

A COORDINATED AGENDA FOR MARINE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL
AFFAIRS SCIENCE (CAMERAS) (2011-2016)

British Potato Trade Association
12 Buckstone Hill
Edinburgh
EH10 6TH

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important consultation paper on behalf of the British Potato Trade Association which represents potato trading companies in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

The Association acknowledges the substantial investment over many years by the Scottish Government (and its predecessors) in publicly funded research programmes on potato plant pathology and potato genetics and in the maintenance of a world-class science base in these research areas at the Scottish Crop Research Institute. It is vital to the health of the potato industry in Scotland that this support continues in the future.

Scotland has a reputation world-wide for the quality of its seed potatoes and this sector of the potato industry is conservatively valued by the Scottish Government at £50m per annum. The sector is locally important to the rural economy of much of eastern Scotland. The economic value of the potato industry is magnified several fold when ware (table) potatoes and downstream packing and processing are also considered. Moreover ware potato production is an important integral crop in the arable cycle in Scotland and thus is a vital component of the fabric of rural Scotland. Successful ware potato production is of course dependent on the availability of good quality seed.

Unfortunately the potato is susceptible to a wide range of pests and diseases. At this time many of the plant protection products used to combat these pests and diseases are themselves under scrutiny due to perceived environmental impacts. New plant protection products are required to replace those that will be lost. The Scottish seed potato industry is in a fragile state and depends upon finding new markets abroad as home markets shrink. New varieties are required for the industry to compete in international markets and maintain critical mass. If the Scottish seed potato industry were to lose critical mass the consequence would inevitably be the entry into Scotland of imported seed potatoes with the substantially heightened risk of introducing pests and diseases that are not currently found here - ring rot and brown rot are perhaps the main perceived threats but there are others that are less well known but no less potentially damaging. Not only would that scenario carry a major cost implication in terms of phytosanitary measures to prevent spread, there would be a potentially catastrophic loss of reputation for our industry which largely trades on the health of our seed potatoes. The establishment here of these damaging potato pests and diseases therefore carries the real prospect of the

demise of a potato industry in this country with major economic repercussions for arable farming in Scotland.

This Association believes that continued Government support for scientific research on potato pathology and potato genetics is consistent with the 3 Headline Themes identified in the consultation paper: - Local Responses to Global Change - Optimising the Potential of Scotland's Natural Assets - Support for Nationally Important Rural, Environmental and Marine Capability and Resource.

A shrinking globe in trade terms will result in our industry facing new potato plant health challenges with an unpredictable impact depending on how our maritime climate responds to global climatic changes. While there will be opportunities to explore answers in collaboration with other research providers within Scotland, the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond and across other sectors of agriculture, there will also be a clear need to identify and deliver a response tailored to local circumstance through knowledge transfer of research findings.

Scotland's reputation for producing high grade seed potatoes is built upon the natural assets that the country enjoys – temperate climate, long summer daylight hours, fertile soils, abundant clean water and not least the dedication and expertise of our growers, others downstream within the industry and those within the public services. The last of these natural assets is the most at risk as experience is being lost through the retirement of growers and the reluctance of younger people to enter an industry which is viewed as being high on required inputs and also high on risk. Measures to increase interest in making a career in the industry would therefore be very welcome.

As I have indicated earlier in this response the potato industry is an important part of the economy and fabric of life of rural Scotland. It harnesses the beneficial natural resources of the Scotland and its people. It makes a contribution well beyond these shores with exports to over 60 countries out with the EU. It has played an historic part in the search for food security for the UK and will continue to do so in the future if given a similar level of Government encouragement and support.

I have been unable to download an amendable Respondent Information Form to include with this electronically delivered consultation response. However I can confirm that this response by the BPTA may be made public and that we are willing to be contacted about this response to the consultation paper.