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Our Reference: 202500488424
Your Reference: Scottish Environment LINK priorities for Scottish budget

28 October 2025

Dear Mr Paris,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 October 2025 outlining Scottish Environment LINK's budget priorities for 2026-27. I appreciate the continued engagement of SE LINK members and your commitment to supporting Scotland's natural environment.

Protect Environmental Budget Lines in Real Terms

I have confirmed that the Draft Budget will be presented to Parliament on Tuesday 13 January 2026. We can only deliver progress for Scotland with the support of our partners and Parliament, and we will work across Parliament to achieve this. We will continue to engage with stakeholders, capturing views across Scotland's diverse communities and the priorities of the third, public and business sectors for the 2026-27 Budget.

I recognise the importance of sustained investment in Scotland's natural environment to meet our climate and nature targets. Investment is one of the key enabling 'conditions for success' identified in our Strategic Framework for Biodiversity. The Scottish Government has significantly increased investment in nature through, for example, our £65 million Nature Restoration Fund (NRF). The NRF is a key mechanism for delivering our Strategic Framework for Biodiversity, restoring Scotland's terrestrial and marine environment, and supporting green jobs and skills development in local communities. The Fund has already committed more than £65 million to nature restoration projects, including £22 million directly allocated for Local Authorities and the National Parks to develop and deliver projects locally and our Programme for Government has committed to extending NRF in 2026-27 to enable funding of a further round of multi-year projects.

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The Scottish Government will seek to ensure that our environment agencies, including NatureScot, SEPA, the Marine Directorate, and others, are adequately resourced to deliver their statutory duties. This will be set out and agreed by the Scottish Parliament as part of the annual budget process.

Deliver for Nature and Climate Resilience in the Agriculture Budget

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (£25 million)

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) continues to be a key mechanism for supporting land managers to deliver environmental outcomes. To date a total of £339 million has been committed to 3,417 businesses to fund a range of activities that help to maintain and enhance our rich and varied natural environment through AECS. Despite cuts to the Scottish Government's capital allocation for 2025-26, the 2024 round awards demonstrate continued prioritisation of funding for agri-environment support. The Agri-Environment budget for 2024-25 and 2025-26 has been set at a level that has enabled all eligible applications to be approved, representing a record approval rate for the scheme.

As announced by the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity at the NFFN Summit on 7 October 2025, the next round of AECS will open for applications in early 2026. Further detail will be confirmed later this year and communicated via our usual channels. Additionally, AECS will run until at least 2030, as reflected in the updated [Agricultural Reform Route Map](#), offering farmers and crofters certainty to engage with the scheme in the transition period.

Organic Farming Support (£6 million) & Organic Action Plan (£2 million)

Support for the conversion to, and maintenance of, organic farming practices remains available to land managers through AECS. Of the £339 million committed through AECS since 2015, around £41 million has supported 707 organics contracts.

The area cap for the conversion to, and maintenance of, organic farmland has been lifted since the 2023 round of AECS to encourage Scottish businesses to convert additional land and move their full organic area into AECS management. This has contributed to land entering the two-year organic conversion process increasing by 102% since 2023.

Through the realisation of the Vision for Agriculture and the four-tier framework, farmers and crofters will be incentivised and supported to further incorporate sustainable and regenerative practices, an important aspect of organic principles.

The Scottish Government committed to developing a new Scottish Organic Action Plan to support the growth and resilience of organic food and farming. With a significant increase in organic land across Scotland, continued support through AECS, and rising demand for organic produce in both domestic and export markets, this has been an opportune time to develop the new Scottish Organic Action Plan.

The plan has been shaped collaboratively by key stakeholders across the organic sector, Scotland Food & Drink, and the Scottish Government. It will outline clear priorities to scale up organic production, meet rising demand, and support the long-term growth and resilience of organic food and farming in Scotland.

The plan is now in its final stages of development and is expected to be published by Scotland Food & Drink in due course. I am pleased to provide funding to support its implementation, with a focus on delivering key objectives during the first year. Further details will be announced by Scotland Food &

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Drink upon the plan's launch.

Advice and Training / KTIF (£5 million)

Thank you for your suggestion regarding additional funding for advice and training to support the transition to nature- and climate-friendly farming, and for your support for the continuation of the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF).

