raw materials, packaging and so on. The market conditions for our businesses are difficult, but others are facing that, too.

On the opportunity side, one bright light that has emerged from Covid on the domestic front has been the increased interest in local food. I think that we need to capitalise on that. The public are generally more appreciative of local suppliers and there is more recognition of the value of local food. We have seen an upsurge in home deliveries and local outlets, so we need to capitalise on that and do more there.

We know that the Scottish brand and Scottish quality and Scottish provenance are well regarded, in England and internationally. We need to capitalise on that. We need to redouble our efforts to get back into the market and to raise our profile, and we need to help our businesses in that space. We know that the demand is there. We just need to support our businesses to navigate those opportunities once again.

There are two aspects to my answer. The starting point is that Scotland is a fantastic place to operate from the point of view of the support that has been available from the Government and others over the past 10 years. The Scottish food and drink industry has a fantastic culture of working together and collaborating. Such a culture is not enjoyed elsewhere in the UK, for example, in England, although England is catching up through the Henry Dimbleby report, which the committee heard about earlier, and Wales and Ireland are also starting to do good things.

What we have in Scotland is a fantastic platform from which to support our industry as we move forward. We need to recognise the challenges that we face but keep a laser focus on the opportunities that exist to build back stronger, and target those opportunities to grow our businesses again.

Karen Galloway: Following on from what John Davidson, in particular, said, I think that seafood has faced the perfect storm over the past couple of years. To say that there are tough market conditions out there is perhaps a significant understatement. We have had significant inflation, and we know that the labour shortages, particularly in rural areas and in some of our seafood hotspots, are very dramatic.

At the end of the day, what we catch in Scotland we tend to export—we do not eat what we catch in Scotland. We have been trying to address that over the past 20 years, but it is very challenging to get both the UK and the Scottish consumer to eat what we catch. John Davidson is, however, right in saying that, through Covid, we have seen many businesses pivot and an acknowledgement of local food—people enjoying and supporting local businesses but also enjoying the Scottish bounty, if you like.

Although we are facing some tough challenges, Scotland is in a very strong position. John Davidson mentioned collaboration. The work that happens through partnership working across and between organisations is exceptionally strong, and it is not replicated south of the border. I think that Claire White will talk about the role of the regional food groups. The network that we have here is vital to some smaller businesses and to our recovery.

I do think that the seafood that we catch in Scotland is some of the best in the world, but, as John Davidson said, the rest of the world is out there, too, and it is hard trading at the minute. For some of our shellfish exporters, the issues that they are facing means that getting their products to traditional markets is harder than it has ever been. That will not go away. Therefore, we need to address some of the issues around domestic consumption and domestic demand. Working with those challenging retailers and looking to create a demand for Scottish seafood products provides an opportunity, but it will not be a quick fix—we will have to work on it over a period of time.

That also goes back to the point about the impact that the seafood industry has on sustainability and broader environmental and ethical considerations such as the climate and biodiversity.

There are a lot of issues going on in the background, but I believe that the future is rosy, with the right support and collaboration through working together, which we do not necessarily see south of the border.

Claire White: [*Inaudible.*]—both John Davidson and Karen Galloway have made. Specifically from other perspectives, as John said, the most difficult challenge that we face locally in Shetland is competition—particularly external competition in an island setting where there is finite available food and drink spend.

We had a couple of recent expansions of supermarket chains here, the impacts of which are difficult to articulate because they are so systemic and catastrophic, potentially in the long term. It strikes us that, when it comes to the finite local food and drink supply chain, there is a disconnect between planning policy, local development policy and the aspirations of large companies that wish to locate themselves in island settings.

On the distribution point, production and distribution costs and blockages remain significant in island settings—including freight and regulation costs, particularly around animal transport and slurry storage. Jonnie Hall knows a great deal more about those topics than I do. In all of this policy making, it is important from the outset that island perspectives are included and that measures are proportionate when it comes to that smaller, coherent food supply unit.

In fishing, as Karen Galloway said, we have the issue—particularly in Shetland—of increasing competition over the sea bed as aspects of it are sold off to the highest bidder for renewable energy use. We ask what that means for our fishing sector, which traces back hundreds of years and for generations. Always be mindful of the competition for existing, indigenous industry in creating new industries on the sea bed.

We face challenges in quota terms through a lag between the scientific data being collected and the consequent fishing policy. That has a massive impact on our local fleet, which is the most significant aspect of our economy by some margin.

The fishing industry also needs support in and of itself. It is already a climate-smart food choice that we are promoting. We need support to transition successfully, so that the seafood food sector is kept front and centre as an existing incredibly climate-smart solution to a lot of the protein problems that we face. So, do keep supporting that industry in the long term.

Those are all challenges that we face.

11:00

On the Scotland versus UK aspect that you asked about, it does not feel, from a membership perspective, as relevant to us as the mainland versus island perspective on things. As Karen Galloway said, we already collaborate very effectively Scotland-wide with our equivalents elsewhere, but there really is minimal UK-wide consultation and collaboration currently. Critical for us in all policy making is to think about the islands before implementing anything that professes to be universal.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Claire. We now move to Alasdair Allan.

Dr Allan: This is a question for Jonnie Hall. Could you speak a bit more about what you feel a good food nation would look like? You have given an indication already about what it might mean for the agricultural sector and elsewhere, but, at a time when, as you have indicated, we are moving through a period of change in agricultural payments, how does a good food nation plan—which is what is in the bill—relate to the wider issue you are talking about in terms of the change in the regime that farmers have to operate under?

Jonnie Hall: That is an excellent question. Fundamentally, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, a good food nation must—at the very least—have the principle of a sustainable food system and sustainable agriculture at the heart of it.

