

NET ZERO

ARRAN



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The climate change benchmarking group was formed following the end of Scottish Government's Beef Efficiency Scheme with a core group of farmers interested in better understanding their carbon footprints and taking collective action to cut emissions and improve production.

The group met three times over the course of 2022, having held multiple meetings in 2021 and keen to maintain the momentum. All three meetings were held on the island and consisted of a meeting on rush pasture control, a meeting on enhancing the farmed environment for pollinators and finally a meeting to discuss the most recent benchmarking results and to develop the action plan for 2023. During this time each member of the group has been carbon auditing, with the group results updated after each audit is completed. Kenneth Bone, Glenkiln farm also participated in FAS TV alongside Katy Malone from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, the key speaker at the second meeting this year. Members of the group have also continued soil sampling and benchmarking their results following the activities around soil in 2021. All these actions collectively have helped raise the profile of farming on the island as well as more broadly, and demonstrated that coordinated, grassroots action for climate change can have impact.

Key Interests

- 1) The dormancy period for rush seed in soil is around 60 years so long periods of inaction can only make rush control harder. If you have a problem with rushes, the best control is to promote better grass growth to outcompete the rush, making better use of grass and making the spread more difficult and in all cases, rushes are a symptom of some other underline issue.
- 2) The single biggest take home message from the pollinator meeting was the importance of fringe farmland habitat and the need to provide areas of cover for vulnerable bumblebees, who have a heat tolerance of around 28°C and are highly susceptible to changing climate.
- 3) The carbon benchmarking meeting was an opportunity to review the last three years of meetings and activities and plan ahead for 2023, the take home messages being that expansion of the group means that there may be a need for an on island coordinator but that some farms have made good progress to net zero emissions.

Group Successes

In 2021 the group was able to meet and discuss topics through virtual meetings but the general consensus is that a return to in person meetings is welcome. Some members of the group continue to be recurring regulars and others, depending on their particular interests float in and out of the meetings but provided they are Arran farmers it is important there are no barriers to the group or meetings. Being able to mix on farm has also been a nice change of pace for many, with plans to continue this in the next phase of FAS Connect.

The group has received minor media attention and in 2021, with COP26 on the horizon the group participated at the Arran Climate Fringe Festival, as well as making appearances at NFUS presentations and speaking with BBC Radio Scotland—as climate change continues to climb the political agenda the hunger for good farming and climate change stories only increases. At present, four members of the group have featured on FAS TV and content around the group has proven popular, with a farmer driven, collaborative approach to tackling the issues facing the industry.

The group benefits from its island setting, with clear boundaries and common issues which, if dealt with would benefit each business at farm level, but also the wider supply chain and local island economy and has great support from local special interest groups.

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NET ZERO ARRAN — Action Plan

Action Plan for 2023

During the last meeting of 2022 the group discussed content for 2023, areas of interest and topics to be covered, these include but are not limited to completion of three trials:

- 1) In an effort to maintain land in a managed, productive condition and explore avenues to reduce reliance on purchased feed, David Henderson has committed to trial growing a crop of spring barley in one of his permanent grassland fields. Kilpatrick farm is a farm that has been in grass for years now and David is excited to see if an arable component is viable on the farm again.
- 2) The industry as a whole is hearing a lot of talk around so called “regenerative agriculture” and keen to see what opportunities it might have for Arran, Alastair Mackenzie will complete a full reseed on his productive beef unit at Knowe farm and see if a multispecies sward can be incorporated into the farm’s grazing rotation and what benefits it might bring for the herd, the soil and nature conservation more generally.
- 3) The third trial will involve a return to Tigheanfraoch farm, where John Murchie, the host of the past rush control meeting will work with specialist advisors to bring his rush pasture under control—John has previously mentioned that the field in question used to grow hay and he is keen to see it return to something close to that. This trial will also be a good chance to discuss other issues around the spread of invasive and non-native plant species.
- 4) Past ideas that the group may revisit also include waste plastic recycling and the potential for an island buying group to coordinate farm input purchases for more buying power.

With a minimum of three meetings planned for 2023 and ongoing trial work throughout the year it will be essential to have the continued support of the Farm Advisory Service. The group has secured funds to promote their activities on their own FAS webpage and this will become more and more important as the group continues to develop, allowing the group to track their own successes, learn from their failures and provide a roadmap for other potential, similar groups across the country.

Actions

- Coordinate with the relevant farmers to make sure the best possible times in the year are set aside for each of the proposed meetings.
- Continue with in person meetings but do not overlook the opportunities for remote activities and interesting contributors.
- Look for opportunities to work more closely on joint goals with groups like Farming for a Better Climate, Nature Scot, The Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Working for Waders.
- Continue putting on content promoting the positive action taken for climate change and nature at farm level.

Long Term Vision

Climate change is a generational, if not multi-generational challenge and Net Zero Arran will continue so long as there is a willingness to do so from the farmers on the island and support for their activities and messages.

Long term the business would like to contribute to the normalisation of carbon auditing as best practice for farming in Scotland and promote the development of likeminded groups across the country. A proportion of the group members have indicated an interest in looking at how nature conservation efforts can be built into what is trying to be achieved and this can be developed going forward with the support of groups like Farming for a Better Climate, Nature Scot, The Bumblebee Conservation Trust, RSPB and Working for Waders. Arran as an island has no shortage of nature designated land and it is important that in the discussion about going green, the nature conservation message gets an equal platform, particularly as Scotland deals not only with a climate crisis but associated nature declines.

As the group continues to grow informal discussions around getting a formal structure are being had, and while the group appreciates Scottish Government support, it must strive to be self sustaining.