TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

35th Meeting, 2002 (Session 1)

Wednesday 11 December 2002

The Committee will meet at 9.15 am in the Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh to consider the following agenda items:

1. **Declarations of Interests:** The Convener will invite the new member of the Committee to declare any relevant interests.

2. **Items in private:** The Committee will consider whether to take agenda item 6 in private.

3. **Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider the Bill at Stage 2 (Day 5).

4. **Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill (in private):** The Committee will consider possible lines of questioning for witnesses.

5. **Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Lisa Schneidau, Policy Officer, Scottish Wildlife Trust

   Peter Pitkin, National Strategy Manager, Scottish Natural Heritage

   Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Land Use Planning, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

6. **Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider a draft response to the Rural Development Committee on the Bill.
The following papers are attached for this meeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note from SPICe (private paper)</td>
<td>TE/02/35/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Agenda item 4)</td>
<td>(to follow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission from Scottish Wildlife Trust</td>
<td>TE/02/35/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Agenda item 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission from Scottish Natural Heritage</td>
<td>TE/02/35/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Agenda item 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission from Royal Society for the Protection of Birds</td>
<td>TE/02/35/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Agenda item 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefing Paper from SPICe on the Organic Farming Targets</td>
<td>TE/02/35/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Scotland) Bill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Agenda item 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Papers not circulated:**

**Agenda item 3**

In addition to the above papers, the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill and Accompanying Documents are also relevant to this meeting. Copies of the Marshalled List of Amendments and the groupings of amendments will be available at the start of the meeting in the Hub.
Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Transport and Environment Committee on this important Bill. We look forward to presenting more detail to the Committee during the Bill’s passage through Parliament.

Scottish Wildlife Trust supports the principles of organic agriculture, and we believe that it can provide many benefits supporting biodiversity and sustainable development – but only with the support and leadership of Government. We urge the Minister and the Parliament to make the most of this long-overdue opportunity to support and develop organic agriculture in Scotland.

Organic farming: a valuable opportunity for Scotland’s environment

Scottish Wildlife Trust supports the underlying principles and definition of organic agriculture by the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS).

Existing research shows that organic farming produces considerable biodiversity benefits, with generally higher species diversity and abundance on organic farms. The majority of this research has been for lowland farming systems.

A WWF / Soil Association study in 2000\(^1\) showed that organic systems produced five times as many wild plants in arable fields, 57 per cent more species, and several rare and declining wild arable species found only on the organic farms, including some Biodiversity Action Plan species. Both field boundaries and cropped areas were more favourable on the organic farms. The field boundaries had more trees, larger hedges and no spray drift; the crops were sparser, with no herbicides, allowing more weeds; there was also more grassland and a greater variety of crop types.

The overall conclusion of the study was that lowland organic farms support substantially more abundance and diversity than lowland conventional farms, including declining species.

Biodiversity benefits of organic farming also seem likely in upland areas, for example through reduced grazing intensity. However, few detailed studies on the biodiversity benefits of organic farming have been carried out on upland habitats.

Other important environmental benefits delivered by organic agriculture include:

- Lower levels of agricultural pollution: synthetic pesticides and fertilisers are not used, and nutrient leaching is reduced through higher levels of soil organic matter.
- Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced in organic systems compared to conventional agriculture.
- Landscape features are maintained and enhanced.

Why organic targets are needed in Scotland

Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that the Scottish Executive should take the lead in helping the Scottish organic farming industry to develop. There is a marked lack of any such commitment from the Executive in the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture, and full consideration of the benefits of organic agriculture was not requested of the Agriculture and Environment Working Group that considered environmental aspects of the Strategy earlier this year.

---

Examples such as the lack of links between hill sheep producers and low-ground organic finishers demonstrate that the organic industry is encountering difficulties in its development, despite the rapidly increasing demand for organic produce. Organic agriculture clearly cannot develop effectively in Scotland through market forces alone.

SWT supports the Organic Farming Targets Bill because it sets out a programme of action for the development of organic agriculture in Scotland, with targets to be reached by all sectors concerned across several different land use types. We believe that such a plan will assist farmers and the Executive alike, by setting a clear agenda for developing a robust and effective organic farming industry in Scotland.

Other governments in Europe, including England and Wales, have recognised the importance of supporting this important and rapidly growing sector and the benefits it delivers, through the development of organic targets. We urge the Scottish Parliament to use this opportunity to ensure that Scotland is not left behind.