I would argue that the past 50 years of agricultural support has driven us away somewhat from the aspiration of a sustainable food production system in terms of our management of soils, land, our livestock and so on. I think that that has now been recognised and the clear intention is to endeavour to reverse that. That is why agricultural policy in Scotland is rightly starting to shift in that direction, towards being about the trilogy of food, climate and biodiversity. Behind that are the principles of a just transition, which is about enabling farmers and crofters to adapt, because a just transition is also about underpinning rural communities and businesses and everything that they provide socially and economically. To me, that is the kernel of any good food nation, but particularly one here, in Scotland.

As we move beyond the farm gate, that then extends to understanding and awareness on a much greater scale than we have now and an appreciation of what producing food in Scotland is all about—provenance, the cultural identity of many of our food products and so on. That has to resonate far more readily with our primary consumers here, in Scotland, but also in markets in the rest of the UK and beyond.

That is where we very much need a joined-up approach between the likes of ourselves, as a primary producer interest, and the likes of John Davidson at Scotland Food & Drink and others, in order that we have a seamless transition from primary producer all the way to end consumer, bearing in mind that there are some significant commercial interests in that process as well around food distribution, processing, retailing and so on.

I think that the time is right. We need to really understand our potential as a food-producing

nation but to then also ensure that, through policy and support in the right way, we enable those connections to be made. That goes right the way through some of the principles in the bill around things like education of individuals. As folk grow up, they should understand where their food comes from and the value of it—not just what they are paying for it, but the story behind it, and, indeed, the nutritional aspects of what we are producing here, in Scotland.

Dr Allan: My only other question is for Claire White. Like Claire, I live on an island, and I am very interested in what she had to say about supply chains and the market for food locally.

What more do you think can be done—I do not say to reverse the trend—to promote places in islands where food that is produced locally can reach an even wider market locally? In many places, as you have touched on, as in the rest of Scotland, supermarkets have a very large market share of the sale of food, and whether supermarkets choose to stock much local produce at all is variable. What options does Scotland have to ensure that island communities such as yours see more locally produced food on island shelves?

Claire White: The initial response to that question is that you should not let the problem arise in the first place. Please connect planning and local development planning. When planning applications come in from external competition to vulnerable rural and island regions, ensure that the local development plans are upheld in the face of those applications and are not regarded as not material planning considerations and, therefore, not important. Do not invest the time, the effort and the local energy in formulating a vision for how we want the places we live and work in to look if you are not going to honour those commitments in the long term. First of all, it needs a revision of planning to consider the impact of external competition and additional external competition on already vulnerable areas—both in rural Scotland and in island settings.

What can be done to reverse the trend? The trouble is that, once those kinds of strategic decisions are made, it is very difficult to do anything to reverse the trend because, as you say, supermarkets notoriously offer poor margins for local suppliers. Claims in their planning applications can be, in some cases, arguably inflated, and small local suppliers are simply not economically strong enough to provide all the infrastructure that supermarkets require. Consequently, they just cease to trade as more and more business, in a finite pool of spend, moves to those other outlets. All that money for us simply sails out the south mouth of Lerwick harbour and there is no multiplier effect locally. It is really difficult to think what to do in these situations.

We try desperately to promote local produce all the time. That is the reason we exist, but our resource is minute. To give you a feel for that, we are a one-person team that is co-ordinating every bit of local food promotion that happens in this region. We would argue—and we have spoken lots to Scotland Food & Drink about it—that we need significantly more resource, and long-term resource, in the way that equivalents in Iceland have £500,000 to spend annually on promoting lamb alone, as the result of a farmers co-operative system that they have there. That is the kind of management of spend that we would be looking for to create any sort of competition that feels regionally distinct, in which we can collaborate across Scotland and build a bigger, better brand internationally in the long term that will deliver export benefits for Scotland.

The Convener: On the back of that, we need to remember that the bill as it currently stands brings in a requirement only to produce a plan. The private sector is not involved in that.

At the risk of stepping on other members' toes in future questions, I will ask John Davidson a question. You guys represent the private sector. Do you think that duties should be placed on parts of the private sector? We are talking about supermarkets perhaps having an obligation to buy local, procure local and have local produce in the store. Do you think the bill needs to go further in order address such things instead of just having an obligation to produce a plan?

John Davidson: That is a very interesting question. In terms of the obligations on the public sector, as I said earlier, I think the bill can go further in what we want to see from the public sector to enable and stimulate more local sourcing. At the moment, the plan is a good concept. I think we can go just a bit further, though, to take that to the next level. We will perhaps come on to talk about that.

The point about the private sector is more interesting, and how we do that is probably very complex. Generally speaking, things such as targets can be quite high risk. Across Europe, where targets have been set around the common agricultural policy and so on, we have seen that, when you set targets to drive a particular sector, that can create an oversupply in the sector, which then creates price drops and crashes. Therefore, there are some challenges around that.

We have made enormous progress in the UK and Scotland over the past 10 years—for example, working in partnership with retail to source more locally. Much more could be done, though. The extent to which the bill can address

that or be quite prescriptive in that space needs a lot more thought.

There were comments in the earlier session, I think, about reporting around retailers. That is an interesting concept. If we had more transparency about sourcing practices, would that generate a bit more focus on that and a bit more momentum to source more? We very much support that in the context of the public sector, so it is an interesting debate in terms of the private sector.

My final comment is that we have a very mature architecture around the Scotland Food & Drink partnership, which consists of many trade bodies and the public sector. We have enjoyed relative success over the past 10 years, working together and collaborating with a shared focus and ambition. We need to think long and hard about where there could be particular duties in legislation and how that would add value in the context of the private sector. I think that it needs a lot more discussion. The debate on the public sector is an easier one to have: I think it should show leadership in that space. There is a great opportunity to do that and to build on what it has already done.

The Convener: I was going to bring in Rachael Hamilton for a supplementary question, but it is probably more appropriate to bring in Karen Adam, whose questions will lead on to some of the issues you have touched on. I will bring in Rachael Hamilton after that.

