The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Green recovery

Submission from Obesity Action Scotland

In most cases we will publish your written submission on the Scottish Parliament's website. What you send us may also be quoted in the Committee's report or in its Committee meetings. These are public meetings that are broadcast online.

Before making a submission, please read our privacy notice (section headed Parliamentary business – Committees) about submitting your views to a Committee. This tells you about how we process your personal data. If you are under 12 years of age, please read this 'Submitting Your Views to Committee: Young People' section.

Do the principles of sustainable development (as set out in the annexe), and those for a resilient recovery, as proposed by the UK Committee on Climate Change, provide a comprehensive framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland?

Green recovery from COVID-19, food and the food system are vital and synergistic contributors to global health. The current food system is threatening both human health and environmental sustainability. Scottish Government already backs a wellbeing economy as part of COVID-19[1] recovery, stating that the wellbeing economy "will be built on the principles of sustainable economic growth, accompanied by tackling inequalities, and delivered as a green recovery to meet our climate change targets and wider environmental objectives." Improvements to the food system, food and national diet need to be a part of this.

Population dietary health is determined by national diet and types of foods people eat most often. Rates of diet-related diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease or cancer, are high in Scotland and the UK. People with these conditions are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus. We also know that excess weight can increase risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19[2] and almost a third of people in Scotland live with obesity.

Green recovery needs to embrace the 'build back better' philosophy and acknowledge the interconnectedness of the serious issues we are struggling with on national and global scales: climate change, poverty and undernutrition, obesity, and crisis caused by COVID-19. Only a holistic approach to these matters can bring meaningful change. For this, food and the food system's roles need to be acknowledged and factored into the process of green recovery.

Environmental health, sustainability and human health and wellbeing are inseparably linked. There is a wealth of, and rapidly growing, evidence for including food and health considerations in recovery plans and plans to address the current crises:

- Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the World

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[1] https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-scotlands-wellbeing-economy/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/excess-weight-and-covid-19-insights-from-new-evidence

Food Programme, and the World Health Organization produced a joint report,[3] "The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2018", recommending (1) addressing the linkages between food, nutrition, energy, water, and health, (2) understanding food production and utilisation issues, covering considerations of efficacy, sustainability, climate risks, and diversity of resources, and (3) developing sustainable diets by taking an integrative food systems perspective to deliver health and wellbeing, linked to transformation towards the circular economy and bioeconomy, among other actions.

- The Lancet commission on obesity (2019)[4] 2019 called the triple threats of undernutrition, of obesity and of climate change 'The Global Syndemic' and strongly recommended tackling common drivers of these issues.
- The EAT Lancet commission proposed a model of a planetary healthy diet which is good for both human and planetary health.[5]
- Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UK has published a range of resources, including a briefing on anticipating the impacts of COVID on food availability.[6]
- The recent Global Nutrition Report 2020 pointed out that Covid-19 exposed the vulnerability and weaknesses of our already fragile and stressed by increasing climate extremes, food systems. It argues that as the virus is being controlled, gains and focus on reducing hunger and improving diet cannot be lost, and "we must actively prevent the main drivers of malnutrition through more equitable, resilient, sustainable systems for food and health security, backed up by responsive social protection mechanisms".[7]
- The interconnectedness of food and current problems was also recognised in the recent House of Lords report Hungry For Change[8] that concluded "The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need, and provided the opportunity, for the government to act now with commitment and focus to deliver the improvements to the food system, public health and environmental sustainability that are so urgently required."

Additionally, the National Food Strategy for England[9] recommended adopting a statutory responsibility to commission and publish an independent report on any proposed trade agreements; the report including economic productivity; food safety and public health; the environment and climate change; society and labour; human rights; and animal welfare.

Finally, Obesity Action Scotland is a member of the Scottish Food Coalition. As a collation we are part of the campaign for a new law on food, a Good Food Nation Bill,[10] that takes a whole system approach. The bill should be a coherent framework that ensures the food system contributes to everyone's health and wellbeing, values the work to put food on our plates, supports high animal welfare, sustains our wildlife, natural resources and environment for generations to come. Although this legislation was delayed, and together with what we know from the work set out above, it could play a key part in green recovery.

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[3] http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf
[4] https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/global-syndemic
[5] https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/EAT
[6] http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb0206en
[7] https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2020-global-nutrition-report/
[8] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldselect/ldfphe/85/85.pdf
[9] https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/partone/
[10] http://www.foodcoalition.scot/the-good-food-nation-bill.html