**Organic farming and the wider picture**

**Organic farming and conventional farming**
Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that organic and conventional farming systems are not mutually exclusive, and we consider that there is room for improvement in the performance of both systems for farmland biodiversity. We believe that all sustainable methods of farming which support biodiversity and sensitive habitat management deserve the full and long term support of the Scottish Executive on behalf of the taxpayer.

**Organic farming and agri-environment schemes**
Scottish Wildlife Trust is frustrated at the continued chronic underfunding of agri-environment schemes in Scotland. We consider that the Organic Aid Scheme (to be discretionary from next year) and the Rural Stewardship Scheme should both receive adequate resources to meet demand; both schemes provide considerable benefits to the environment, through different types of farming system.

Scotland’s present level of agri-environment funding is significantly lower than that currently available in England and Wales. Demand for the Rural Stewardship Scheme is already hugely outstripping the finances available: this year, less than a third of farmers were successful in receiving RSS grant (196 out of 612 applications). A considerable amount of opportunity, advisory effort and farmer’s goodwill is being lost through inadequate funding of RSS.

New resources will therefore be required for agri-environment schemes to implement the Organic Farming Targets Bill. Reallocation of the existing, inadequate agri-environment funding would not be acceptable. SWT strongly encourages the Scottish Executive to redress the situation by reviewing mechanisms available now, such as increased modulation of production subsidies, and by taking full advantage of any environmental opportunities resulting from the current mid-term review of the CAP.

**Scottish Wildlife Trust and agriculture**
Scottish Wildlife Trust has over 23,000 members, 70 staff and many active volunteers. Our aim is to achieve a Scotland rich in wildlife, enjoyed by all. We manage 127 wildlife reserves, a number of which are managed using farming methods. SWT also has an indirect involvement in biodiversity management on farms, through the identification of hundreds of agricultural Wildlife Sites across Scotland. Our strengths lie in achieving practical results at the local level, and in seeking to involve all sectors of the community in taking action for wildlife. SWT’s work is informed by Trust members who are farmers and understand the wider issues involved in this complex land use sector.

SWT believes that fundamental change is required to Scotland’s farming systems to halt and reverse the decline in farmland biodiversity. We advocate the development of sustainable farming and crofting practices, to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits throughout Scotland.

SWT works closely with the Executive over environmental issues in agriculture, both through our own work and through membership of Scottish Environment LINK (we currently chair LINK’s Agriculture Task Force). We will continue to contribute our expertise and experience to the development of more environmentally-friendly farming in Scotland.
THE ORGANIC FARMING TARGETS (SCOTLAND) BILL
SUBMISSION BY SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Introduction

Scottish Natural Heritage is responsible for the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage and for promoting its understanding and enjoyment by the public. The Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991 states that SNH ‘shall have regard to the desirability of securing that anything done, whether by SNH or any other person in relation to the natural heritage of Scotland, is undertaken in a manner which is sustainable’. SNH is also required to take account, as appropriate, of (inter alia) the needs of agriculture, the need for economic development and the interests of owners and occupiers of land.

SNH recognises that organic farming can have considerable benefits for the environment. We welcome the growing demand for organically produced food, and the way in which farmers in Scotland have responded to the Organic Aid Scheme. Nevertheless we believe organic conversion should not be regarded as the only means of ‘greening’ agriculture but should be accompanied by other approaches to sustainable management which are relevant to conventional systems of production.

Benefits of organic farming for the natural heritage

Although the evidence is incomplete, there is sufficient to support the claim that organic agriculture is generally more beneficial to the natural heritage than most kinds of conventional farming. Some of the significant advantages are:

- Avoiding the use of most chemical pesticides ensures that hedges, field margins and other wildlife habitats are protected from the harmful effects of spray drift.

- Avoiding the use of chemical fertilisers reduces the risk (in certain circumstances) of nutrients washing into streams, rivers, estuaries and still-waters. (Organic farming is based on the principle of recycling waste and the conservation of nutrients within the ecosystem.)

- Organic farming pays greater attention to the role of natural processes in the soil and of maintaining its organic matter content. This is likely to reduce its susceptibility to erosion and to result in a richer and more varied soil flora and fauna.