Karen Adam: I want to touch on targets and target setting, as I have concerns about that and we have experience in the panel. A lot of the food planning processes that we have can be seen as fragmented between industries, and we have contradictory strategies with diverse policy goals. I asked the previous panel a question about targets, and everybody seemed to have their own targets and wishes, although there was some overlap. For example, one target that was mentioned was having one hot meal a day, but one hot meal a day could be somebody throwing a microwave-ready meal at somebody. So, can target setting be quite detrimental at this stage? Is that what the plan should be about? Should it not be an overview—a guide to how we can holistically create the culture of a good food nation?

John Davidson spoke earlier about the unintended consequences of lockdown, with a bit of a silver lining being that people were buying their food locally and going to local shops and businesses. That was also more practical for the sake of exports/imports and everything else in the light of EU exit. Everything seemed to be compounded and harder at that time, but there was an unintended consequence. If we are going to be led by the nose towards targets, is there not a danger that we will miss the point of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill and what it is supposed to be about?

Jonnie Hall: Setting targets is a principle that we are somewhat averse to. Targets are something of a hostage to fortune. Certainly, in agriculture and land use, there are many Scottish Government targets kicking around that you can see the intention behind, but, nevertheless, they create something of a distraction.

We have targets around things like afforestation. We obviously have targets around climate change and emissions reduction. Some of those are specifically set in an agricultural context and, therefore, the question is: how do we achieve them? That is also in the context of a target within something called ambition 2030—which John Davidson of Scotland Food & Drink will be able to comment much more on—which is about how we grow the value of the food and drink sector in Scotland over the next eight years to reach a value of some £30 billion.

11:15

It is easy for the Government and agencies to throw around the concept of targets, but, when it comes to practical delivery, it is more about what measures and levers you put in place to enable people not necessarily to achieve those targets but at least to make progress towards them.

We should not beat ourselves up about targets. I would be very reluctant to set targets for Scottish agriculture on what it should produce and so on. I would be far more interested in how it produces what it does sustainably and, indeed, what the margin is for the primary producers in order that they can remain viable agricultural businesses that continue to produce food of the highest quality.

I do not think that targets are particularly helpful in any respect. Obviously, quoting a target is a convenient way for Governments to set out a policy ambition, but a key thing is the how of it. How do we actually achieve change? How do we implement change? We then need to know whether we are making progress towards what we want to attain and whether we have achieved success or failure.

As I say, targets are hostages to fortune. You either reach them or you do not reach them, but getting some way down the line towards them can still be a success.

Karen Galloway: Karen Adam and John Davidson have mentioned unintended consequences, and targets can often have unintended consequences. They can often be contradictory—we see that where we want to achieve net zero plus growth in exports or whatever it might be. Sometimes, as Jonnie Hall

said, targets can be hostages to fortune, because you might meet one by seriously missing another. I think that putting headline targets out there can be very much a distraction.

I also agree with Jonnie Hall's point about the enablers. For me, it is about articulating what a good food nation looks like, instead of numbers or setting targets, which, as Jonnie Hall said, can be missed. It is very much about the how, and it is about the ethos and culture that we want to create as well as a sustainable food production system. It is about the enablers and what we need to do, as well as—to address Claire White's point—what that means for rural economies and for rural businesses, whether that is about access to local food locally or our rural economies and our island nations getting product to the mainland and around the country, with all the logistical and infrastructure challenges around that.

There are a number of issues tied up within that, but, fundamentally, I would like to see a clearer articulation of what a good food nation actually means and the enablers for business and the public sector to deliver on that.

Claire White: To develop slightly what the previous speakers have said, I think that targets have been a successful incentive for us. Scotland Food & Drink's network of regional food groups is very young—it is just a year old. We have been collaborating in a formalised way and exchanging information with one other. Although parts of Scotland—Orkney, for example—have been doing that job very successfully for over 30 years, some parts of Scotland are right at the beginning of their food and drink co-ordination journey. Therefore, as Karen Galloway said, there is a very mixed picture across the country.

From the point of view of someone who is trying to make the vision of a new Scotland with a new food and drink proposition come to life daily for the people who live around me and work here, targets are useful. Ambition 2030 is a nice crisp and clear aspiration. Similarly, the food tourism action plan, which looks at a doubling of our revenue from £1 billion to £2 billion in the same time period—by 2030—has an incredibly clarifying and guiding aim that we can all move behind.

I am not averse to targets. However, from where we are sitting, we would like it to be ensured that they are realistic. Karen Galloway referred to that earlier. Jonnie Hall said that, as well as the end outcome, ensuring how we reach that outcome is important. We must ensure that the targets are realistic, the needs of the different parts of the country are kept in mind and the targets are well communicated. From what I have read about the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, it sounds wonderful, but it is almost like the internet going into a box. There is so much information that touches on so many aspects of life that it is completely overwhelming. A nice, crisp number in among all that would make things understandable for everyone.

There must be reporting of progress against targets. We constantly hear, "How far are we on the milometer towards our final destination? How many kilometres have we come, and how many are still to go?" Reporting needs to happen at all levels, and, if people are struggling, there needs to be a safety net so that it could be said, "We're nowhere near where we forecast being at this point. Who do we call on to remedy that? How do we work together to solve it?" That is the only way in which we can move together effectively as a nation on the issue.

The Convener: John Davidson touched on targets. Will you summarise your position on targets, John?

John Davidson: Yes. Thank you.

It will sound as if I am repeating what the other panellists have said. We are not particularly attracted to targets per se. We favour an ambition: that is good to have. Ambition 2030 is an ambition and a strategy. There should be high-level ambition but, as others have said, we are much more focused on the outcomes. What things do we want to achieve across different sectors and regions? The key then is how we do that. Crucially, the question is: how does the bill help to enable and facilitate those things? Targets have unintended consequences. They can mean that people are overly focused on them at the expense of other things. We need to keep a broader perspective.

