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**24 February 2025**

**John Swinney MSP  
First Minister  
Scottish Government**

**cc Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands  
cc Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity**

Dear First Minister,

As you stated clearly at your recent speech at the Glasgow Botanic Gardens, Scotland faces a nature and climate emergency. It was encouraging to hear a shared commitment to working together and taking action to address this challenge.

It is in the above context that we write now to share our frustration and disappointment at some of the recent decisions taken by your government regarding agriculture policy and funding. Agriculture is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to biodiversity loss in Scotland. It is also a sector which can provide many of the solutions to these problems if farmers and crofters are supported in the right ways.

Your government was elected on a manifesto commitment that by 2025 half of all agricultural funding would be made conditional on environmental outcomes. The government's Vision for Agriculture stated that this would take the form of enhanced conditionality on 50% of direct payments. Your decision therefore to split direct payments with 70% in Tier 1 and only 30% in Tier 2 is a significant step back from earlier commitments.

The Scottish Government's own analysis has found that direct payments are not an effective use of public money. Retaining direct payments and coupled support, ensuring at least 70% of the farming budget will continue to be allocated to them and deciding on the 70/30 split to Tier 1 and Tier 2 funding is policy making that flies in the face of all evidence. Trying to make payments deliver outcomes they are not designed for is a recipe for failure. As your officials are now finding, applying meaningful conditions to such payments is very difficult in practice and does not ensure funding is well targeted to where it needs to be or distributed fairly.

These policy decisions will make it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for your government to meet its environmental targets and obligations and deliver its vision for sustainable and regenerative agriculture. They will not provide the targeted and specific funding required to facilitate a just transition to the kind of food production and farming systems in Scotland that would benefit us all, farmers and crofters included. Many of our organisations work on the ground with such farmers and crofters and know that many of them also share concerns as to the direction of travel.

Our members have engaged constructively with your officials through a range of stakeholder fora and, most significantly, via ARIOB and the PDG. They have offered practical solutions and steps for making progress, and emphasised the pitfalls of certain proposals, but to little avail. Time and again the most sensible pathway – and what appeared, in some meetings, to be an agreed pathway - has not been chosen. Instead, decisions seem based on maintaining the status quo regardless of the urgent need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to tackle nature loss, both of which pose a direct threat to food production.

We recognise fully the challenges your government faces. The funding constraints and loss of ring-fenced funding from the UK Treasury for agriculture, the IT and delivery challenges of introducing any new schemes and payments and the need, importantly, to take farmers and crofters with you in the process of change. These challenges have, it feels, too often been allowed to stand in the way of making the progress needed. There are, and always have been, other options for supporting the agriculture sector that would also deliver your ambitions in relation to nature and climate. Opportunities have been missed at every step.

We request a meeting with you and your Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands as a matter of urgency. We want to engage positively and have been at pains to do so to date. But we are growing increasingly frustrated at having to sit and watch decision after decision taking us down the wrong pathways and, ultimately, further away from where we need to be.

Yours sincerely,

**Deborah Long**  
**Chief Officer of Scottish Environment LINK**

**Mike Robinson**  
**Chair of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland**



**Scottish Environment LINK** the voice for Scotland's environment

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