- Organic farming depends on crop rotation, which provides a variety of conditions for wildlife and contributes to the visual character of the farm landscape.
The avoidance of chemical methods can permit a certain level of plant and animal life to survive within cropped areas. Plants like poppies and corn marigolds are attractive features of the countryside. Arable weeds and insects are an important source of food for farmland birds.

Natural predators of insect pests (beetles and spiders) are more abundant on organically managed land.

Organic livestock farms generally have a lower stocking rate, thereby reducing pollution risks.

Walkers and other recreational users of the countryside are likely to feel safer on land that they know is managed without the use of chemical pesticides.

Organic farming is also often associated with a smaller scale of production, with local processing and marketing, so helping to keep people living and working in the countryside. Organic farming has not, however, succeeded in overcoming all the environmental problems associated with agriculture. For example, considerable losses of soluble nitrogen can occur when a clover sward is ploughed-in, and unless precautions are taken this can pollute aquatic wildlife habitats. The use of pyrethrins is permitted for the control of insect pests, and these can be highly toxic to fish if they find their way into freshwater habitats.

Limitations of organic farming relating to the natural heritage

Both of the main organic standards used in Scotland (the Soil Association and Scottish Organic Producers’ Association) include measures which ensure a high level of environmental protection. They also include specific provisions for the protection and, to a limited extent, the management of wildlife habitats, though these are generally advisory rather than obligatory.

Modern farming methods, whether conventional or organic, do not automatically produce the conditions required by much of the wildlife we associate with farmland. Maintaining, and where necessary improving or restoring, wildlife habitats and other features that give rise to the essential character of farmed landscapes in Scotland requires farmers to take steps that go well beyond the everyday activity of farming.

Although organic farming can create conditions which are particularly favourable for the natural heritage, experience of the Scottish Agri-Environment Programme shows that the management required to maintain and restore natural heritage features can be effectively accommodated within conventional farming systems, providing basic precautions are taken to protect the environment. SNH’s submission to the House of Lords European Committee (Sub-committee D) in 1996 stated:

“while we recognise that organic farming results in significant benefits to the natural heritage, few if any are unique to organic. We argue that all farmers should be encouraged to introduce measures which will benefit the natural
heritage, and that they should be rewarded according to the positive benefits any produce."

This remains our position.

**The wider policy context of support for organic farming**

SNH strongly supports the European Commission’s proposals to ‘decouple’ CAP support payments from agricultural production. We believe the CAP should be progressively reformed to reward a multifunctional role for farming that provides a wide range of social and environmental public goods. An essential part of this reform would be to reallocate resources away from the present system of industry-wide support towards a system of payments for specific social and environmental benefits.

Within the context of this broad objective we support the principle of financial support for the conversion of farms to ‘organic’ status, and we would be in favour of a much larger proportion of the annual budget for agricultural support being used for this purpose. For similar reasons we would also be in favour of payments to assist conventional farmers to adapt their businesses in order to comply with new and higher environmental standards. Once the conversion is complete, however, we do not believe a continuing payment with the aim of maintaining those standards is justified, unless they commit the farmer to significant positive action to manage or enhance (as opposed to merely protecting) the natural heritage. To do otherwise would run counter to what we believe to be a key principle – that the cost of environmentally sustainable production should be fully reflected in the price of the product.

**The Financial Memorandum – impact on other agri-environment measures**

The Financial Memorandum indicates (table 3) that the cost of payments that would need to be made under the Organic Aid Scheme to meet the proposed targets would, by 2006, be more than £15.3m pa.

The Organic Aid Scheme is part of the Scottish Agri-environment Programme, which also includes the Rural Stewardship Scheme and the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Schemes. These other agri-environmental schemes play a critical part in the conservation of Scotland’s natural heritage – they are the only significant source of funds available to support the management by farmers of the wildlife habitats and landscape features of land outside Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

The present budget for the agri-environment programme of £29.7m (para 24) is expected to increase to £43m by 2006/07. The cost of new Organic Aid payments required to meet the proposed targets would therefore more than account for the proposed increase and, unless significant additional money can be found, would preclude any expansion of other agri-environmental schemes during this period.
The Rural Stewardship Scheme, the principal current agri-environmental scheme, is heavily over subscribed. Less than one-third of the applications submitted in 2000 has been approved, and the budget is insufficient to renew the agreements held by farmers in the ESA schemes that will begin to expire in 2003. It is difficult to imagine how farming in Scotland can become ‘a leading player in the protection and enhancement of our environment’ (A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture), or how the Executive’s objectives for biodiversity can be achieved, without a significant expansion of these schemes.