Ariane Burgess: I will stick with the theme of targets. I am a bit confused. We have just talked about targets with this panel, and we commented on them when the panels were switching over. I do not think that anyone has said, "This is a target," so I will offer some targets—or what I think are targets, although maybe they are ambitions. They are: all workers in the food sector are paid at least the living wage and are included in collective bargaining agreements by 2025; halving moderate to severe household food insecurity by 2030; halving childhood obesity by 2030; and halving the environmental impact of the food system, including halving food waste by 2030. Are those targets or ambitions? They are really great and useful things to have as part of our good food nation, which we have been working on for quite a long time. I heard Pete Ritchie say that he has been campaigning on that for six years. To build on the platform of what John Davidson talked about, we already have an amazing food and drink offer in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has already committed to halving childhood obesity elsewhere, reducing emissions from agriculture by 31 per cent by 2032, and reducing food waste by a third by 2025. Those commitments already exist. It is about getting things into the bill so that we can use it as a framework bill. People have talked about that. The bill can set a course and direction for all the other things that will come afterwards, particularly the agricultural policy.

I appreciate Claire White's contribution. She has found targets useful things to move towards. Targets can be missed. The Scottish Government might miss its targets yet again, but surely, when anyone is trying to change anything, having somewhere to move to in an agreed direction is needed. That is what we need to be a good food nation.

I would love to hear whether those are targets or ambitions. I need what we mean by "target" to be clear.

Jonnie Hall: Obviously, lots of things are always open to interpretation as to whether they are ambitions or targets. Once metrics are put on something, in my head it becomes a target. Putting numbers on things makes them targets in my head.

I go back to what I said before. What we want from all policy is the "how to". The bill is primary legislation; what comes through secondary legislation will count. That is the enabling piece that allows people to move towards the ambition or target—however we define it—and which becomes critical. From an agricultural context, without those levers, we will continue to operate pretty much along the lines of the status quo, unless we get real shocks from the marketplace. However, we would not necessarily like shocks from the marketplace, and they would not necessarily help us in achieving the wider goals or aspirations around being a good food nation.

I go back to the fundamental point that I made right at the start. We need a sustainable agricultural system and sustainable food production in Scotland. What does that mean, and how do we achieve that? It is not necessarily about setting a target, but we are short of that at the moment. We are definitely not there yet. It is about how we piece together all the pieces of policy that will change behaviours and practice and deliver outcomes that we want.

John Davidson: A really good question has been raised, and there were different perspectives from the earlier panel. I think of those things as ambitions that have been set rather than targets. That said, they are open to interpretation.

We want the bill to be defined and clear about what we are trying to achieve and thinking about how others can make that happen. How does the bill create the conditions? How does it bring people together? How does it focus efforts and energy on achieving the things that we want to achieve?

Jonnie Hall spoke about flourishing local businesses and sustainable food production. How can we create more opportunities for local suppliers? How can we try to help them to get fairer prices for their products? How can we support the growth of local businesses generally? Those are the things that I want to see. The question is how the bill helps us do that. Can there be additional things in it to stimulate those things and achieve the outcomes that we want to achieve?

Karen Galloway: I concur with Jonnie Hall and John Davidson, and I probably agree with John Davidson that the measures are more ambitions than targets. However, I acknowledge that the minute we put a number on something, it is very much a target. That is open to interpretation.

I agree that it is about how and about the culture that we want to create in Scotland with the whole food production system. It is about creating a shared vision.

I did not manage to listen to all the evidence in the earlier session, but I know well some of the organisations that gave evidence. We need to look at how we create the infrastructure and shared vision. I am not sure that having half a dozen or a range of targets necessarily helps, because that can provide distraction. As Claire White said, it is perhaps more constructive to have one vision that we can all agree with and all aim towards collectively. That may well be made up of a number of elements, but it is about getting to the point of what we collectively want for our food infrastructure, our food systems, our access to food, and worker conditions. There is a range of aspects in there. I do not disagree at all with any of that, but it is about what the levers are and how we can encourage. If we want to look at public procurement, we can talk about obesity and school meal provision. There is a range of aspects within each of those different elements.

For me, it is about clarity of vision and clear articulation and communication of it. The net zero communication is a strong example of having a clear, unified position in respect of a target or ambition—let us not argue about that. That is a vision that we can all share.

I do not necessarily feel that we have articulated the vision clearly. The words "good food nation" are fantastic and feel-good ones, but I would like to see what that means in practice for the public sector and our supply chains.

11:30

Rachael Hamilton: Twenty-one of the 66 responses to the consultation on the bill stated that education about food is key to success to meet some of the wider regard of the plan in areas such as social and economic wellbeing, the environment and health. For example, Quality Meat Scotland stated that it would like to see

"a right to food education".

The Royal Highland Education Trust said:

"The Bill does not consider improvements to food education ... which is vital in order to help deliver"

the five overall key objectives. Bearing in mind the scope of the bill and the limitations that have been raised, how would you like to see food education delivered through the vision of a good food nation ambition?

Jonnie Hall: I totally support some of the comments that you have relayed. Food education is a very broad piece. Obviously, we would like to see a very clear and definitive focus on agricultural education, how food is produced in Scotland in the first place, and why we produce what we produce. We want to see that as part of the curriculum, and we have openly said that. Obviously, it is about the whole supply chain and the processes that food goes through, and ultimately, it is about young or older people or whoever appreciating the value of food. That means that we need to go back to basics in understanding the role, function and purpose of sustainable food production and how important it is to our lives, society and culture in many ways.

I entirely endorse the quotes from QMS and RHET. We need to do more to allow everyone—particularly younger folk who are growing up and going through the education system—to understand more about food and therefore to value it. I am not talking about what price they pay for it; I am talking about valuing it for what it intrinsically involves and what it means, how to utilise it, how to cook it, how to derive the best nutritional value from it, and being proud that it has come from Scotland.

The provenance side of what we do in Scotland is critical. We will not be a commodity producer in any sense—we have a relatively small agricultural economy. Our key strengths or unique selling points are all to do with provenance and the story behind the food. We need to maximise those at home and in markets in the rest of the UK and beyond. That is an education piece. Promotion is just another form of education in many ways.

