

**Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform
and Islands**

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Chùisean Dùthchail, Ath-
leasachadh Fearainn agus Eileanan
Mairi Gougeon MSP/BPA



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Our Reference: 202400391634

Your Reference: Agriculture Bill

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Dear Pete,

Thank you for your letter of 19 December regarding the proposals on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK's Food & Farming Group in relation to the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill. My private office will be in touch shortly to arrange a meeting with you in the near future.

I appreciate your ongoing support following the Bill's publication and continued engagement with the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee as it undertakes scrutiny of the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill is to deliver the Vision for Agriculture. The Bill and its accompanying documents set out an adaptive framework focused on key outcomes: high quality food production; climate mitigation and adaptation; nature restoration; and wider rural development. I note and thank you for your support of the Scottish Government's direction of travel contained in the Vision. The Vision has been welcomed by stakeholders and commits to transforming how the Scottish Government supports farming and food production in Scotland, to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

The framework approach of the Bill will enable the Scottish Ministers to respond flexibly to future social, economic, and environmental changes, challenges and opportunities. This enables tailored provisions and support to be implemented through secondary legislation, such as the frontloading of payments and redistribution, and further adapted in the context of a new Rural Support Plan to meet future challenges and uncertainties. These challenges include climate impacts, food security risks and challenges and market changes, whilst reinforcing our commitment to continue to support the agricultural industry.

Going forward, I am committed to continuing to work closely with stakeholders and rural partners in the co-development and co-design of future policy. This will be the foundational approach to the development of future support structures and delivery. The Bill provides the opportunity to develop a future agriculture support regime to be implemented at an appropriate point and flexibly from 2025 onwards. This will shift to a new Scottish approach that aligns with the new EU CAP, as well as ensuring a flexible approach to distributing payments towards outcomes.

I am also clear that the UK Government must live up to its public commitment to collectively and meaningfully engage on future rural budgets. The Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison, raised this issue directly with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury at Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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the Finance Interministerial Standing Committee in June last year and we will continue to press this matter to ensure that Scotland's rural economy does not lose out from EU exit and that we have certainty for future planning.

The Bill and accompanying documents outline the Scottish Government's rationale for preparing a Rural Support Plan and I thank LINK for their support of this requirement. As you will be aware, the Bill places a requirement on Scottish Ministers to prepare, lay before Parliament and publish a Rural Support Plan. This Plan will cover up to a five-year period and will set-out the strategic priorities for providing support during the plan period. It will set out details of each support scheme in operation or expected to come into operation during the period whilst also making clear how agricultural support contributes to climate commitments. The Plan offers a level of certainty, that was sought by many respondents during the consultation, within the flexible support model that was welcomed.

Many of the issues you have raised will continue to be developed during the secondary legislation phase. I welcome your views and will continue to work with stakeholders to deliver the optimal outcome to realise the Vision for Agriculture. I am committed to co-development of our future support and I look forward to working closely with the agriculture industry and stakeholders, including LINK.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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