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Mairi Gougeon MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands  
Scottish Government

By email to: [cabsecralri@gov.scot](mailto:cabsecralri@gov.scot)

May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

### **Supporting High Nature Value Farming and Crofting**

Farming is vital to Scotland's future. We, all of us, need farmers to be producing high quality food whilst, at the same time, playing an important part in restoring nature and reducing emissions and we welcome your repeated comments that food production and nature restoration can go hand in hand.

Given the importance of farming in addressing the nature and climate emergency, the members of Scottish Environment LINK see the development of a new post-Brexit agricultural policy as a once in a lifetime opportunity to create a better system. We welcome the government's vision of seeing Scotland become a world leader in regenerative agriculture and we welcome the details provided so far through the Route Map. It is important to note, however, that while the proposed framework has the potential of delivering better outcomes for nature and climate, so much will depend on the political decisions that are made around the budget and the detail of scheme design. This means that there is also the potential for the new framework to fail to deliver for nature and climate and so Scottish Environment LINK will continue to fight for the better system we hope for.

We are writing to you now because we want to highlight a possible solution to some of the problems the government currently faces. In particular, it appears that the government's proposed Tier 2 Enhanced Direct Payment measures will struggle to adequately support farms and crofts in the most extensive areas because it is more difficult to design measures that apply in the uplands than in the lowlands. Equally, the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme needs to be replaced because it is no longer fit for purpose.

We believe that the government could address these issues by recognising and supporting High Nature Value (HNV) farms and crofts. We have raised this issue with your officials and we write to make a plea



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to you: can the Scottish Government please explore the concept of HNV farming and how it can best be supported within the new policy frameworks being developed?

HNV systems are associated with farms and crofts where semi-natural vegetation makes up a high proportion of the available forage resource and where the livestock grazing is at low grazing densities. HNV farms and crofts play an important role in maintaining rare habitats and threatened wildlife and they are vitally important in supporting Scotland's rural communities.

We think that it should be possible to develop a relatively light touch approach to identifying HNV farms and crofts and that once they have been identified this category could be built into the new framework. We have presented an initial first attempt at an approach to officials, but this needs additional work and we hope that the government could take this further. This could be done by a short-life expert group and tested through the National Test Programme.

We believe that support for HNV farms and crofts could be a positive step forward. It could be a way of recognising that some farming systems are important for maintaining biodiversity and reduce complexity by providing a route to support for large numbers of smaller applicants.

The current development of new agricultural policy is an exceptional opportunity. We are eager to work with the Scottish Government to deliver sustainable and nature-friendly farming. Please do not hesitate to ask us if you have any questions or want to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,  
Deborah Long

Chief Officer  
Scottish Environment LINK



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