Rachael Hamilton: I put the same question to John Davidson. In the private sector, there might be some interest in cutting sugar and salt and increasing fibre, as the Dimbleby report has suggested. Behaviour in that regard could be changed through education. Do you have any comments on that?

John Davidson: I agree with the principle of enhancing education on this agenda. We can do much more on it. Of course, a lot of good work is already being done by many bodies such as QMS, Seafood Scotland and RHET on connecting school kids with the farm and what happens on it. Other local initiatives are happening as well. However, the work feels a bit disjointed, and it probably lacks cohesion with the wider good food nation agenda or the culture that we are trying to encourage. There is a huge opportunity in that.

As Jonnie Hall said, it is important that young people understand where food comes from and the contribution that it makes to our society, environment and wellbeing. That then translates into what they might buy in the future. The connection with what is served in local schools is important. We want to educate our young people, whether or not it is part of the curriculum, about the connection to the food that they are served at lunch time. Clearly, there are good examples of that happening, but more can be done. There is also the related wider issue of careers in the sector, which we know is difficult and on which we need to make more progress. It is about how all those things connect going forward.

On the issues around diet, it is important to give young people more information on salt, sugar, fat and fibre and how that relates to local suppliers, and on how the Scottish food offer is adapting to societal changes. A huge amount of effort is going on across our manufacturing sector to make healthier products, to reformulate and to cut sugar. That is difficult, particularly for small producers, but the market wants it, whether that is through Government policy or just market demand for a healthy lifestyle, and many producers are responding to that. We need our young people to understand more about what is involved in food production, the quality that we have here, the things that we need to think about and do and the choices that we make. The bill presents an opportunity to bring some alignment around all that.

I would expect to see a strong emphasis on that in the local food plans that local authorities will produce. As part of the food plans that they will have to publish annually, I would expect consideration to be given to the improvement of our food culture through our young people.

The Convener: I ask Karen Galloway to give her thoughts on that very briefly.

Karen Galloway: I absolutely agree with what John Davidson and Jonnie Hall have said and I concur with the comments from QMS and RHET

that Rachael Hamilton read out. Education is an important part of this. I could drone on for hours about my experiences with my children and going into their schools to provide seafood experiences. As an organisation, we have done quite a bit of work on that. On John Davidson's point, it is not just about the food and dietary aspect; it is also about preparation and cooking. It is about healthy food choices through to the skills and career aspects. We need a joined-up approach in all aspects of education, right through to educating in colleges and talking to chefs and young people who are training as chefs.

This is not a one-trick pony. We cannot just go into primary schools and tell children about healthy balanced diets and the wonderful bounty from Scotland—that is a very simplistic lens. We need to look at it in the round, across all educational establishments. I agree with John Davidson's point about how that links up with the offer from public procurement, certainly in the school environment. We have had some experience on that. It is particularly challenging to try to link up the education in the classroom with what is served at lunch time, but that is a massive opportunity. If we could line up some of that and create links with local supply chains and food producers, the benefits would be strong for all aspects of the sector in Scotland.

The Convener: I am mindful of time, but we have a brief supplementary question from Jim Fairlie.

Jim Fairlie: The question is directly to Jonnie Hall, although I want to come back to John Davidson later on the role of Scotland Food & Drink, the "Ambition 2030" document and the role of public-private partnership.

Jonnie Hall talked about how Scots should enjoy and be proud of their food. Paragraph 8 of the policy memorandum says:

> "it is the norm for Scots to take a keen interest in their food, knowing what constitutes good food, valuing it and seeking it out whenever they can".

There are also a couple of related points at paragraphs 20 and 25, although I will not quote them.

I am interested in what Jonnie Hall said about the farming community getting more back from the marketplace, which I absolutely endorse. However, we have also heard about food insecurity and people living impoverished lives and who cannot get access to good-quality food. How do we make the bill work so that we subsidise or support our farming community to produce the best-quality food but at the same time we make it available? If the farming community wants to take more out of the marketplace, how do we bridge that gap?

Jonnie Hall: There is no doubt that it will be a challenge. One of the fundamental points that I was making about the farming share of the margins in the supply chain is that some supply chains are quite short, but some of them are quite long and convoluted. The roles of the processor and retailer are critical. Little of our food is sold direct from farmer to consumer. I wish more of it was, because there would then be benefits on both of the sides that Jim Fairlie spoke about. People would have access to food, and quality food at that, but equally the primary producer—the farmer or crofter—would get a better return.

The supply chain needs to be interrogated to look at the margins that are being made in it and who is capturing what. As I have often said, at the one end, farmers are being squeezed and, at the other end, there is pressure on consumers but, somewhere in the middle, someone is doing quite well. We have seen farm incomes decline over years and years. Despite the fact that we receive significant amounts of public support, farming incomes have continually declined. At the other end, we continue to see food poverty.

Something is happening in the middle more than anywhere else, and we need that to be interrogated. Clearly, we are producing a high-quality product in sufficient quantities and we also import from the rest of the UK and other places, particularly certain fruit and vegetables. More than anything else, a light needs to be shone on what is happening in processing and retail.

Beatrice Wishart: I will ask the same question on the right to food that I asked the previous panel. We heard about a whole-systems approach and policy cohesion, but we have people going hungry and who are in food poverty, as Jonnie Hall has just mentioned. Should the right to food be incorporated in the bill? Do you have thoughts on the merits or weaknesses of doing so, or can you see any other ways that the bill can be strengthened on the issues of access to food?

John Davidson: The debate on that earlier was interesting. On the face of it, we completely understand why people feel strongly about the issue and see merit in that approach. We do not have a particularly strong view, but that is probably because we do not understand all the implications. Because of that and because of the nature of what we are talking about, our thought in response to the evidence is that it would probably make more sense to think about the right to food in the context of wider human rights legislation. That would allow you to look at the issue a bit more coherently in the round and take time to think about the implications and what it means in practice.

