



Scottish
Environment
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Dear Cabinet Secretary

Thank you for your time on 28 May to discuss, with Professor Curran and I, how Scottish Environment LINK can assist with ongoing thinking and development of next steps for a green and just recovery from Covid-19.

We very much welcome your view that now is the opportunity to shift the dial and that there is appetite for change. We all recognise that this has not just been a health and economic crisis. It has been an equality crisis too and the solution needs to address the underlying issues behind its impact - including biodiversity loss and climate change. Returning to business as usual is not where we want to be - people are calling for access to nature, cleaner transport, access to local food and sustainable businesses. Our aim for the green recovery must not be to take us back to where we were before the pandemic: we need a fairer economy that supports today's society and future generations. We have offered you support in your ongoing discussions for achieving net zero emissions, restoring nature and increasing people's wellbeing, in the context of difficult decisions that will challenge everyone.

You mentioned that resilience and sustainability are central to this, which Scottish Environment LINK has also made the focus of our new strategy, published early March 2020. Scotland's resilience in the future depends on a recovery that addresses not just the impact of Covid-19 on the nation's health and wealth but also addresses the ongoing nature and climate emergencies which make future pandemics even more likely.

You asked us to help unleash creative thinking on this and to identify how change management can help Scotland in building and maintaining innovative thinking and bringing new solutions. We noted that you specifically asked about *how* we do this – not just what we do.

LINK has been thinking about solutions to the fundamental issues of overexploitation through our circular economy work and through our environmental resilience thinking. We offer a place for creative thinking that brings professionals together to develop solutions for a green recovery, and to feed through new thoughts and proposals to the Scottish Government. We are exploring with the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital how both our networks could work together to do this. We are very comfortable working with all sectors of civic society, going beyond the 0.5 million individuals across Scotland who are members of the 39 NGOs that are convened within LINK.

We also agree that we need to start as we mean to go on, to avoid a drift back to old ways of working. We agree that the best way to do this is to step out of policy silos, work across sectors and engage in a whole systems approach. This fits very much with our way of working in our new strategy: we cannot solve the problems we face today whether that is responding to Covid-19, or the climate or nature crises without working together.

The progress we are keen to make on this will be limited by our capacity in the short term, as the network continues to furlough staff as a result of the financial strain of the pandemic. In addition, our 39 member NGOs are struggling financially so LINK has committed to reducing subscriptions for up to 3 years. With some limited funding support from Government we would

be able to coordinate Green Recovery thinking much more quickly and more extensively through a time-limited coordination post. If you are interested, we would be delighted to discuss a targeted work programme. Without that capacity increase, we will continue to work on the circular economy and mechanisms to build environmental resilience as a fundamental part of the recovery and we will continue to work with other networks and yourselves. It will be slower. We will keep in touch, in any case, with progress on bringing together creative thinking to build the future we all want to see.

Yours sincerely



Dr Deborah Long

Chief Officer



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