Given the total amount of money currently devoted to supporting agriculture, SNH regards it as regrettable in the extreme that there should be any question of having to choose between support for conversion to organic farming and the expansion of other agri-environment schemes such as RSS. We would like to see an increase in organic farming in Scotland and a greater proportion of financial support for agriculture used to support the cost of conversion, for developing the marketing and distribution of organic produce, for research into organic methods and for training and advice for organic farmers. But we do not believe that the resources needed to support this effort should be at the expense of other agri-environment measures, which currently account for no more than perhaps 5% of total spending on agriculture. The answer must lie in a transfer of resources out of other agricultural spending programmes, as envisaged in the European Commission’s proposals for the Mid-Term Review of the CAP.

Scottish Natural Heritage
21 November 2002
RSPB Scotland Parliamentary Evidence

Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill

Losses of farmland birds

The loss of some species of birds on farmland over the last 25 years has led RSPB Scotland to devote considerable resources to agriculture:
- over 50% of our nature reserve land in Scotland is managed by farming, some of it organically;
- we have our own in-hand operation on the Isle of Islay and over 70 management agreements with farmers and crofters across Scotland; and
- this practical work is supported by a research programme, advisory and policy work, based at our Scottish headquarters in Edinburgh, and through our staff across Scotland.

RSPB Scotland has been involved in the steering group of the Organic Farming Targets Bill since its inception and would be pleased to give oral evidence to the Committee.

Why does RSPB Scotland support organic farming?

Research shows that the declines of farmland birds are due to changes in the way Scotland is farmed. These changes have been mainly driven by the Scottish Executive’s implementation of the EU’s Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), that is, the way in which farmers and crofters are paid subsidies. RSPB Scotland wishes to support farmers and crofters in Scotland in their efforts to farm for wildlife. RSPB Scotland supports organic farming, as it is a method of wildlife friendly farming.

Recently, the RSPB reviewed organic farming research, and concluded that land fanned organically does have wildlife benefits. A review of 33 published studies on the biodiversity differences associated with organically and conventionally managed farmland systems was undertaken. Six of the studies were predominantly on birds, 1 on mammals, 16 on invertebrates, 8 on flora and vegetation, and 2 on soil microbes.

General findings of these studies were that organically managed fields and farms had a greater biodiversity than conventionally managed sites. Abundance of birds, butterflies, spiders, beetles, earthworms and arable weeds were all consistently greater in organic systems. Exceptions did occur where some species and some studies showed the reverse relationship.

Management practices associated with organic regimes which were generally beneficial for biodiversity included mixed crop rotations, spring sowing of cereal crops, prohibition of herbicide and insecticides, use of farmyard manure in place of chemical fertilisers, shallow ploughing and sensitive management of non-cropped field margin habitats. Practices which had negative impacts included weed control using mechanical methods and undersowing of crops. There is a need for further research and dissemination of the biodiversity benefits of organic conversion in Scotland; particularly in the uplands.
Why does RSPB Scotland support the Organic Farming Targets Bill?

RSPB Scotland supports the Organic Farming Targets Bill as it lays out measures and targets to guide the development of the Executive’s support for organic farming. This area of public policy requires clear leadership and cannot be developed through market forces. For example, the Executive should fund and publish research into organic standards and their impacts for wildlife. Results of this research should be debated and integrated in organic standards. This will enable the public to better understand the links between organic farming and wildlife, enable the Scottish Executive to deliver its biodiversity commitments, and build trust in the market.

The impacts of the Organic Farming Targets Bill on other agri-environment schemes

RSPB Scotland has a long record of concern at the chronic underfunding of agri-environment schemes in Scotland. Many farmers and crofters who are keen to help wildlife are unable to do so due to the extremely limited support available. RSPB Scotland believes that funding should be available for both organic farming and for agri-environment schemes on conventional farmland. The Executive must allocate extra funding for agri-environment schemes to implement the Bill. The budgets of conventional agri-environment schemes are too small to be reallocated to organic schemes.

The Executive has several options for increasing the budgets for agri-environment schemes. These include:

- Full allocation of the receipts modulated (and match-funded by the UK Treasury)
- Re-allocation of the Scottish share of the UK Rural Development Regulation budgets (currently at 17%)
- Funding from the Scottish budget. There was no allocation for agri-environment schemes in the recent Scottish expenditure statement: in England, an extra £150 million per year was allocated to agri-environment schemes in July’s Comprehensive Spending Review.

