

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill

SUBMISSION FROM National Sheep Association Scotland

The NSA does not believe the ambitious targets laid out in the paper are realistic and with regard to the livestock sector we believe there will be serious impacts on red meat production for Scotland. With 85% of Scotland classed as Less Favoured Area, this provides a natural grazing habit for the biggest proportion of sheep production across the country. The hill flocks managed across vast areas of Scotland already contribute significantly to reducing climate change targets purely by the way in which they graze and control grass growth were no other animal or human can do that. Managed grazing of grass and rough grass is much more efficient for the climate and also reduces the risk of wildfires, as has been experienced in some parts of the UK this year.

If breeding sheep numbers were to be reduced, purely, as a mechanism to meet GHG emission targets then the social, economic and environmental impact would be devastating across rural parts of Scotland. People would simply disappear from the remotest areas, as without sheep and sheep farming there will be no reason for people to live up many of the remote glens of Scotland. Evidence of this land abandonment can already be seen in many parts.

The livestock farming industry also has a duty and responsibility to provide beef and sheep meat in order to achieve the Scotland Food and Drink targets of doubling its turnover by 2030. The sheep industry plays a vital part in contributing towards this target and any reduction in sheep numbers in order to achieve a zero GHG emission target will undoubtedly reduce our contribution towards achieving the Food and Drink targets.

We believe that Scotland has never had a starting point within the sheep sector and over recent years the industry has made improvements in reducing GHG emissions which have gone unrecognised. We also believe that sheep farming delivers many environmental benefits which contribute significantly to meeting climate change targets which also go unrecognised. These benefits currently delivered could have a financial benefit to sheep farmers, this could be delivered through some form of carbon audit specially designed for hills and uplands.

Whilst we as an industry are not against making improvements for efficiency and GHG emissions we should be realistic in what we can achieve, which maintains our sheep numbers. Scotland has vast areas of hills and uplands and provides a natural grazing environment for sheep, this in turn delivers a scenic backdrop for a very large number of tourists each year.

In summing up we do not believe these targets are realistic, they are not evidence based, agriculture will not be in a position to meet these targets whilst maintain breeding livestock. We have never had a starting point set to begin reductions and we have moved a

significant way in already achieving major reductions which have not been taken into consideration.