



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

5 Atholl Place  
Perth  
PH1 5NE

T: 01738 630804

E: [enquiries@scotlink.org](mailto:enquiries@scotlink.org)

W: [www.scotlink.org](http://www.scotlink.org)

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

**2 July 2024**

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

We congratulate you on the successful passage of the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill and welcome the amendments made, which we believe strengthen the legislation. However, as the Bill is framework legislation, many of the most important decisions and policies will come in the Rural Support Plan and through secondary legislation.

It is vital that the Rural Support Plan meets the aspirations of the Vision for Agriculture and allows the sector to meet its contribution to legal climate targets and to restoring nature.

There are several points around the Rural Support Plan that we would be keen to discuss further.

First, we previously mentioned the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which we believe must accompany the first iteration of the plan.

Following amendments at Stage 3, the Bill also gives powers for Ministers to describe how measures in the Rural Support Plan may support outcomes such as reducing harm from pesticides, reducing nitrogen waste and loss, and optimising the proportion of land farmed organically. The Rural Support Plan should show clearly how the allocation of resources will lead to achieving these outcomes over the plan period.

The Plan should assess the distributional impact of support schemes, and reflect the Fairer Scotland Duty. This would contribute to a just transition towards a more sustainable and equitable agricultural system. The current split of funding does not deliver for the environment or intended public benefit, as was outlined in the Government's own [analysis](#). Public money should be spent to best deliver outcomes for the public good, and the current system is failing to do so.

Regarding the 70% of the budget allocated to Tiers 1 and 2, LINK members believe Tier 1 should receive no more than an initial 50% of this split and that over time this budget allocation should change, with a higher proportion of funding gradually being moved to Tiers 2, 3, and 4. This will allow for better targeting of funds towards nature restoration, carbon sequestration, and climate mitigation.

We welcome your intent for the new system to be co-developed. LINK members have engaged constructively and proactively in discussions with your officials to date. We look forward to being fully

involved in the next stage of developing the Rural Support Plan, and we are planning to host a workshop session with farmers and crofters to help refine our own proposals on that front.

As you know, our members share the aspiration of all stakeholders for a thriving agricultural sector which is restoring nature and playing a leading role in mitigating climate change. However, science tells us we need a decisive shift in policy and resources towards this goal. Too slow a pace risks not just achieving our climate and nature goals; it also risks leaving our farmers and crofters behind in a changing global market.

As always, we are happy to discuss the points in this letter further.

Best wishes,

Pete Ritchie  
Convener, LINK Food and Farming Group



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