Current CAP reform proposals and the World Trade Organisation talks in 2003 are indicating that agricultural support will move from production to environment and social subsidies. We urge the Executive to plan and prepare for these changes now, by supporting and developing organic farming in Scotland.
ORGANIC FARMING TARGETS (SCOTLAND) BILL

MARIE-AMÉLIE VIATTE

The Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill [SP Bill 66] (“the Bill”) was introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 30 September 2002. This is a Member’s Bill and the Member in Charge is Robin Harper MSP. The lead Committee is the Rural Development Committee. The Bill’s long-term aim is to increase the amount of organic food produced and consumed in Scotland. Its primary objective is “to increase the area of land under organic management” (Policy Memorandum 2002). The Bill’s key purpose is to place a duty on the Scottish Executive:

• to adopt a set of targets for the conversion of agricultural land to organic standards
• to publish a plan setting out how these targets will be achieved.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the SPICe Briefing on Organic Farming and Food, which offers background information on the organic sector. The following pages therefore concentrate on the Bill itself and more specifically covers the following:

• a summary of the Bill’s provisions
• main points arising from the consultation exercise
• perspectives on the Bill
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Key Points of this Briefing**.................................................................................................................. 3  
**The Bill’s Main Provisions**.................................................................................................................. 4  
  - **Overview** ......................................................................................................................................... 4  
  - **Section 1** .......................................................................................................................................... 4  
  - **Section 2** .......................................................................................................................................... 4  
  - **Schedule** .......................................................................................................................................... 5  
**The Consultation on the Bill** .................................................................................................................. 5  
**Perspectives on the Bill** ....................................................................................................................... 7  
  - **Cross-Party Backing** ....................................................................................................................... 7  
  - **Opposition to the Bill** ...................................................................................................................... 8  
  - **Support for the Bill** ......................................................................................................................... 10  
**Bibliography** ....................................................................................................................................... 11  
**Annex: Consultation Respondents** ...................................................................................................... 12
KEY POINTS OF THIS BRIEFING

- The long-term aim of the Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill is to increase the amount of organic food produced and consumed in Scotland. Its primary objective is to increase the area of organic farmland.

- The Bill places a duty on the Scottish Executive:
  - to adopt a set of targets for the conversion of agricultural land to organic standards
  - to publish a plan setting out how these targets will be achieved.

- A consultation exercise was carried out in 2001. Out of the 20 responses received, 13 were favourable to the proposal, two were opposed to it and 5 held mixed views.

- The Bill has received cross-party support from over 20 MSPs and the backing of a range of organisations including supermarkets, unions, producers and environmental protection groups,

- The Scottish Executive and the National Farmers Union of Scotland have stated their opposition to the Bill.
THE BILL’S MAIN PROVISIONS

OVERVIEW

The Bill contains four short sections plus a schedule, as follows:

- Section 1 details the duties the Bill proposes to place on the Scottish Ministers.
- Section 2 relates to the Executive’s organic targets plan (“the plan”).
- Section 3 defines the various terms used in the Bill.
- Section 4 details the short title and commencement provisions.
- The schedule specifies the minimum contents that have to be included in the plan.

The Policy Memorandum which accompanies the Bill provides further details on the thinking behind the Bill and the Explanatory Notes offer a detailed description of the Bill’s. The following paragraphs therefore concentrate on the Bill’s two main sections (s. 1 and 2) as well as the schedule and offer a short summary of each.

SECTION 1

Section 1 requires the Scottish Ministers:

1. within one year of the Act coming into effect, to publish targets for the area of land to be farmed according to organic standards
2. to produce a plan setting out how Ministers will achieve their organic targets

Targets would be established for each of the three categories of land mentioned in Section 1(2) of the Bill:

- arable
- improved grassland; and
- unimproved grassland and rough grazing

In each case, the targets would be for organic farming to take place on no less than 20% of land by area and for this to be achieved within 10 years of the targets being published.

This section also places a duty on Ministers to prepare annual progress reports to be laid before the Parliament.

SECTION 2

Section 2 sets out how the plan should be developed and reviewed and what it should contain.

