

Nick Halfhide
Director of Nature and Climate Change
NatureScot

Via email
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Dear Nick

Scottish Environment LINK and its members all work together to put nature at the heart of our society and wellbeing, benefiting people, communities and the planet. We all have different organisation objectives and ways of working but we come together to deliver on Scotland's nature and climate targets.

NatureScot work with and support many of our members and this support is hugely helpful in unlocking other sources of funding as well as enabling organisations to deliver for nature and climate. The impact of the pandemic was significant, as you know, and recovery from the huge changes in working has been incremental and sometimes slow. Key impacts affecting LINK and many of our members include difficulties in forward planning and effective budgeting particularly with steep inflationary rises, staff recruitment and retention and the resulting limited capacity to deliver. Coping with uncertainty is something eNGOs are used to, but the ongoing brain drain of staff to the public and private sectors combined with the lack of budgetary resilience, means many organisations are now dipping into limited reserves to cover costs, which in turn means that the sector as a whole is less resilient and robust.

This, clearly, causes issues for delivery towards Scotland's nature and climate targets, for which the eNGO sector is vital. Evidence of effective delivery over time has been amply illustrated in two reports, a decade apart when we looked at Delivering the Goods in [2008](#) and [2021](#). Given the urgent need for effective delivery this decade, it is vital that Scotland continues to support and invest in its eNGO sector at this crucial time.

[Research](#) from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the [charter for flexible funding](#) has been extremely useful across the charitable sector and we would encourage NatureScot to consider signing up to that initiative. This equips and commits funders to make the most of their funding through effective procedures that deliver real results and reduce inefficient administrative burden. A key part of this is flexibility and investment in trusted relationships to support effective delivery. Both of these were identified as key barriers in LINK's 2020 and 2021 member surveys on the impact of the pandemic and addressing these remains vital.

This would mean a move away from project funding to unrestricted funding targeted at key outcomes that eNGOs are well equipped and experienced in delivering. This would also be a



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mechanism to ensure limited public funding is used most effectively and used to enable organisations to access other funding and multiply it up to deliver for nature and climate.

The role of the Conservation Funding Forum will be critical in helping to identify how public funding can best deliver for nature. Scotland's eNGO's remain one of the most effective, best value and efficient ways for NatureScot to meet its nature objectives. Working with us to maintain a robust suite of delivery partners in Scotland, including charitable bodies as well as government bodies, is central to meeting Scotland's nature and climate targets.

This is a topic that will be discussed as NatureScot allocates the budget for next year and will come in the many imminent conversations around those decisions. We expect to return to it regularly as LINK and as individual organisations. If a cross LINK discussion on the strategic options would be helpful, we would be delighted to set that up before the new financial year decisions are confirmed.

Yours sincerely



Dr Deborah Long
Chief Officer



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