



Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill Financial Memorandum, November 2023

Introduction to Scottish Environment LINK

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interest, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. LINK provides a forum for these organizations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary sector, and acting as a strong voice for the environment. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that the environmental community participates in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK works mainly through groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the issues and developing advocacy to promote sustainable development, respecting environmental limits. This consultation response was written by LINK's Food & Farming Group.

Response

1. Did you take part in any consultation exercise preceding the Bill and, if so, did you comment on the financial assumptions made? Provide response

Scottish Environment LINK responded to the December 2022 consultation. In addition, we submitted as a consultation response a compilation of 1,765 personal messages from people who signed our Farm for Scotland's Future petition, saying why they care about the future of farming in Scotland. Our member, Nourish Scotland, also undertook an extensive public consultation exercise involving 21 meetings and 300 people, including a specific section which sought people's views on the optimal budget allocation across the four tiers.

LINK has consistently argued that, in order to reach our climate and nature targets, it is necessary for the majority of agriculture funding to move away from direct payments to supporting climate- and nature-friendly methods of food production. We published the report Farm for Scotland's Future: The Case for Change which summarises the evidence base behind this position.

2. If applicable, do you believe your comments on the financial assumptions have been accurately reflected in the FM? Provide response

No. The Financial Memorandum sets out a 'business as usual' budget across the four tiers. We believe this is fundamentally inadequate in reaching the Scottish Government's climate and nature targets.

The current farm funding system is unfair and inefficient. Most payments are based on agricultural area, which means they go to the farmers who own the most land, rather than paying farmers for managing the land well. The distribution of funding is massively weighted towards a minority of large landowners. Instead, the new system should be focused on using public money to achieve public policy objectives, including restoring nature and mitigating climate change.



The Financial Memorandum states that “the government intends to maintain underpinning support through base payments (Tier 1) and universally accessible support for land managers undertaking climate and nature actions through the enhanced mechanism (Tier 2) and to do so at similar levels to current direct support.”

Under the current system the top 20% of claimants receive 62% of the direct payments budget – whilst the bottom 40% of claimants receive just 5%. While the Bill includes powers to cap and/or taper these payments, they do not require Ministers to do so.

To meet its targets to reduce emissions and restore nature, the Scottish Government must incentivise ways of farming with climate and nature in harmony with food production – and ensure that payments to farmers and crofters are coupled to achieving the targets attached to these policy priorities. It is our strong view that maintaining the current distribution of funding will undermine the stated objectives of the Agriculture Bill and wider government policy.

3. Did you have sufficient time to contribute to the consultation exercise? Provide response

Yes

This response was compiled on behalf of the Food & Farming Group and is supported by:

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
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CIEEM - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
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Ramblers Scotland
RSPB Scotland
Scottish Badgers
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Soil Association Scotland
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Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment



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