

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
First Minister of Scotland



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
T: 0300 244 4000

Ms Daphne Vlastari  
Advocacy Manager  
Scottish Environment LINK

[daphne@scotlink.org](mailto:daphne@scotlink.org)

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*Dear Ms Vlastari*

Thank you for your letter of the 27 June concerning the global climate and ecological challenges we all face and the importance of safeguarding Scotland's nature. I recognise and very much welcome the strong interest in these issues.

The Scottish Government has consistently recognised the importance of the natural environment to our prosperity as a nation and to people's health and well-being, and our responsibility to help address the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The value of our environment is reflected in our National Performance Framework and our Economic Strategy, where protecting our environment is a key part of achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth. We have developed a Natural Capital Index to ensure that we recognise the massive contribution of the environment to our economy and our wellbeing, today and into the future. As you know, we have strong environmental legislation and regulation in place in Scotland and a strong record of delivery.

The challenges facing biodiversity are as important as the challenge of climate change, and I want Scotland to be leading the way in our response. We welcomed the recent Net Zero report by the Committee on Climate Change, and immediately amended the climate change bill to reflect the recommendation that Scotland adopt the challenging target of achieving net zero emissions by 2045. We are among the first countries to commit to undertaking a thorough analysis of our action on biodiversity in response to the recent Global Assessment on Biodiversity, and we will write to Parliament with our initial assessment by the end of the year. We are also playing an active role in supporting the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and will host a conference in early 2020 in the lead up to the 2020 Conference of the Parties in China.

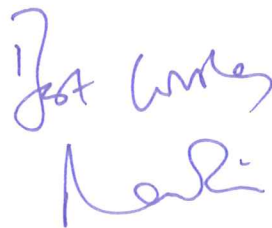
In Scotland, we continue to pay attention to what the evidence is telling us and take action to tackle climate change and create a circular economy. We were the first country in the UK to propose legislation to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic cotton buds. We were also the first to commit to introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers and announced the scheme design in May. In 2018-2019, Scotland created 84% of all new woodland in the UK. As part of our climate change commitments, we have already increased the planting targets for the future to 15,000 ha a year from 2024/25.

I share your concerns on the potential impact of Brexit on our environment. The UK Government's irresponsible pursuit of a hard or no deal Brexit and their failure to engage meaningfully with the Scottish Government threatens the progress we have all made when it comes to our natural environment. Despite this uncertainty, we have made a clear commitment to maintain or exceed EU environmental standards in future. We have also prioritised intensive planning and preparations to mitigate the environmental impact of a potential no deal exit, including taking forward a substantial programme of secondary legislation.

While my clear preference would be to remain fully within EU governance systems, our recent consultation set out the systematic and considered approach we are taking to the future of environmental principles and governance in Scotland should the UK exit the EU. This includes clear proposals to legislate to ensure that the four EU environmental principles continue to guide the development of policy and law in Scotland. The responses to this consultation are helping finalise the detail of our approach. We will legislate at the earliest opportunity, taking account of the need for any further consultation exercises, to ensure we have appropriate and effective arrangements in Scotland.

Following our online discussion last year, we are continuing to develop our Environment Strategy. This will set out our long-term vision to protect and enhance our environment, ensure a net-zero and circular economy underpinned by sustainable use of our natural assets, and secure the right of everyone in Scotland to a healthy environment. It will show how our extensive, existing policies, actions and commitments are helping to achieve this vision. As we look ahead to future developments, from the recommendations later this year of the independent review of Scotland's air quality strategy to new international targets on biodiversity being set next year, the strategy will help identify where further collaborative actions are required, including across government portfolios, to support the transformative changes needed.

I have been clear that we do not underestimate the difficulties, complexities and challenges involved in finding effective responses to climate change and biodiversity loss. We can all take some pride in the progress that Scotland has made, while recognising that more needs to be done. I welcome the continued contribution of your organisations and look forward to working constructively together to achieve our shared ambitions for the environment.



**NICOLA STURGEON**