

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands
Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity
Scottish Parliament



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Dear Cabinet Secretary and Minister,

Thank you for your time on Thursday 14 January.

Our meeting illustrated that we are as keen as you are to achieve the Scottish Government's vision for sustainable regenerative agriculture. Our proposals to achieve this have been laid out across the reports and briefings we've sent you before. We are keen to continue to engage with you and your team but in a more productive way than has been the case to date.

It is very clear from the evidence in the advice you have received from FMEC and from across ARIOB that the current approach is not delivering at the rate and scale necessary. We agree that progress to date has been too slow, hence our resignation from ARIOB, and we believe this needs a reset with a new process that can create space for constructive dialogue between industry bodies, academics, representatives of rural communities and eNGOs. This could follow the model of the recent EU Strategic Dialogue on agriculture or, closer to home, the Common Ground group on deer. A key part of such processes is securing agreement on key principles and strategic direction through independent and expert facilitation.'

We restated our full support for your Government's vision of sustainable and regenerative agriculture but we do not see visible delivery. We agree that the future requires a change in culture and we tried to stress that in our view this must be supported: farmers cannot be expected to change without support and capacity building. We do not agree that merely giving them longer to change is sufficient: this will result in a steeper cliff edge as the business and environmental context for farming continues to change. This support could be delivered through Tier 4, which in our view has received far too little attention. We explicitly reject the assumption that farming and the environment is a zero sum game: that is not true and attempts to use that argument to limit progress are disingenuous.

You and your officials referenced the CCP, on which David McKay gave evidence to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on behalf of LINK: the CCP draft for agriculture as it stands lacks the scale of action the Government needs to meet climate targets. We remain concerned about the apparent lack of urgency and the lack of capacity in Government to develop feasible and effective policies for the CCP given that the UK CCC advice for this sector has been rejected.

We are also concerned about the Rural Support Plan, which in our view limits your ambition because it proposes very little action for a further 5 years. This is problematic and what was set out in the draft is highly unlikely to deliver your own vision and the objectives of the ARC Act. The RSP is the document that should give everyone clarity about the direction of travel and where you expect to be by 2031; as it stands, it does not do this.



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Farmers and crofters are already walking away from Government support because of its complexity and uncertainty. We are concerned by the perception that public funding cannot be used as an incentive to enable positive change and is only seen as a stick. Whilst large landowners are important given the scale of land under their control, if they are doing too little to help you achieve the Government's vision, then public support must be reformed so that those land managers can only receive payments for specific actions and land management activities that achieve desired outcomes. This is essential if Scotland is to deliver against its targets for achieving sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

We look forward to hearing from you with a date for a meeting in February. At this meeting we suggest the agenda should focus on your Government's vision for the next parliamentary term, so that a new Parliament is able to hit the ground running. We believe, as we have outlined before, that moving funding from Tier 1 into Tiers 4, 3 and 2 is the quickest and most effective way for you to lead the change required.

We look forward to meeting again in February.

Yours sincerely

Pete Ritchie, Executive Director Nourish Scotland, Convenor of LINK's Food and Farming Group

Mike Robinson, Chair Farming 1.5

Vicki Swales, Head of Land Use Policy, RSPB Scotland

David McKay, Director Soil Association Scotland, Vice convenor LINK's Food and Farming Group

Deborah Long CEO, Scottish Environment LINK