- Sub-section 1 refers to the Bill’s schedule, which describes the minimum requirements for the plan’s contents (see below).
- Ministers will have to consult with relevant stakeholders before publishing and revising the plan (ss 2).
• Ministers will have to review the plan and amend it as needed. This should occur at regular intervals, at least after every Scottish Parliament elections (ss 3).

SCHEDULE

The schedule lists the information the plan will have to include. For each land category, the plan should specify the following:

• The Executive’s interim objectives towards meeting the set targets.
• Resources committed by the Executive, including financial assistance, to achieve the targets.
• Other assistance to be offered by Scottish Ministers (e.g. information and advice).
• Details of measures taken by the Executive to develop the market for organic produce.
• Details of measures adopted by the Executive for the promotion and marketing for organic goods.
• Particulars of any research commissioned or proposed by Ministers for the purpose of achieving the targets and associated resources.
• The role of any organisation, other than the Executive, involved in achieving the targets and the Executive’s policy for coordinating that role with that of Ministers.

THE CONSULTATION ON THE BILL

In March 2001, the Scottish Organic Food and Farming Bill Steering Group published a consultation paper entitled Seizing The Organic Opportunity: A Bill For Scotland’s Parliament. The paper was sent to 47 consultees and also disseminated through the Organic Targets Bill Campaign website. The consultation exercise asked 13 questions covering the following:

• the promotion of organic production and consumption
• the role of the Scottish Executive in developing the organic sector
• the proposed bill and any potential detrimental effects it may have
• the appropriate timescale for the targets
• the action plan and what it should contain
• stakeholders’ involvement in developing and reviewing the action plan

The exercise yielded 20 responses\(^1\), a majority of which (14) were favourable to the proposal. Two respondents were opposed to the Bill as outlined in the consultation document and 4 held mixed views.

A broadly representative selection of comments made in the consultation responses is reproduced below. The Bill’s Policy Memorandum gives further details on how the consultation exercise was carried out and what its outcomes were.

---

\(^1\) See Annex for full list of respondents and their overall standpoint regarding the proposal: for, against or mixed views. Individual responses are available from SPICe.
Should the production and consumption of organic food be encouraged in Scotland?

- Yes. Why should the growing demand for organic produce be met through imports when the food could be grown locally?
- Yes, for its benefits to the environment, landscape and human health.
- Yes, the current cheap food policy is not cheap, as recent crises have shown.
- Yes, there's a clear case for strengthened government support for organic farming.
- Yes, but not necessarily through the establishment of absolute targets.
- No, food production policy should be based on outcomes rather than processes.
- Production and consumption of organic food should be determined by the commercial decisions of individual producers.

Would an increase in organic production and consumption require the Scottish Executive to take action to develop the sector?

- Yes, because a free market favours an industrial agriculture sector where organic producers cannot be competitive.
- Yes, to co-ordinate the required infrastructure changes and necessary advisory service.
- Yes, to give farmers confidence by demonstrating the Executive’s long-term commitment.
- Yes, experience from other EU countries has shown that a strategic approach by the Government is needed for the organic sector to reach its potential.
- The Executive needs to secure enhanced funding for organic agriculture.
- There is a risk of getting bogged down in bureaucracy. Government financial support must be kept simple. In addition, the Executive’s role in developing the organic sector should be to facilitate and to educate.
- No, the Executive dictating farming practices would not be the best way to maintain quality in the organic sector.

Are there any problems associated with the setting of targets for conversion of land to organic?

- The targets should be accompanied by additional resources for financial support, advice, training and marketing initiatives.
- Targets should not focus merely on production to the detriment of market development.
- A more sensible target would be to convert 20% of current Scottish farm output to organic standards.
- The setting of targets does not in itself oblige producers to make the necessary commercial decisions to switch to organic production.
- If mass conversion to organic production occurs, the niche marketing position of organic agriculture may be lost.
- If the introduction of targets results in the supply of organic goods outweighing the demand, price premiums will disappear.

Could the Bill - as proposed in the consultation document - potentially have some negative effects?

- Yes, risk of a loss of price premiums if demand for organic produce equals supply.
• Yes, the use of homeopathy could have negative implications for animal welfare.
• Yes, the pesticide, fertiliser and GM industries could suffer some economic losses.

