



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)

John Swinney MSP

First Minister

Scottish Government

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

Dear First Minister

### **Resignation from ARIOB and PDG**

We wrote to you on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025 raising serious concerns about the process for developing future agriculture policy and the policy decisions being taken. We met you in July, setting out our concerns in more detail. You sought to reassure us that our views are being taken into account as policy is developed and that delivering positive outcomes for nature and climate are at the heart of your government's decisions.

We can see little evidence of real progress in recent months and are not reassured. The draft Rural Support Plan, presented to ARIOB and the PDG, should have provided clarity regarding future plans but it does not. It is not a plan and fails to set out a clear policy destination and the steps required to get there over the five years of its life. Similarly, the agriculture section in the draft Climate Change Plan is weak, lacking any real policies and proposals for reducing emissions from agriculture. Through ARIOB, the PDG and via various submissions, we have raised concerns and offered suggestions for improvements but see limited evidence that these have been taken into account. It is worrying therefore to see ARIOB presented externally as an effective co-design process where views are taken into account and fed into the decision making process.

In the face of these concerns and lack of policy development progress, we have reluctantly taken the decision to withdraw from ARIOB and the PDG with immediate effect. This means Pete Ritchie, Mike Robinson and Vicki Swales will not attend any future meetings. They and we are no longer willing to participate in a process in which we do not have confidence. There is no clear sequencing of agendas and discussions, timelines remain uncertain and evidence - including that of the Academic Advisory Panel – seems to be being ignored in subsequent Ministerial decisions.

In future, we will be calling on a new Scottish Government, post election, to draw a line under proceedings to date and introduce a new process of stakeholder engagement. We suggest there



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment

Registered office: 5 Atholl Place, Perth, PH1 5NE. A Scottish Charity No. SC000296

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish Company Limited by Guarantee and without a share capital under Company no. SC250899



would be merit in government following a process such as was undertaken via the CAP Strategic Dialogue or, closer to home, the civic mediation process 'Common Ground' undertaken in relation to deer management. We feel that many of the basic principles and foundations required to develop policy in this space, given its often contested nature, were not established at the start. This has hindered the process ever since.

The aim ultimately must be to introduce a reformed agriculture policy and system of farm support payments that delivers the government's visions for sustainable and regenerative agriculture and is consistent with the objectives set down in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024. We support this vision and these objectives. We do not consider however that what has been proposed and implemented to date is anywhere near sufficient or likely to deliver the government's own desired outcomes or what Parliament has passed in law.

We have called consistently for a more ambitious approach to agriculture policy, and faster progress, whilst recognising the need for a just transition. For us this means: developing a new Tier 2 Enhanced, effectively designed to help the majority of farmers and crofters take action for nature and climate (Enhanced Greening is not it); a revised agri-environment-climate scheme, support for collaboration and supply chain support in Tier 3; and, much greater focus on advice, training and knowledge transfer initiatives in Tier 4. All of this requires a significant reallocation of farm funding into these three Tiers. Sadly, the current reality is that 81% of farm funding is allocated to Tiers 1 and 2, with most of that allocated to Tier 1. Although we have been told this allocation is not set in stone, we have been given no indication of when and how it might change.

We wish to remain constructive. We will, of course, continue to engage with the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and respond to consultations and calls for evidence in the normal course of policy development. We cannot however remain part of this agriculture policy development process as long as it continues in this vein; it needs a major reset.

Yours sincerely



Deborah Long, CEO,  
Scottish Environment LINK



Vicki Swales, Head of Land  
Use Policy, RSPB Scotland



Mike Robinson, Chair,  
Farming for 1.5



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment

Registered office: 5 Atholl Place, Perth, PH1 5NE. A Scottish Charity No. SC000296

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish Company Limited by Guarantee and without a share capital under Company no. SC250899

