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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Debate on the Scottish Budget 2013-14

December 2012

Summary

- WWF urges all MSPs to promote the importance of linking its commitment to climate change with its own annual budgets.
- WWF is concerned that this Budget is at odds with the Government's strategic ambitions on climate change, and further compounds previous underinvestment in low carbon homes and transport.
- It is therefore disappointing that the Finance committee has not taken forward concerns by ICI and EET committees about insufficient levels of funding for active travel and home energy efficiency.
- We ask MSPs to use this debate to call on the Government to shift its spending to adequately reflect its climate ambition by:
 - doubling the funding of the National Retrofit Programme
 - increasing the proportion of the transport budget spent on active travel to 10%

In its report, the EET committee rightly asserts that 'it is important that the budget gives confidence that the climate change targets will be met'. Indeed, the RACCE committee last year urged Government to 'ensure all proposals and policies in the RPP [Report on Proposals and Policies] are fully funded, in order to meet the targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act.' Despite this call, the Government has presented a budget that WWF believes undermines the credibility of its own climate change action plan.

Earlier this year the Scottish Government missed its first annual emissions reduction target for 2010, with emissions from housing and transport higher now than they were in 1990. We hope that with the introduction of a new climate action plan in early 2013 – RPP2 - will be an opportunity to bring forward the 'step change' needed in climate policies.



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A budget at odds with climate ambition

WWF Scotland recognises the difficult economic constraints in which Ministers make their decisions, but it is disappointing that their climate change rhetoric is not aligned with their spending framework. On 7 November, Nicola Sturgeon stated to the ICI committee that climate change was 'extremely high up the list of priorities' and that climate change was 'every minister's business'. However, we remain unconvinced that the housing and transport sectors are playing their part in tackling climate change.

Homes: Recent analysis for WWF Scotland reveals the scale of the gap between the total investment required to reach the government's target for emissions reductions from housing would require a total investment (public and private) of £4.6bn. The Draft Budget for 2013-14 proposes only £65m for a National Retrofit Programme for energy efficiency and fuel poverty. We recognise that government cannot be expected to plug the entire funding gap, however, to lever in the necessary private investment, we believe spending on the National Retrofit Programme funding must be at least doubled to £130m. WWF is therefore concerned to note the division within the EET committee, resulting in it being unable to agree collectively on support for the proposal to raise fuel poverty funding from £65m to 'no less than £100m'.

Transport: The transport budget again remains heavily dominated by spending on motorways and trunk roads with less than 2% of the transport budget allocated to walking and cycling. With latest figures indicating that most journeys were short in distance and duration - in 2011, 61 per cent of journeys were less than 3 miles -, cycling and walking should be encouraged. The ICI committee rightly noted that it 'remains convinced that the level of public investment in active travel is insufficient to meet the ambitious long term objectives it needs to deliver' and that 'even relatively minor adjustments could bring disproportionately larger economic and societal benefits.' We therefore urge the Government to follow this example and work towards spending 10% of the transport budget on boosting walking and cycling.

New 'low carbon' opportunities

It is disappointing once again that the Finance committee has not taken forward concerns by ICI and EET committees about insufficient levels of funding for active travel and home energy efficiency, and has relegated climate change to 'other issues' within its report. This is despite the fact that one of the Budget's fundamental priorities is to secure 'new opportunities through the low carbon economy'. A low carbon budget should be seen as an investment in the wellbeing of our country, supporting green jobs, warmer homes, cleaner energy, active travel and more efficient public transport.

WWF Scotland urges MSPs to highlight these concerns at the Budget debate, to ensure that it reflects Scotland's commitment to secure a low carbon future. We understand that climate targets are only achievable with the effort of government, businesses, communities and individuals together. However, we believe Government must lead by example, and set a policy framework matched by appropriate funding that is conducive to behaviour change. Scotland can not pass up the opportunities presented by a move to a low carbon economy.

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