Could the Bill - as proposed in the consultation document - potentially have some positive effects?
• Yes, it could ease fears over the risks of eating meat.
• Yes, it could have psychological benefits for farmers, assuming they can obtain an adequate financial return.
• Yes, it could reduce energy use.
• Yes, benefits could include healthier soils, biodiversity protection, reduced levels of pesticide residues in food, increased rural employment, and diminished threat from GM crops.
• Yes, it could benefit human health.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE BILL

CROSS-PARTY BACKING

The Bill proposal\(^2\) received the support of 24 MSPs as follows:

- 15 SNP
- 4 Liberal Democrats
- 2 Labour
- 1 Conservative
- independent MSP Dennis Canavan
- Scottish Socialist MSP Tommy Sheridan

Following the introduction of the Bill in the Scottish Parliament, the Evening News (01/10/02b) reported:

“Mr Harper's plans (...) have already won the support of more than 30 businesses, including supermarket chains Asda, Waitrose and the Co-op\(^3\). Friends of the Earth Scotland, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the Scottish Wildlife Trust are among almost 50 organisations who have also given their backing. (...) Liberal Democrat MSP Mr Gorrie said he would back the bill. He added: ‘I strongly support trying to get more organic food into the shops and I'm very keen on supermarkets buying more local produce rather than importing things.’”

The Scottish Green Party issued a press release for the Bill's introduction. This stated:

---
\(^{2}\) As lodged with the Parliament on 01/11/01 following the consultation exercise.
\(^{3}\) Sainsbury's has also made a long-term commitment to organic produce. In January, the company pledged that its organic meat and dairy would be 100% British by January 2004. As part of its 'Buy British' policy, Sainsbury's is looking to reduce its imports of organic foods from 60% to 45% by January 2004.

providing research and information services to the Scottish Parliament
“The Organic Bill Steering group has estimated the benefits of meeting the 20% target to organic farming to include:
• as many as 1-3000 extra jobs directly in Scottish agriculture
• many more jobs in food related industries
• a reduction of over 3/4 million hectares of pesticide spray area on foodcrops in Scotland
• reduction in pesticide residues in food
• increased countryside wildlife, for example a 17% increase in butterfly numbers in arable areas”

In the same press release, Robin Harper was quoted:

"It's a very popular proposal with the support of MSPs from all of Scotland's parties and over eighty organisations including farmers, producers, supermarkets, unions and environment organisations, as well as hundreds of individuals."

Irene McGugan, SNP MSP, was recently quoted in *The Scotsman* saying:

"An expert Executive group4 is all very well, but if you really want to show commitment you have to take action, and set targets. We've had an expert group here working on these proposals for more than two years. What this Bill will provide is direction, a focus on quality produce and a firm basis for sustainable growth."

By way of contrast, in August, former Executive Minister for Transport and the Environment Sarah Boyack wrote in the *Evening News* (28/08/02):

“There is a Member’s Bill before the Scottish Parliament which would lead to legal targets for Scotland to have a proportion of farmland being organic. I don't believe that this is the best way forward, although I support the principles behind the Bill.”

**OPPOSITION TO THE BILL**

Earlier this year, Sarah Boyack asked the Scottish Executive whether it would publish an organic food and farming action plan (SP PQ S1W-27300 2002). In response, the Rural Development Minister, Ross Finnie, highlighted how the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture already sets out an action plan relevant to the organic sector as well as to other forms of environmentally sustainable farming. Some of the key challenges he drew attention to were:

• identifying and tailoring production to consumer demand and market outlets
• developing the supply chain to strengthen Scotland's organic processing capacity
• providing the necessary business and technical advice to organic farmers

---

4 This refers to the stakeholder group to develop organic farming recently announced by the Executive.
The Executive also explained how it is trying to encourage the development of the organic sector in Scotland through a number of schemes such as the Organic Aid Scheme (OAS), the Processing and Marketing Grants Scheme, the Marketing Development Scheme, the organic helpline and the recently published Guide to Organic Marketing. In addition, the Minister pointed out that, following a recent consultation exercise, the OAS grants would be reviewed in the short to medium term. It is likely that this review will result in the scheme becoming discretionary.

In a newspaper article (Sunday Herald 26/05/02), Ross Finnie indicated that he would not be supporting the Bill. He raised concerns about the fact that organic farmers sometimes receive public grants but fail to deliver organic meat to the market. The Minister was reported to have said:

“Being a minister, I'm against putting a stick across my own back for a target that I can't necessarily influence. (...) Organics appear to demand a premium, yet I am not being overwhelmed by people seeking assistance for organic conversion. I'm puzzled by that.”

