



Summary

Agriculture has the potential to help address the twinned climate and biodiversity crises, while supplying Scotland with healthy, locally produced food and supporting rural economies. LINK members believe that the Bill must be considerably strengthened to set a clear direction of travel, with greater certainty for industry and scrutiny by parliament. The following outline the rationale behind Scottish Environment LINK support for several amendments lodged to the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill.

LINK supports the following amendments:

Number:	Purpose of amendment	LINK’s rationale for support
Purpose and objectives of agricultural policy		
92	To clarify purpose clause	This amendment introduces a clear link between the objectives of the Bill and decisions made through the Rural Support Plan.
98, 99, 100	To clarify and expand objective (c)	These amendment uses terms better understood in legislation. The current term ‘on-farm restoration’ is limited to restoration, rather than protection or enhancement, and overlooks activities which may have wider impacts than purely ‘on-farm’. Amendments 98,99 and 100 function together.
103,104, 105,106	To clarify the meaning of objectives	These amendments provide more detailed guidance as to how the objectives should be interpreted.
107	To link objectives to policy	In line with amendments 92 and 129, this amendment introduces a clear link between the objectives and decisions made by Ministers through all powers introduced by the Bill.
Indicators, targets, monitoring and reporting		
109	To introduce indicators and targets relating to the Bill objectives	This would set a clear direction of travel of agricultural policy and ensure greater certainty for farmers, crofters, land owners and rural communities.
110	To require the Scottish Food Commission review progress in achieving the objective to produce high-quality food.	This is an appropriate measure which would ensure scrutiny of the progress made against a key Bill objective.
111	To require reporting on objectives	LINK members support the purpose of this amendment in tracking progress in achieving the objectives of the legislation.
Rural Support Plan		
112	Defining and setting outcomes for objectives	This amendment would require that the Rural Support Plan sets out definitions and outcomes for the Bill’s objectives, as well as how Ministers intend to achieve those outcomes.
30, 31	Multi-year budgeting	While recognising that the annual budget process takes precedence, LINK members support the inclusion of



		indicative multi-year budgeting through the Rural Support Plan. These amendments are linked to 115, which introduces a requirement for 'indicative proportionality' in multi-year budgets.
114 / 38	Evaluation of previous Rural Support Plans	LINK members support the requirement to evaluate progress to date when setting future Rural Support Plans. These two amendments offer different ways of achieving this.
32	Establishing baselines	The introduction of baseline figures is useful in analysing progress in achieving the Bill's objectives.
115	To introduce a duty requiring further details to be included in the Rural Support Plan	As the Bill is framework legislation, the most important decisions will be made afterwards through the Rural Support Plan. It is important that stakeholders and parliamentarians have a clear understanding of what the Rural Support Plan will include and how it will interact with the objectives set out in law.
116	To introduce a duty requiring further details to be included in the Rural Support Plan	This amendment is similar to amendment 115. A key point of difference is that this amendment does not require indicative multi-year budgets.
35/122	To require the first Rural Support Plan to be laid before by a specified date	LINK members support a date in legislation stating when the first Rural Support Plan should be introduced.
39	To require the Rural Support Plan to be subject to affirmative procedure	The proposed Rural Support Plan is a significant document that will steer agricultural policy and support for rural communities. It is therefore a crucial part of the implementation of this Bill that this and future governments will use the plan to set out priorities.
128	To provide a definition of the term 'rationale'	This sets out in greater detail what is meant by 'rationale', further informing the previous amendment.
129	To link objectives to policy	In line with amendments 92 and 107, this amendment introduces a clear link between the objectives and decisions made by Ministers through the Rural Support Plan.
42	Inclusion of biodiversity as matter to be considered	This amendment would specify that Ministers must have regard to biodiversity policies within the climate change plan.
49	To introduce a duty to consult with independent advisory bodies when preparing the Rural Support Plan	Due to the importance of agriculture funding in meeting our climate and biodiversity targets, as well as food production, we believe a similar duty to seek independent advice should be adopted in this Bill. This follows a precedent set out in the Climate Change Act 2009.
135	To require support schemes to be consistent with the Rural Support Plan	This amendment would provide improved linkage between the Rural Support Plan and support schemes enabled by the Bill. However, this also allows for the possibility to depart from the Plan should exceptional





		circumstances arise, conditional on that departure being explained.
60	To consider the promotion, protection, or improvement of soil health and its ecosystem functions to be considered a purpose of support.	Soil health is critical to ecosystem function, carbon sequestration, and food production. This amendment offers a more robust definition soil health and function.
62	To include assisting persons to set aside land for the natural environment to be considered a purpose of support.	This can encourage incorporation of non-farmed areas on farms, such as hedgerows, field margins, and small areas of woodland. This can help to encourage more nature-friendly farms and reduce further biodiversity loss.
Distribution of payments		
150	To require Ministers to publish the distributional impact of support schemes	This will help to ensure greater transparency on funding schemes and that Ministers will give due consideration to any socio-economic impacts of support schemes, contributing to just transition principles.
70, 71	To introduce a power for Ministers to ‘frontload’ payments	This power would complement the existing powers to cap and taper payments. Amendment 70 specifies a 30 hectare cut-off, whereas amendments 71 is more flexible.
158	To effectively target capping tapering powers by limiting its application to Tier 1	The application of such a cap or to tier 1 payments is entirely justified – as it ensures that such support is focused on low income farmers/crofters. With higher tiers, the public policy benefits increase as payments increase, meaning that capping could limit the outcomes that could be delivered.
68, 69, 159	Redistribution of payments	These various amendments propose approaches to achieve a fairer distribution of payments. LINK members support a redistributive approach in designing the new payment system.
165	To provide a legislative definition of ‘Tier 1’	Such a definition does not currently exist in legislation and would be necessary for the interpretation of amendments 158 and 159.

LINK would discourage the following amendments:

Number	Purpose of amendment	LINK’s rationale for discouraging
55	To limit the use of forestry on arable land for the purposes of support.	This could have several unintended consequences, such as discouraging silvoarable agroforestry systems. As this Bill is intended to provide a framework for agriculture for decades to come, we do not consider it sensible to rule out productive agricultural practices which incorporate forestry.





65	To prioritise support for primary production on high quality agricultural land.	This amendment devalues other land management activities, while also prioritising land which is typically more economically viable than land considered lower quality for the purposes of agricultural production.
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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.

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