

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 17 November 2022

Endorsement of Plant-based treaty – Response to Motion by Councillor Burgess

Executive/routine

Wards

Council Commitments [18](#)

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy and Sustainability Committee:

- 1.1 Note the greenhouse gas emissions reductions associated with a shift to plant-based diets outlined within this report
- 1.2 Note the potential implications of the proposed plant-based treaty for City of Edinburgh Council

Richard Carr

Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: Claire Marion, Lead Change and Delivery Officer (Carbon Management)

E-mail: claire.marion@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 7093



Endorsement of Plant-based treaty – Response to Motion by Councillor Burgess

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report outlines the potential implications for the City of Edinburgh Council of endorsing the call for a [Plant-based treaty](#) and integrating its principles and relevant actions, including for cities and education, into Council strategies and action plans.
- 2.2 This report is brought to Committee in response to a motion by Councillor Burgess on [17th March 2022, item 8.8](#).

3. Background

- 3.1 At Full Council on 17 March 2022, Councillor Burgess requested a report on the implications for the Council of endorsing the call for negotiation on the development of a Plant-Based Treaty by national governments as a companion to the UN Paris Climate Agreement and integrating the Treaty's principles and relevant actions, including for cities and education, into Council strategies and action plans.
- 3.2 The Treaty aims to halt the widespread degradation of critical ecosystems worldwide caused by animal agriculture, to promote a shift to more healthy, sustainable plant-based diets and to actively reverse damage done to planetary functions, ecosystem services and biodiversity. The Treaty has three core principles:
 - 3.2.1 **Relinquish:** no land use change, ecosystem degradation or deforestation for conventional animal agriculture
 - 3.2.2 **Redirect:** an active transition away from animal-based food systems to plant-based systems
 - 3.2.3 **Restore:** actively restore key ecosystems, particularly restoring forests and rewilding landscapes
- 3.3 The Treaty has so far been endorsed by one city in the USA, one city in Argentina, and seven cities in India. It has more than 32,000 individual, 685 organisation and 502 business endorsers to date. A petition has gathered more than 15,000 signatures to ask Glasgow City Council to endorse the Plant Based Treaty.
- 3.4 The latest IPCC report (Climate Change 2022, Mitigation of Climate Change), published in April 2022, stated that food systems are associated with 42% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. The report acknowledges that there is robust

evidence that diets high in plant protein and low in meat and dairy make for lower greenhouse gas emissions, and that consequently, shifting consumption towards plant-based diets has a major mitigation potential. In their Sixth Carbon Budget report published in 2020, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) recommended a 20-50% reduction in all meat and dairy consumption by 2050 (depending on the different scenarios modelled). A summary of the findings of these reports in relation to agriculture and food production is detailed in Appendix I.

- 3.5 In 2018/19, emissions from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) in Edinburgh were estimated at 15,300 tCO_{2e}¹. Emissions from livestock generated in Edinburgh were estimated at 13,101 tCO_{2e}. Overall, livestock and land use emissions represent about 1.2% of Edinburgh's territorial emissions (emissions generated within the city boundary). This small percentage is due to the fact that Edinburgh is an urban local authority and does not have much agricultural land. Most of the meat and other food products consumed within the city are imported.
- 3.6 Estimated consumption-based emissions² (generated out with the city boundary but related to consumption of goods, services, food etc. by Edinburgh residents) show food and diet account for 23% of the city's consumption-based footprint, 12% of these emissions are from the consumption of meat and fish³. A shift to plant-based diets would therefore significantly reduce the city's consumption-based emissions.
- 3.7 Although the Council and city net zero targets and associated emissions reporting currently do not include all consumption-based emissions, both the Council Emissions Reduction Plan and city 2030 Climate Strategy, include commitments to take action to reduce consumption-based emissions. For example, through sustainable procurement and promoting more a more circular economy, including within the food sector. Moreover, changes to the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties due to be brought in later this year will require Councils to set targets for reducing 'indirect' emissions, where applicable.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The main implications to the Council of endorsing the call for a Plant-Based Treaty are outlined in the sections below.
- 4.2 **Local governments to declare a climate emergency**
 - 4.2.1 No implications. The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, set an ambitious target for Edinburgh to become net-zero by 2030 and approved Edinburgh's 2030 Climate Strategy in November 2021.
- 4.3 **Relinquish: no land use change, ecosystem degradation or deforestation for conventional animal agriculture**

¹ UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics: 2005-2019, BEIS

² Contrary to territorial emissions, consumption-based emissions include the emissions produced as a result of what Edinburgh residents use in their daily lives (goods, services, food etc.), even where these emissions take place outside of the city's territorial boundary. Edinburgh's consumption-based emissions are estimated using the [Impact tool](#)

³ According to the methodology paper, this was calculated using the Living Costs and Food survey (LCF) "which contains detailed information on the consumer spending habits of a representative set of households from across Great Britain".

- 4.3.1 City of Edinburgh Council is a largely urban area. If the Council were to sign up to the treaty, there are likely to be minimal implications at city level. However, it could have implications for the Council's work with regional partners, particularly within the context of joint work on food systems with Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal partners. For example, by impacting the Council's ability to support activity which increases land-use for animal agriculture.
- 4.3.2 **Stop the building or expansion of new animal farms and slaughterhouses**
- 4.3.3 This demand requires to ban the expansion of animal farming. This means no land use change, ecosystem degradation or deforestation for new conventional animal agriculture projects.
- 4.3.4 Given that Edinburgh is an urban local authority, conventional animal farming is already very limited. However, if the Council were to sign up to the call for a plant-based treaty, it would create an expectation that the Council will refuse permission for any new animal farm or slaughterhouse within the city.
- 4.4 **Redirect: an active transition away from animal-based food systems to plant-based systems**
- 4.4.1 **Make sustainable food a priority in Council strategies**
- 4.4.2 Promoting a shift to more plant-based diets aligns with the sustainable food priorities within the Council's [Food Growing Strategy](#) and with the high-level priorities within the 2030 Climate Strategy, and the Council's poverty alleviation and health ambitions. The Council has also committed to enhancing Edinburgh's local food supply plans by working with neighbouring authorities and regional partners across Edinburgh and South East Scotland to develop an approach and priorities for regional food supply.
- 4.4.3 However, the focus so far has been on strategic action on healthy eating, food growing and reducing food miles, with the role reducing consumption of meat and dairy can play in tackling climate change highlighted within the context of sensitivity to individual choice. If the Council were to sign up to the call for a plant-based treaty, it could create a need to be clearer about how the Council will pursue an active transition to plant-based food within relevant strategy implementation plans and activities.
- 4.4.4 This would include being clear about the role of individual choice, cultural and religious preference and what a transition away from meat and dairy consumption might mean for Edinburgh's local businesses and wider regional economy.
- 4.4.5 **Raise awareness about the climate and the environmental advantages and health benefits of plant-based food**
- 4.4.6 The 2030 Climate Strategy commits to raising awareness amongst citizens about the social, environmental and health benefits of healthy and sustainable food, including through engagement activities such as Edinburgh Talks Climate.
- 4.4.7 One of the main aims of Growing Locally, Edinburgh's Food Growing Strategy, is to promote and raise awareness of the benefits of local, sustainable, healthy food to

the environment, communities and consumers. [Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2021](#) has a number of actions in relation to the benefits to nature of food growing.

4.4.8 The Council is actively working to raise awareness among young people through outdoor learning activities in schools, including fruit and vegetable growing and by incorporating learning about food, ecosystems, rewilding, and biodiversity into the school curriculum.

4.4.9 If the Council were to sign up to the call for a plant-based treaty, this could create an expectation that those activities are more overtly focused on promoting plant-based diets and careful consideration would need to be given to communication and engagement in this area.

4.4.10 Transition to plant-based meal plans in schools, government buildings and for public events

4.4.11 Across all primary school sites, there is one meat free day per week, with secondary schools providing 100% meat-free main meals one day per week. This is delivered as part of the Council's commitment to create menus which promote a balanced diet. A vegetarian or vegan option is also available every day and red and processed meats have been reduced in line with the Scottish Government's legislation on school meals.

4.4.12 If the Council were to sign up to the call for a plant-based treaty, it could create an expectation that a clearer pathway for fully transitioning to plant-based meals is set out, for example beginning with meat free days in other Council buildings such as offices, and ensuring a plant-based alternative is always available for the other days of the week. There could be similar implications for events serviced by the council catering service.

4.4.13 Place food security as a priority for the Council, with a focus on ending poverty and hunger and making nutritious food accessible for all

4.4.14 The Council is working with EVOC to develop an approach to addressing food poverty, as part of the wider response to ending poverty in Edinburgh. The aim is for people to be able to afford and have access to good quality, nutritious food, within the context of the Council's strategic priorities around ending poverty. As such, there would be no implications in signing up to the treaty within this area.

4.5 Restore: Actively restore key ecosystems, particularly restoring forests and rewilding landscapes

4.5.1 This part of the Treaty calls for the restoration of key ecosystems and accelerate reforestation, sequestering carbon and helping to build climate resilience.

4.5.2 The Council is committed to protecting and enhancing Edinburgh's environment through the creation of a citywide green and blue network and Edinburgh's Nature Network, the planting of around 250,000 trees to become a One Million Tree City, the greening of active travel routes, the creation of wildflower meadows as part of Edinburgh's Living Landscape initiative and the protection and enhancement of the city's biodiversity and habitats as detailed in the [Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2021](#).