It is a complex debate. Even the witnesses on the earlier panel talked about the complexity and all the things that need to be considered. Given

that complexity and that there are issues beyond food, whether that is education or other aspects of life, it would probably be more sensible to debate the issue in the round with all those other factors rather than look at a right to food in isolation in the bill.

Claire White: I totally align with what John Davidson said. The issue is not a primary preoccupation for us, so we cannot offer a particularly detailed or nuanced view on it. However, our instinct would be that it should be dealt with in human rights legislation, rather than the bill, although that is a very amateur view of the whole picture.

Karen Galloway: I concur with colleagues. We lack expertise on the issue, which is hugely complex. If we were to embed a right in the bill, there would be an issue about the broader piece around cohesion with other aspects of food policy, whether it be local procurement, education or something else.

I am afraid that I lack the expertise to be able to say whether a right to food should sit in this bill or in human rights legislation. Fundamentally, we should embed the right in legislation somewhere. I defer to others who have more expertise to comment on whether it should be in the bill or somewhere else.

11:45

Jonnie Hall: I have no particular expertise in the area, but my gut feeling is that food is a fundamental of life. We all need food to sustain ourselves day to day; it is part of our wellbeing and culture, and part of who we are. I would have thought that any right to food would align with other fundamental human rights and that therefore a right to food should sit alongside other human rights issues in human rights legislation, rather than in good food nation legislation.

The Convener: Thank you for keeping your responses brief. We will move on to a question from Karen Adam.

Karen Adam: To follow on from what my colleagues discussed, I have a question that is more specific to you and your industries. We face a cost of living crisis. A couple of days ago, I saw a thread by a butcher, who was explaining the cost of a leg of lamb. A customer had thought that £30 was a lot to pay for it, but in fact that was a discounted price. For anyone to have a reasonable profit and to be viable, a leg of lamb should cost around £50, but that is more than some have for a week's worth of food.

I know that most people do not have an issue with paying well for good food, but many just cannot do that. We still see poverty and health-related inequalities, because good nutritious food is still a luxury for many. For example, cutting out salt is a luxury when cheap meats are full of saline and food bank foods are full of salts, which you cannot extract. No amount of education can extract that salt—well, maybe you could do it if you are a chemist.

What can we do to address that? I presume that a reduction in food prices would put people out of business and harm the industry and perhaps lower food standards. The issue impacts not only the quality of life for the individual but our economy and health service. How revolutionary would it be for your industries if everyone could afford good local food?

The Convener: We can address that to John Davidson and then to Karen Galloway.

John Davidson: That is a great question. On the fundamental point about whether it would help if everybody had access to high-quality good local food, there is no doubt that it would help. On what it means for suppliers, I go back to my earlier comments and to what Karen Galloway said. She is absolutely right about the pressure on suppliers, and the margins in retail are extremely difficult just now. As I said, the competitiveness of the UK retail market is driving down prices or keeping them stable at a level that is challenging for suppliers. Retailers are doing that in an effort to keep prices relatively low for consumers, although the point has been well made that, for some consumers, things are still extremely difficult.

The industry is a major employer of 120,000 people, and it is clear that food and drink businesses up and down Scotland have a responsibility to pay a good and fair wage. We are starting to see wages increase across the country. That is because businesses are in pursuit of being good employers, but it is also because of the labour challenges that we have. Labour is in short supply. The reality is that businesses need to pay more to get people, which is a good thing for individuals.

It is a complex and difficult problem. Generally, the cost of food for many products in the UK is extremely low in comparison to prices in other countries, and there is enormous pressure on the supply chain. However, at the same time, it is extremely difficult for some individuals to afford good-quality food. That is a fundamental challenge in this country, and the industry wants to play its part in tackling it, through how we support our employees.

Karen Galloway: That is a huge issue. There is no doubt about the inflation in supply input costs. I think that John Davidson mentioned that earlier. Whether it be electricity or transportation and so on, the input costs for food production are

skyrocketing. Therefore, there will inevitably be food price inflation down the line, whether it be 5 per cent, as has been reported or, if you believe some threads on Twitter from Jack Monroe, in the region of 25 per cent. There is definitely an acknowledgement that it is a massive issue. It is structural and systemic, and it will not go away quickly.

I would love to think that the seafood industry could provide a solution, but we know that it is not that straightforward. Our population does not want to eat what we catch, and it is easier for our seafood businesses to stick stuff on a lorry to France, where they get a better price and where the product is viewed of significant quality and is desired. From a seafood perspective, it is a challenge. That is not to say that nothing can be done. We can support local networks. The support that we can encourage from our industry for local communities, particularly rural communities, is one of the routes to doing that.

As John Davidson said, there are things that we can control. We can encourage our seafood businesses to pay a living wage and to offer good conditions to their workers. I am afraid that I do not have an easy solution, but I acknowledge that it is an issue and that it will become a bigger issue. John Davidson's point is that we know that retailers are keen to keep their on-shelf prices down and that the squeeze on margins will continue apace.

The Convener: Thank you. We need to move on. Ariane Burgess will ask the next questions.

Ariane Burgess: My questions are on the theme of participation, oversight and accountability. Before I ask them, I thank Claire White for her contribution on the supermarkets opening in Shetland. I drove by one of them on my way to Northmavine, and I then learned of the devastating impact of its opening on the local community shop. You have opened my eyes to the connection between planning and the need for participation at a local level.

I will direct my questions to John Davidson and Karen Galloway, in the interests of time. I have a little preamble, but I will keep it short. Last week, Professor Mary Brennan said that many workers in primary food production are not food secure themselves, which is clearly incompatible with any vision of a good food nation and shows the importance of involving workers and the whole food sector in policy design. Does the bill go far enough to ensure sufficient participation for the food sector in food policy design? How should that be facilitated? We have been talking around the edges of that issue.

