



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

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**17 November 2023**

**Patrick Harvie MSP**  
**Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights**  
**Scottish Government**

**Ariane Burgess MSP**  
**Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands Region**  
**Scottish Parliament**

Dear Mr Harvie and Ms Burgess,

Thank you very much for your time on 13th November and for the discussions on the open letter to Party Leaders, Agriculture Bill, Enhanced Marine Protections and funding for statutory agencies. We have summarised the discussion below.

### **Open letter to Party Leaders**

On 11<sup>th</sup> August, Scottish Environment LINK wrote to all Party Leaders in Scotland calling for urgent action on the climate and nature crises. The letter was signed by 26 member organisations of LINK. We will be meeting with the Scottish Liberal Democrats and Scottish Labour over the next few weeks to discuss this further.

LINK appreciates that the environment agenda is particularly busy and that there are limits on capacity. LINK members would like to offer their expertise to support the scale of action the Scottish Government needs to take to meet climate and forthcoming nature targets. We welcome the continued rhetoric from the Scottish Government to tackle the twin crises. However, our main concerns include continued delays and the need to see more environmental policy gains banked under this Parliament.

We need cross party ambition in reducing emissions, developing ambitious legal targets for nature restoration, a well-resourced strategic framework for Biodiversity, urgent progress in delivering enhanced marine protection as well as reformed agriculture and forestry support systems.

We welcome the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary's commitment to counter and rebut misinformation alongside being clear on the rationale behind what needs to be done to restore nature. We discussed how LINK can support these efforts through the [Farm for Scotland's Future](#) and [Save Scottish Seas](#) campaigns.

### **Enhanced Marine Protection**

We discussed the period of change due to the set back of the Highly Protected Marine Areas policy. Current commitments are old, and more ambition is needed. We noted that the statement from the Cabinet Secretary on 8<sup>th</sup> November didn't include an outline of 'enhanced marine protection'. Completing measures committed to six years ago, such as fisheries management measures, is necessary and welcome, but more is needed to deliver a credible, transformative pathway for ocean recovery by 2030.

LINK remains committed to harnessing and demonstrating public support for the range of tools needed, including strictly protected sites, for long-term sustainability of sea use/enjoyment as well as the desperate needs of restoring nature at sea. Ms Burgess highlighted the work of Revive and their efforts to mobilise community voices in key discussions around the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill. We agreed that we need to see the level of public engagement and interest that reflects climate.

LINK's annual Congress is being held on 28<sup>th</sup> November with a focus on communities in action. Community Land Scotland will be presenting on working together to achieve social justice and environmental recovery. Coastal Communities Network will be presenting on elevating coastal and island voices for the environment. We have agreed on a follow up meeting with Ms Burgess after Congress to discuss how best we can work together in engaging communities in the development of forthcoming environmental policies such as protecting 30% of Scotland's land by 2030.

We also agreed to set up regular meetings with Ms Burgess to keep each other updated on the development of marine policies.

### **Agriculture Bill**

LINK welcomes the publication on Scotland's Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill. However, we are concerned that the financial memorandum to the Bill, which implies business as usual for payments, won't deliver for climate and nature. A key message from the Farm for Scotland's Future campaign is that we want to see at least three quarters of public spending on farming to support methods that restore nature and tackle climate change as well as produce food.

The campaign will be pushing for targets in the Bill as amendments, as we don't believe the framework is strong enough without them. We agreed that the Bill should include new duties on Ministers to set targets.

We discussed how the rural support plan needs to be more clearly defined and strengthened. We agreed with Ms Burgess to discuss further what LINK thinks needs to be included.

We discussed how the Farm for Scotland's Future campaign can support the Scottish Government in communications with the public on what the Agriculture Bill means in practice for farmers, crofters and our food supply.

### **Funding for statutory agencies**

We discussed the letter LINK wrote to the Deputy First Minister on 9<sup>th</sup> November about the membership's concerns over the long-term erosion of budgets to Scotland's environment agencies. Against the backdrop of rising expectations of these agencies to do more to tackle the crises, LINK members expect the environment to be given priority in the tough budget decisions being made. Spending now is cheaper in the long term and protects lives, livelihoods, and landscapes now.

We highlighted alternative ways of funding to tackle the nature crisis. There is a live conversation within the LINK Green Finance Group about the role of private finance. The Group are currently drafting a paper which explores these alternative funding avenues, which we can share with you both once finalised. We also discussed the idea of a Land Value Tax, which we will take back to the LINK Green Finance Group to explore.

We agreed to organise 6 monthly meetings with Mr Harvie and Ms Slater. We look forward to hearing from your office with some dates when we can bring key topics of importance to your attention, alongside some of our members.

Once again, thank you for your time. If you require further information on any of the issues we have raised, we would be delighted to supply that.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Long, Chief Officer, LINK  
Juliet Caldwell, Advocacy Officer, LINK  
Esther Brooker Marine Officer, LINK  
Fanny Royanez, Marine Officer, LINK  
David McKay Head of Policy (Scotland), Soil Association



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