

RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT BUDGET 2011-12

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

You have invited comments from SAC on the draft Scottish Government budget.

I would wish to draw the attention of the Committee to two items contained in the Environmental and Rural Sciences budget which directly impact on SAC and on the services which it provides to rural Scotland on behalf of Government.

1. Agricultural and Horticultural Advice and Support

This budget has been reduced by £1m overall; £400k of that cut is to be applied to the 'Remote Areas' Support for local SAC Offices (a cut of approximately 30%). This will impact mainly on the Highlands and Islands and, in particular, the Crofting communities. It will lead to reductions in staffing and an increase in costs of advisory services to the end users in these economically fragile areas.

2. Veterinary Surveillance

The headline figures provided for Veterinary Surveillance, most of which is provided by SAC through its network of eight regional Veterinary Laboratories across Scotland, appear to indicate an increase in resources from £4.8m to £5.2m. However, SAC has received notice of a cut of £500k (out of a total budget of approximately £4m) from 1st April 2011. It is proposed that this 12.5% cut in resources for animal disease surveillance is to be implemented ahead of the outcome of the current independent review of animal disease surveillance in Scotland, which is being conducted under the chairmanship of Mr John Kinnaird.

It makes little sense to us to have a cut in resources implemented now, which will result in a loss of key scientific staff and threaten the viability of individual labs, ahead of the outcome of John Kinnaird's review. We would propose that any alteration in budgets, and any consequent re-organisation, should only take place consequent to the review being completed.

Professor W A C McKelvey
Chief Executive & Principal
25 November 2010