

Shona Robison MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
Scottish Government
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1 June 2022

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

An Independent Food Commission for Scotland

We are writing to you regarding the Good Food Nation Bill which is coming back to Parliament shortly. As organisations working to end poverty in Scotland, we strongly urge you to establish an independent statutory Food Commission as part of this Bill to ensure Scotland's journey to a Good Food Nation is fair for everyone.

Responsibility for food policy rests with many different government departments and agencies. An independent Food Commission will provide assistance in the development and delivery of cross-cutting food plans at both a national and local level. It will assist Parliament in its scrutiny of progress by providing timely evidence on all aspects of the food system.

Over the last twelve years increasing numbers of people are being pushed to the doors of food banks because they haven't got enough money to buy food. Since the cut to Universal Credit and the start of the cost of living crisis in October 2021, demand for charitable food aid has steadily increased. And we know that the growing number of people accessing emergency food parcel represents the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wider food insecurity and poverty.

The deteriorating cost-of-living crisis is making matters much worse in Scotland. People unable to afford essentials and accessing a food bank are increasingly asking for food they do not need to cook or refrigerate because of rising energy prices. This includes a growing cohort of people accessing a food bank for the first time and who are struggling to afford food while in work. Meanwhile, many food bank teams are struggling to cope as demand outstrips resources and they make difficult decisions about cutting usual supplies of food and dipping into financial reserves.

Establishing a Food Commission is one of the changes that the Scottish Government can make to help to address this crisis and links to your commitment to tackling growing food insecurity with a cash first approach.

A Commission can guide progress towards a food system where everyone's right to food based on adequacy of income is realised. It can independently monitor and report on the state of Scotland's food system, scrutinise national and local government food plans and facilitate collaboration across all stakeholder groups. Food plans must involve, and be

shaped by, people with direct experience of poverty and local food bank workers – a Food Commission can support dynamic and inclusive public engagement and participation in food plans.

The Scottish Government has shown leadership by introducing the Good Food Nation Bill which will help us to create a food system that is good for people, communities, animals, businesses and the natural environment. This Bill has widespread support from civil society, MSPs and local authorities – but it needs to be accompanied by an independent body to champion action and scrutinise progress in delivering a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable food system for Scotland.

Your Government has, commendably, established Commissions to address similarly complex issues, such as the Scottish Land Commission, Social Security Commission, Poverty and Inequality Commission and the Just Transition Commission.

We urge you to take a similar approach to food and establish an independent Scottish Food Commission as part of the Good Food Nation Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Polly Jones
Head of Scotland, The Trussell Trust

Sabine Goodwin
Co-ordinator, IFAN UK

Peter Kelly
Director, The Poverty Alliance

Christine Carlin,
Director Scotland Home-Start

Amy Woodhouse
Head of Policy, Projects and Participation, Children in Scotland

SallyAnn Kelly
Chief Executive, Aberlour Children's Charity