John Davidson: I will keep my answer brief. It is important to strengthen the bill in relation to how the authorities work and collaborate with the private sector. There are two streams to that. Claire White is representing a regional food group, of which there are 18 across Scotland, and those groups do amazing work locally to promote and encourage the growth of local food and drink. It is important that regional food groups participate in the development of local plans. I do not think that there is a national problem because, in relation to policy design, the Scottish Government has a wide network of appropriate networks to feed into through Scotland Food & Drink and the wider partnership. However, there is an opportunity for more connections to be made locally, so one issue relates to regional food groups.

Another issue relates to the Scotland Food & Drink partnership, which I represent. It consists of all the trade bodies and has fantastic links to business and workers. How we feed into, are consulted on and are involved in the development of local plans, along with local authorities and health boards, is important. If we go down a level to business, it starts to get quite complicated, but the industry bodies can do a very good job in representing their workers.

Those two aspects need to be considered in any future engagement.

Karen Galloway: I concur with John Davidson's comments. It is about connectivity through bodies such as Seafood Scotland, Scotland Food & Drink and NFUS, and about working with regional food groups and regional authorities. Increased connectivity and closeness between supply chains, local authorities, local networks and so on can be part of the solution. If the bill helps to bring aspects of the industry closer together, that will be a real step forward.

Dr Allan: We have talked about whether new bodies are needed to implement what might be in the bill and its plans. Does John Davidson have a view on whether that should be a priority for the money that might be spent on good food? Are there other areas in which the money might be better spent?

John Davidson: We do not see a need to establish a new body, for two reasons. First, the on-going pressure on public finances is significant, so creating a new body—which always costs a bit more than you think—is probably not a wise choice at the moment.

Secondly, there are bodies operating in the food and drink space that could probably fulfil some of the things that we want to be fulfilled. I have talked a lot about the Scotland Food & Drink partnership, which takes an approach that involves the public and private sectors. That is one piece of the landscape. Food Standards Scotland already exists, and it has responsibility for food safety and

diet. If we need to do something, we have the option of looking at its role and remit. Once we define the purpose of the oversight, looking at existing structures and mechanisms will be the way to go, rather than creating something that is brand new.

Jenni Minto: I would like to return to the bill's relationship with the private sector. How will the plans that local authorities and the Scottish Government create through the bill enable the private sector to play a positive role in a good food nation? I ask Jonnie Hall or John Davidson to answer that.

Jonnie Hall: I do not have too much to say on that. The bill's primary focus relates to the relevant authorities producing the plans, but, as I have said a number of times, I still struggle to see how the bill, as primary legislation, links to the "how" bit. How does it link to the private sector, the primary producer, the supply chain, the distributors of food, the processors of food and so on, so that everybody buys into the ethos about local production, procurement and consumption, we shorten our supply chains and we address some of the issues that have been touched on in other questions? The bill, as it is presently written, does not make those obvious links to the private sector at all. It is very public sector focused. What the plans say will be key, because surely a plan must set out a number of actions for the relevant authorities.

That is not much of an answer, but my plea is that the plans must enable something effective to happen; they should not just be an aspirational strategy.

12:00

Jenni Minto: What kind of examples would John Davidson like to be included in the plans, to allow the private sector to be involved in and to support a good food nation?

John Davidson: There are two parts to my answer. It is fundamental that all the plans are fully aligned with the wider industry strategy that is being developed. We need connectivity and cohesion between the two. That goes back to how people feed into the plans and collaborate.

This is an opportunity for me to mention a couple of areas in which the bill could go a bit further in helping the private sector. I think of the bill as an opportunity to enable the private sector to source more produce locally and supply it to the public sector, which will grow the local economy, and to think about the wider food culture.

The bill could go further, beyond the plans or within the plans, in three areas. First, could there be a duty on the public sector to consider Scottish suppliers? At the moment, there is a procurement process, and our agencies and our public sector are, of course, doing good things around local supply and local sourcing. Public sector bodies might not necessarily have to use Scottish suppliers, but there could be a duty that they must consider them. That is the first thing that would strengthen the bill.

Secondly, something definitely has to be done around the reporting of local sourcing. We think that everyone is doing a good job on local sourcing—there are some great examples of authorities doing good stuff—but a big challenge is that we do not really know whether that is the case. The bill could definitely make the reporting more transparent. We would then be able to see where the gaps are and think about how we fill them, through the industry and the public sector working together, for example, on a product or in a region. Something needs to be done about the transparency of reporting.

The third aspect is a bit broader. In relation to planning and licensing, could conditions be applied to stimulate local sourcing and opportunities for local suppliers? For example, when an event is given a licence, what should that licence say about contracts and the need for the organisers to consider a food and drink offer from a local supplier?

Having such provisions in the bill would take it to the next level and provide opportunities for local suppliers. In turn, that would have much broader benefits for local economies and for our culture generally.

Jenni Minto: What you have said reminds me of a quote that often strikes me. It says:

"Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the kind of world you want."

Your comments tie into that.

Claire White, you made some helpful points about Shetland and the way that it operates. Can you add more to what you have said with regard to the relationship with private companies?

Claire White: From a local perspective, we are looking at the early collaboration and vision of local businesses. From where we are sitting—funded by a local authority, Scotland Food & Drink and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and representing private businesses—it always feels as if we are slightly torn and that the objectives of those two groups are not fully aligned. Objectively, as a good broker in among all that, it feels that the private sector has a clear vision—inevitably, through its business planning—of how it sees the sector developing locally. In many cases, that is slightly ahead of local authority thinking, whether because an authority is awaiting policy advice, a

change in administration or whatever else. As regions, islands or local authorities, we would be on a better footing if, as early as possible, we all envisioned that for our own patch and then spoke about what it means nationally in the longer term. That is where we feel that we are right now in Shetland.

Karen Galloway: I do not have much to add. John Davidson summed it up nicely, and what he said is probably reflective of our position. We have certainly had experience of some parts of our industry struggling on the public procurement front, whereby businesses have been desperate to supply local authority services, in particular schools, but the public procurement process has been a block to that happening. John Davidson's points were well made—the bill provides an opportunity to create closer links and relationships between public and private. I would like some of that to happen in practice.

