

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION FROM QUALITY MEAT SCOTLAND
THE DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN (RPP3)

QMS is an NDPB that does not get direct funding from Scottish Government but is funded, primarily from a statutory levy collected on all cattle, sheep and pigs slaughtered for human consumption in Scotland. It also bids for the competitive EU funds administered by the Scottish government through the SRDP in respect of knowledge transfer in particular or directly from the European Commission in respect of marketing support for PGI brands. QMS is the custodian of the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb PGI brands and also the Specialist Selected Pork brand

In responding to this plan, QMS will reserve its comment to section 14 (Agriculture) as this is where our competences and stakeholder interest lie. QMS has contributed to many stakeholder discussions in respect to this plan but have not been directly consulted on the role we may play particularly in respect to policy 3 of the agriculture section. We, we are aware there are issues elsewhere in the supply chain from refrigerant and energy use to waste disposal which may be addressed elsewhere in the draft plan.

QMS welcomes the publication of the draft Climate Change Plan by the Scottish Government as a clear indication of challenges faced and some of the means by which these challenges can be addressed. We are particularly pleased to see the emphasis on emissions intensity as well as total emissions. We also welcome the recognition of the importance of economic sustainability as part of the plan for agriculture (para. 14.4.4 and 14.4.5).

QMS has, for a number of years, run knowledge transfer programmes designed to support and encourage improved business efficiency through for example genetic evaluations, animal health, grassland utilisation and soil schools. We therefore welcome the encouragement given to this programme of work within agriculture policy 3. QMS is well placed, subject to resources, to help deliver this in partnership with Government and industry.

QMS consider genotyping, fertility and animal health to be key areas with the potential to deliver improved carbon efficiency. We also welcome the recognition of the role feed additives can play and the requirement for more research on this subject. However, we would like to have seen comment on the need for work to be done to assess the role of and encourage the use of alternative and sustainable protein sources; in particular for the monogastric sector. We would also have liked to see discussion of the role of grassland management and utilisation in emissions mitigation beyond the reference of “the need for development programmes before improved nitrogen -use varieties would be available to farmers”. Elements associated with nutritional quality of grass species and use of forage legumes in swards may be as useful in improving ruminant livestock performance (and reduced emissions intensity) as animal fertility. We welcome the profile given to soil structure and management within the draft plan.

QMS recognises the role that carbon audits can play in identifying strengths and weakness within a production system and published carbon intensity estimates in its sheep and cattle enterprise profitability report in 2016. We consider though, based on the number of businesses within our farm assurance schemes, that the target of 1200 free carbon audits lacks ambition.

We note the reference to “exploring mechanisms for paying farmers....to reduce emissions” and that “this is an extremely complex area and many issues need to be resolved first”. In this regard it is important that any schemes recognise that livestock production is a biological process and within year variations in climatic conditions, for example prolonged snow falls, extreme rain events, drought, can all impact on crop and animal growth rates and the need for imported feeds with high embedded carbon costs, can lead to significant variations in emissions intensity between years that are out with the control of the livestock manager and any mechanism for “paying farmers” must recognise this constraint. Equally in giving consideration to these measures the option of simply reducing stock numbers must not be seen as a mechanism for meeting individual reduction targets, instead the rewards must be based on emissions intensity which would not only contribute to Climate Change plans but would also encourage business economic sustainability.

As custodians of several significant brands QMS notes with interest the consideration given to a Low Carbon Farming marketing scheme and reference to the role of Origin Green in Ireland. We would like to see more details of the support to economic sustainability that Origin Green has delivered for Irish producers and would like to see a full economic impact assessment of how such a marketing initiative would impact on, and work with, the high profile PGI brands already held within Scotland.

The livestock sector remains concerned about the forestry planting targets and the land type on which this planting will be targeted. However, the livestock sector does recognise the benefits that can be gained for the planting of shelter belts and hedges. In respect to discussion of forestry we are disappointed not to see discussion of low density planting (agro-forestry) could be used to allow integration of grazing and forestry to the benefit of carbon capture while sustaining livestock production. In the same context of land use diversification and its potential to mitigate emissions, QMS welcome the recognition of the role livestock farming can play in arable systems through provision of organic fertilisers and improved soil structures by have a grass break in a crop rotation. This topic was equally recognised in the beef sector strategy described in Beef 2020 as potentially offering a way for new entrants to farming to gain access to land to begin a livestock enterprise.

In the wider context of meeting some of the other ambitions of Scottish Government, particularly for Scotland's food and drink industry to continue growing and meet the ambitious targets for food and drink exports set by Scotland Food and Drink and building growth across all areas of rural Scotland, the Climate Change targets must not result in a reduction in livestock numbers to meet overarching absolute targets for emissions reductions. In this regard the recognition given in the Climate Change Plan to emissions intensity and a drive to reduce these through improved technical efficiency would allow stock numbers to be maintained or even increased to the benefit of wider goals while contributing to overall emissions reduction targets and is particularly welcome.

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