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Environment
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Mairi Gougeon MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands
Scottish Government

2 May 2024

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

The weakening of Scotland's 2030 climate targets is deeply concerning. The impacts of the climate and nature crises are being felt worldwide, including by Scottish farmers and crofters, with many areas of the country having experienced their wettest April on record. We need to step up our efforts to tackle these deeply connected environmental challenges.

With agriculture our second biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, it is clear that we cannot reach Net Zero without significant changes to the way we farm in Scotland. The Scottish Government must establish, without delay, a support system that enables farmers and crofters to make the transition to sustainable farming.

The recognition in last month's climate policy statement of the importance of farming in addressing climate change is welcome. It is encouraging that nutrient management planning will be required as part of each farm's Whole Farm Plan, and that methane suppressing feed additives will be piloted. However, the policies announced to date are not enough to bring about the transformative change we need to see in the agriculture sector. The interventions required to reduce agricultural emissions include:

- An increase in the amount of land farmed organically
- Increased funding for the integration of native trees and hedges on farms and crofts
- Increased funding for the restoration of habitats including peatlands, wetlands and grasslands
- Selective breeding for low methane livestock
- A faster rollout than has been announced for carbon audit requirements

In particular, we need to see the majority of public funding for farming supporting methods that help restore nature and tackle climate change. Earlier this year the Scottish Government committed to distributing 70% of the farm support budget through the first two tiers of the new payment system. This risks a business as usual continuation of the current funding system, which the Scottish government's



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own analysis has shown is unfair, and doesn't help farmers and crofters who want to tackle climate change and protect nature.

Since Tier 2 funding will be focused on emissions reduction and nature restoration, and Tier 1 will largely replicate the current area-based 'direct payments' which have few environmental requirements attached, it is vital that Tier 2 is clearly prioritised in the announcement expected in June on the distribution of this 70%.

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to make farming work for nature, climate and people. The Scottish Government must now demonstrate in detail how the changes proposed in this bill will enable Scottish farming to meaningfully contribute to Scotland reaching Net Zero. A marked increase in the pace and scope of change is required.

We urge you to ensure that the new farm support system established by the bill enables ALL farmers and crofters to produce food in ways that reduce emissions, restore nature, promote the highest standards of animal welfare, and revitalise our rural areas for the benefit of everyone. We hope the announcement expected in June on the distribution of funding demonstrates the Scottish Government's ambition to transform Scottish farming.

Yours sincerely,

Lang Banks, Director, WWF Scotland

Josie Cohen, Head of Policy and Campaigns, PAN UK

Dr Rachael Cooper-Bohannon, Scotland Coordinator, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

Shivali Fifield, Chief Officer, Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland

Angus Hardie, Director, Scottish Community Alliance

Kat Jones, Director, Action to Protect Rural Scotland (APRS)

Deborah Long, Chief Officer, Scottish Environment LINK

Robin McAlpine, Founder, Common Weal

Anne McCall, Director, RSPB Scotland

David McKay, Co-Director, Soil Association Scotland

Aileen McLeod, Director, Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland

Eddie Palmer, Chairperson, Scottish Badgers

Jo Pike, Chief Executive, Scottish Wildlife Trust

Louise Ramsay, Chair, Scottish Wild Beaver Group

Pete Ritchie, Executive Director, Nourish Scotland

Mike Robinson, Chair, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland

Euan Ross, Scotland Manager, Nature Friendly Farming Network

Alastair Seaman, Director, Woodland Trust Scotland

Franciele Sobierai, Communities' Reduce Reuse & Recycle Project Coordinator, Edinburgh & Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC)

Kit Stoner, Chief Executive Officer, Bat Conservation Trust

Kathy Wormald, Chief Executive Officer, The Froglife Trust