Jim Fairlie: I will make my question brief. It is targeted to John Davidson, in particular. First, I note what a fantastic and successful industry the Scottish food and drink sector is at the moment. It is important that we bear that in mind.

I want to specifically focus on ambition 2030. We have clearly had huge turmoil over the past couple of years. Does ambition 2030 still stand, and is there a way of linking it to the overall plan of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill?

John Davidson: That is a great question. For the benefit of others, ambition 2030 is the national industry strategy that was published five years ago, which the public and private sector get behind and work towards.

We are currently going through a process to review and revise it, and we will be publishing our revised strategy ambition later this year. It is important because it gives everyone a shared focus and shared confidence to get behind the industry in what we want to do.

How it links to the bill is an interesting question. There is perhaps something in that, as there might be opportunities for the bill to recognise the importance of our sector to Scotland, the contribution that it makes to the economy and how we want authorities to get behind the industry strategy, both now and for the long term. We know how important the sector is to the economy, so there is definitely something about the explicit recognition of a link between the journey that we are on and the bill, although the extent and detail of that needs further discussion. It is a good point.

Over the past 10 years, the industry has benefited from fantastic support from not just the Government but others to get us to where we are today and to recognise the importance of the sector. It is important that the sector, and its contribution to the economy and the recovery from Covid, remains at the forefront of the Government's ambition.

The Convener: That brings us to the end of the evidence session. I thank the witnesses for their time and knowledge today. It is incredibly useful and it will inform our report.

Subordinate Legislation

Official Controls (Transitional Staging Period) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) (No 3) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/493)

12:08

The Convener: Our second item of business is consideration of the proposed parliamentary procedure for a Scottish statutory instrument. I refer members to paper 3.

As the regulations were made under the European Union (Withdrawal Act) 2018, we first need to consider whether the parliamentary procedure that has been designated to the instrument by the Scottish Government is appropriate. Members will note that the negative procedure was designated, and that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee agreed with that designation when it considered the matter on 18 January.

Are members content that the negative procedure is appropriate for the SSI? I ask members who are participating remotely to type an N in the chat box if they do not agree; otherwise, I will presume that members are content. There has been no comment, so we are content.

Red Rocks and Longay Urgent Marine Conservation (No 2) Order 2021 (SSI 2021/463)

Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/466)

Official Controls (Transitional Staging Period) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) (No 3) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/493)

12:09

The Convener: Our third item of business is the consideration of three negative instruments. I refer members to paper 4. No motions to annul the instruments have been lodged.

I propose to write to the Scottish Government in relation to the Official Controls (Transitional Staging Period) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) (No 3) Regulations 2021 for further explanation regarding why the transitional staging period ends on 30 June and when further stages are planned beyond that, and for further information on whether there are any practical differences in the import controls in Scotland compared with those of the rest of the UK as a consequence of the introduction of a Scottish instrument.

I propose asking the Scottish Government to confirm whether the issue falls within the food and feed safety and hygiene common framework and, if so, what the Scottish ministers' views are on how well the framework is functioning, given the issues that are detailed in the Scottish Government's letter.

Are members happy for me to write with those questions? Do they have any other comments to make?

Rachael Hamilton: Are you referring to the Red Rocks and Longay Urgent Marine Conservation (No 2) Order 2021?

The Convener: That is one of the SSIs that we are considering.

Rachael Hamilton: I want to draw the committee's attention to this. Marine Scotland held stakeholder engagement in 2021 on the proposal to expand the original marine protected area. However, I could not find any details of that when I went to look last night, so I want to get clarification from the clerks that that is correct and find out why that information is not available.

The Convener: We can certainly ask the clerks about that. My understanding is that it is an emergency SSI to extend the MPA and that the extension of the whole MPA will be considered in March. I am being told by the clerks that that is correct.

Rachael Hamilton: If that information is not available—I could not find it—will it become available before March?

The Convener: Another SSI will be laid that will include the extension that we are dealing with today.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I want to raise a couple of issues and ask whether they could be included in the letter to the Scottish Government.

I understand that it was scallop divers who identified the site originally, which would have been verified later on. However, following that, diving, reel fishing and trawling are all included in the ban from the area. It would be good to get a bit of information on the evidence base for that. I understand that it is based on NatureScot's advice, which stated that flapper skate eggs are sensitive to a number of activities. The list of activities mentions diver egg collection but it does not mention diving for scallops. I am concerned that there is a difference in sensitivity with regard to different activities but that they have all been categorised in the same way.

I understand that the committee in the previous parliamentary session—the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee—wrote to the minister in March last year, when the first instrument on the extension of the MPA at the site was laid. The letter in response from the minister said that part of the process to consider the need for permanent protection at the site would involve a socioeconomic assessment and public consultation, which do not seem to be happening until later on this year.

I know that it is emergency legislation, but it has been almost a year since the first instrument was passed. There is a question about why more has not been done to gather the necessary evidence in the interim period.

12:15

The Convener: I share your concerns about the lack of socioeconomic impact assessment, given that the first order has been in place for 12 months and there has been a commitment to a public consultation on making it a permanent MPA. I agree that we should write to the Government, asking about its interventions to look at the potential economic impact on the fishing industry.

In that letter, I want to include questions on the potential for people reporting, for example, flapper skate egg locations to be reluctant to report such important findings in the future if they are tied up in the ban. It would be good to know what work is being done around that to ensure that we continue to identify important MPAs—areas that should be protected—and that there is no reduction in their identification because of the impact on the people who identify them.

Are members content for me to write to the Government with those questions? Are there any other comments? There are no comments.

Are members content to note the instruments? I ask members who are participating remotely to type an N in the chat box if they do not agree; otherwise, I will presume that members are content. There are no comments, so we are content.

That concludes our business in public.

12:16

Meeting continued in private until 12:21.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba