



Scottish Environment LINK
13 Marshall Place
Perth
PH2 8AH

T 01738 630804
E enquiries@scotlink.org
W www.scotlink.org

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Dear First Minister

Scottish Government Ramsar Sites Policy

Since the EU referendum result, you and your Ministers have made welcome commitments to maintain the standards of protection for the natural environment required by the EU, and we were pleased to see this positive tone continue in the current environmental governance consultation. However, the apparent weakening of protection for our internationally important Ramsar sites through a new policy note published on 22nd January¹ gives us cause for extreme concern about actual implementation.

Ramsar sites are our very best wetland wildlife sites and government policies right across the UK have afforded them the same high level of protection as European Natura 2000 sites. The weakening of this policy, issued without any public consultation, would undermine a longstanding international commitment; directly contradict what the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform stated in Parliament on 18th April 2018²; and mean that Ramsar sites in Scotland would receive a lower level of protection than in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Given your previous commitments we hope that the note may have been issued in error and you are able to quickly reassure us by amending the note and confirming that Scotland will continue to treat Ramsar sites as equivalent to Natura sites, maintaining at least the same level of protection as applies in other UK countries. Scotland's international reputation depends on it.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/implementation-of-scottish-government-policy-on-protecting-ramsar-sites/>

² <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11467&mode=pdf>

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Long, Chief Officer, Scottish Environment LINK
Anne MacCall, Director, RSPB Scotland
Stuart Brooks, Head of Natural Heritage Conservation, NTS
George Potts, Chair, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
John Thomson, Chair, Scottish Campaign for National Parks
Dave Windle, Chair, North East Mountain Trust
Tony Gent, Chief Executive Officer, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
Kathy Wormald, Chief Executive, Froglife
Susan Matthews, Convenor, Cairngorms Campaign
Chris Butler-Stroud, Chief Executive, Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Alistair Whyte, Head Plantlife Scotland
Matt Shardlow, Chief Executive, Buglife
Carol Evans, Director, Woodland Trust Scotland
Paul Kirkland, Director Scotland, Butterfly Conservation
Jonathan Hughes, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Gus Jones, Convenor, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group
Clare Symonds, Chair, Planning Democracy
Barbara Smith, CEO, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
Charles Millar, Chair, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Kit Stoner, CEO, Bat Conservation Trust
Beryl Leatherland, Convenor, Scottish Wild Land Group
Lang Banks, Director WWF Scotland
Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life
Patrick Stirling-Aird, Scottish Raptor Study Group
Jess Dolan, Ramblers Scotland
Eddie Palmer, Chair, Scottish Badgers