- 4.5.3 Most of the specific actions detailed in the third demand of the treaty are already being considered or implemented by the Council. As such, there would be no further implications in terms of ecosystem restoration as a result of the Council becoming a signatory.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Should Committee agree to endorse this call for a Treaty the Council should provide a named contact and email address on the following 'Endorse as a City' online form: <https://plantbasedtreaty.org/city-endorse/>

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications from endorsing the call for a Plant-Based Treaty. However, it is possible there may be some financial implications if further actions are implemented as a result of the Council becoming a signatory. Any resources required for delivery will need to be assessed in the context of the considerable financial pressures facing the Council and the priorities set out in the Business Plan.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 This report has been assessed in respect of the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties. In summary, any action to reduce meat and dairy consumption in Edinburgh will help to mitigate and adapt the Council and city to climate change, improve social justice, economic wellbeing and environmental good stewardship.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Call for plant based treaty - <https://plantbasedtreaty.org/the-pbt/>
- 8.2 [IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix I - Carbon impact of food
- 9.2 Appendix II - Detailed demands of the treaty

Appendix I - Carbon impact of food

The latest IPCC report (Climate Change 2022, Mitigation of Climate Change), published in April 2022, stated that food systems account for 42% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. At a household carbon footprint level, the food sector dominates in all income groups, accounting for 28% on average – more than the energy footprint. The report acknowledges that there is robust evidence that diets high in plant protein and low in meat and dairy make for lower greenhouse gas emissions, and that consequently, shifting consumption towards plant-based diets has a major mitigation potential.

The below graph taken from the IPCC report ranks the carbon intensity of different food products, clearly showing that meat products have by far the largest carbon impact, with beef, lamb and crustaceans being the most carbon intensive products. Emissions from beef vary vastly from cows reared in factory farms versus those reared on mountain pastures. By comparison, the average carbon impact of 100g of tofu protein is about 20 times lower than 100g of protein from beef cattle.

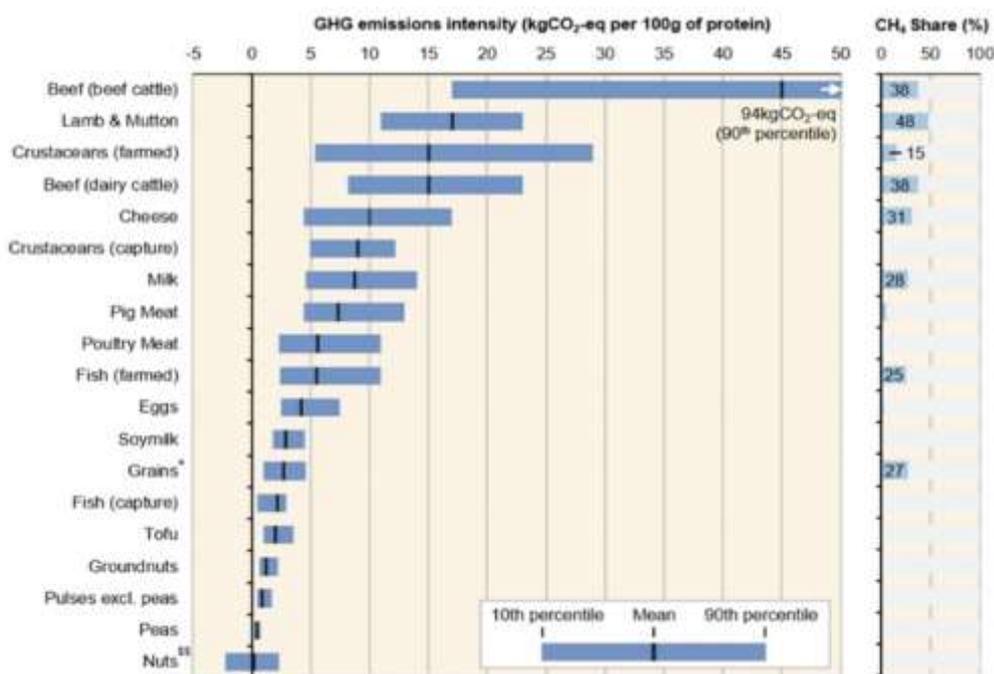


Figure 1: Ranges of GHG intensities [kgCO₂-eq per 100 g of protein, 10th-90th percentile] in protein-rich foods, quantified via a meta-analysis of attributional Life Cycle Assessment studies using economic allocation. Source: IPCC AR6 WGIII – Climate Change 2022 – Mitigation of Climate Change, Figure 12.6

In their Sixth Carbon Budget report published in 2020, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) recommend a 20 to 50% reduction in all meat and dairy consumption by 2050 (depending on the scenarios).