We remain committed to supporting farmers and crofters through this transition, and advice and knowledge exchange will continue to be a central part of our future support framework. KTIF will continue to play a role in the short term and is expected to form part of Tier 4 under the future Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS).

Tier 4/AKIS is currently in development, and we recognise the importance of co-design. We will be working closely with stakeholders to shape its structure, including how advice, training, and innovation support are best delivered to meet climate, nature, and productivity objectives. We welcome your ongoing engagement and will continue to keep you updated as this work progresses.

Collaborative Action Fund (£5 million)

The Scottish Government recognises the value of landscape-scale collaboration in driving nature restoration and climate resilience. Supporting joint efforts in restoration, evidence gathering, and innovative financing is essential to delivering integrated environmental outcomes and resilient rural communities.

As part of the development of the future agricultural support framework, officials are exploring mechanisms to enable and encourage collaboration.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands remains committed to a farmer-led design process and ongoing engagement with landowners, communities, and stakeholders to ensure that collaborative approaches are embedded in future policy. In the interim, the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) will continue until at least 2030, maintaining support and incentivisation of co-operative environmental land management actions.

Agroforestry and Farm Woodland (£10 million)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands is highly supportive of integrating trees on farms. Through the Agriculture Reform Programme and in collaboration with Scottish Forestry and NatureScot, we are considering opportunities to improve how we support farmers to integrate trees on their land.

There are a range of policies and initiatives in place to help farmers, crofters and land managers to become more aware of the multiple benefits that woodland creation can have for their businesses. For example:

- working with partners, the Scottish Government currently supports advisory visits to farms to identify opportunities for farm and croft woodlands
- the award-winning [Integrating Trees Network](#), which is a farmer led Network to share experience of woodland benefits on farms and crofts

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The new package of enhanced Forestry Grant Scheme funding announced on 7 October aims to encourage more small-scale woodland creation projects of up to 20 hectares. Support for these smaller woodland schemes, which are often delivered by farmers and crofters, is being raised by an average of 15% across Scotland and by 30% within the Central Scotland Green Network area. The increase in funding will help cover some of the inflationary pressures that the farming and crofting communities have been facing when growing new woodlands.

Farmers and crofters have a very important part to play in helping raise our woodland creation goals in Scotland. This £1 million funding boost is designed to support our farming and crofting communities integrate trees into their business plans.

Extra funding will also go towards helping communities plan and kickstart the management of their own woodlands. These woodlands are hugely important to local people and can increase the environmental value to their surroundings.

The new package of enhanced grants for small woodlands includes:

- An extra £750 per hectare for the first 20 hectares of new woodland across Scotland;
- An increase of up to £1,750 per hectare in the Central Scotland Green Network area to encourage woodland creation near towns and cities;
- In the Northern and Western Isles, where deer management is a challenge, deer fencing grants and stock fencing is doubled; and
- Up to £10,000 to help community-led woodland management schemes develop.

Full details of the new enhanced grant rates can be found on this [website page](#).

Fund Programme for Government Commitment for National Deer Pilot (£1 million)

The Scottish Government remains firmly committed to taking action to address biodiversity loss and to protect and restore the natural environment. The Natural Environment Bill is part of a wider policy package to implement recommendations made by the Deer Working Group and improve deer management in Scotland. This wider policy package includes work to support incentivising deer management.

The 2025-26 Programme for Government set out our commitment to *“Considering with stakeholders the development of local pilot projects on deer management programmes, including an implementation plan and funding models.”*

Officials are currently proposing to secure funding to bolster the existing deer management incentives pilots that being run by NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

These schemes, which aimed to financially support deer managers to deliver an increased deer cull by trailing new incentives and looked at ways to support local venison, will be running again for this year’s stalking season in 25-26 and expanding to additional locales. We will work closely with NatureScot and the CNPA as these pilots progress, and the findings from the pilots will be used to inform future deer management policy.

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In addition to increased incentives payments, officials are looking to secure funding to support deer stalking in the lowlands via investment in venison larders. This will be achieved by contributing to the existing pilot scheme being run in partnership by NatureScot, the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS) which is administered by SAOS working closely with the Lowland Deer Network (LDNS) and the Scottish Venison Association.

Thank you again for your continued engagement and for sharing SE LINK's priorities. These will be considered as part of our effort to ensure that Scotland's budget supports our shared ambitions for nature, climate resilience, and sustainable land management.

Yours sincerely,



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