More recently, the Executive announced that a stakeholder group was to be appointed to develop organic farming in Scotland. The group’s objective would be “to identify action necessary to ensure the organic sector can fulfil its potential contribution to Scotland's agriculture strategy” (Scottish Executive 27/09/02).

The Minister referred to the role of the organic sector in the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture and in particular highlighted its contribution to the promotion of environmentally friendly and market-oriented agriculture. He asked the stakeholder group:

"to consider further action, which may be needed to join up the organic food chain, priorities for research, standards for organic certification appropriate to Scottish circumstances, and options for future Executive support for environmentally-friendly, market-oriented organic farming.”

The stakeholder group is expected to complete its work within six months. This will lead to the publication of the agreed actions to be taken to secure the development of the organic sector in Scotland.

In a News Release issued following the Bill’s introduction, the National Farmers’ Union of Scotland stated its view that “the development of the organic market should not be based on setting arbitrary targets for organic production” (NFUS 01/10/02). However, the Union acknowledged the need for an action plan to:

- strengthen the supply chain
- improve information provision and delivery
- allow farmers to take advantage of the Scottish brand and organic premium

The News Release quoted the NFUS Vice President John Kinnaird saying:

“The setting of targets for organic production is not compatible with an agriculture industry that must respond to market signals and react to
consumer demand. Farmers who choose to covert to organic production must do so on the basis of sound business judgement, not just to meet an arbitrary target. There is an obvious danger in driving an industry down a route of production for which there is no guarantee of an ongoing demand for the end product.”

SUPPORT FOR THE BILL

Several organisations supporting the Bill issued statements on the day of the Bill’s introduction. A sample of these are reproduced below.

Nick Cooke, Executive Chairman, Scottish Organic Producers Association
“SOPA sees the Bill as a major opportunity to reinforce and promote the measures that a Scottish organic action plan needs to deliver over the next 10 years in order to meet public demand for organic produce on a sustainable basis.”

Martin Meteyard, Secretary, Scottish Co-op
“Organics is a rapidly expanding market but Scottish farmers are badly losing out to their continental counterparts. Scotland urgently needs a strong organics action plan and a long term commitment from the Scottish Parliament to the farming community.”

Kevin Dunion, Chief Executive, Friends of the Earth Scotland
“This legislation is essential to ensure that the environmental, economic and social benefits of organic agriculture are fully realised in Scotland.”

Andy Baird, Regional Secretary, Transport & General Workers’ Union Scotland
“As the organisation representing the interests of Scotland’s agricultural workers, the Transport & General Workers’ Union is supportive of the efforts to establish targets for conversion to organic farming methods.

Many of the problems that have threatened the livelihoods of our members, are, in our view, related to intensive farming methods and the associated drive for profits by farming interests.

We are aware that the establishment of organic farming targets in other areas of the world, such as in Scandinavia, provided the necessary impetus for diversification in the industry and we believe that similar measures in Scotland would be equally beneficial for the future of agriculture.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Home-grown plan to treble organic produce, Evening News 1 October 2002a

Plan to up Scots organic produce, Evening News, 1 October 2002b

Field of dreams Evening News, 28 August 2002

NFU-S opposition to targets but time to develop organic sector National Farmers Union of Scotland news release, 1 October 2002


SP Bill 66–PM 2002. Organic Farming Targets (Scotland) Bill Policy Memorandum

Scottish Parliament PQ S1W-27300 answered on 01/08/02

Why Scotland's environment minister loves GM foods so much he's prepared to risk his career by supporting them, Sunday Herald, 26 May 2002
ANNEX:

CONSULTATION RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For</th>
<th>Mixed Views</th>
<th>Against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Butterworth’s Organic Nursery</td>
<td>2. Cream o’ Galloway Dairy Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Crofters Commission</td>
<td>3. Highlands and Islands Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Demeter (Biodynamic Agricultural Association)</td>
<td>4. Scottish Landowners’ Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Friends of the Earth Scotland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Green Net</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>LW Allan (individual member of the public)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill Campaign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Organic Scotland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>SAC (Christine Watson)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>SAC (David Younie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Scottish Organic Gardeners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Scottish Wildlife Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Scottish Youth Parliament Rural Affairs Working Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: derived from a Non-Executive Bills Unit analysis of consultation responses