Overall, the science is clear, meat and dairy consumption must reduce to achieve climate targets. Both the CCC and the IPCC highlight that there would be significant health co-benefits.

“Shifting meat consumption more in line with Government guidance would have significant health impacts. A 2013 report that the Committee commissioned from

Ricardo indicated that the health impacts of reducing red meat consumption by 50% amounted to an annual monetised benefit of 0.5% of GDP.”⁴

“Benefits would also include reduced land occupation and nutrient losses to the surrounding environment, while at the same time providing health benefits and reducing mortality from diet-related non-communicable diseases.”⁵

The latest IPCC report recognises the importance of communication. It states: “As a key enabler, novel narratives created in a variety of ways e.g., by advertising, images, entertainment industry, help to break away from the established meanings, values and discourses and the status quo. Discourses that portray plant-based protein and as healthy and natural promote and stabilise particular diets. Case studies demonstrate that citizens support transformative changes if participatory processes enable a design that meets local interests and culture. Promising narratives specify that even as speed and capabilities differ humanity embarks on a joint journey towards wellbeing for all and a healthy planet.”

⁴ The Sixth Carbon Budget, CCC, December 2020

⁵ Climate change 2022, Mitigation of Climate Change, IPCC, 2022

Appendix II - Detailed demands of the treaty – from
<https://plantbasedtreaty.org/the-pbt/>

Demand 1: Relinquish: Stop the problem increasing	No building of new animal farms and slaughterhouses
	No expansion or intensification of existing farms
	No conversion of plant-based agriculture to animal agriculture
	No conversion of any land for animal feed production
	No clearing of forests or other ecosystems for animal grazing, animal rearing or animal farming of any kind
	No new fish farms or expansion of existing aquaculture farms
	Protection of Indigenous peoples; their land, rights and knowledge
	Ban all live exports
	No new large-scale industrial fishing vessels
Demand 2: Redirect: Eliminate the driving forces behind the problem	Declare a climate emergency – join the 1,900+ local governments in 34 different countries that have already done so
	Food security should be placed as a priority for all nations, with a focus on ending poverty and hunger and making nutritious food accessible for all
	Acknowledge and support the pivotal role small farmers have in feeding the planet; support them to maintain (or restore) autonomy over their lands, water, seeds and other resources
	Prioritize a switch to plant-based foods in Climate Action Plans
	Update government food and dietary guidelines to promote wholefood, plant-based food
	Design public information campaigns to raise awareness about the climate and the environmental advantages and health benefits of plant-based food, nutrition and cooking
	Aim to reduce the public's consumption of animal-based food through education in schools
	Transition to plant-based meal plans in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and government institutions
	Mandate honest labelling of food products, including cancer warning labels on all processed meats which have been declared carcinogenic by the World Health Organization
	Introduce a meat tax (including fish) with proceeds funding restoration of land destroyed by animal agriculture
	Subsidize fruits and vegetables to make a wholefoods, plant-based diet more affordable and end food deserts that hurt low income communities
	Redirect government subsidies for animal agriculture, slaughterhouses and industrial fishing to environmentally-friendly production of plant-based food

	End government subsidized advertising for the meat, dairy and egg industry
	Create green bonds to fund a transition to a plant-based economy
	Provide financial support and training for farmers, ranchers and fisher people to move away from animal production to diversified (ideally organic agroecological) plant-based systems
Demand 3 Restore: Actively healing the problem while building resilience and mitigating climate change	Reforestation projects to be rolled out in appropriate ecosystems using native tree species to restore habitats to a previously similar state
	Reforestation and restoration of the oceans is prioritised by designating additional areas of the oceans as zero fishing Marine Protected Areas (known as Highly Protected Marine Areas – HPMAs)
	All existing Marine Protected Areas should be declared strictly no fishing zones and converted to HPMAs
	Active programs rolled out to replant critical carbon absorbers in the oceans, such as seagrass beds
	Restore key degraded ecosystems which are essential for carbon sequestration cycles: mangroves, peat bogs, forests, some types of grassland
	Focus shift on nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation
	Subsidies made available for farmers and landowners who practise good land stewardship and are actively restoring the land and the associated ecosystem services (such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, flood defence, general climate change resilience)
	Subsidies made available for rewilding and reforestation projects
	Incentivised subsidies / grants for farmers to switch from animal agriculture to diversified plant production
	Cities: increase trees and wildflowers, increase green community projects, wildlife corridors, green rooftops, local growing schemes, work towards biodiversity increases
	Enhance food justice by providing access to healthy food for all, especially low-income communities of color
	Repurpose available land freed up from animal grazing for: rewilding, reforestation (if appropriate), nature reserves, hiking zones, community growing, allotments (if appropriate), agroecological food growing (where possible)
	Shift of some land ownership into community hands so the land can be repurposed for reforestation, green space and community food gardens and allotments