Email from Daphne Vlastari following meeting with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing 25 July 2016.

Dear All,

Please find below my notes from the meeting and suggested follow-up actions. Let me know your thoughts. On a personal note I think we recovered well from the attempt to deviate from the agenda, though I think we did not convince him on the “economy” (how environment can help the economy). There should be some thinking among us on how we can do that more effectively and we should follow up with a letter and potentially some short briefings on the issues we discussed.

**Overview:** Overall a good first meeting, despite being delayed for over 30mins due to Cab Sec running late with meetings. Cab Sec provided reassurances regarding LINK member involvement in policy discussions and committed to biannual meetings. In principle, dialogue with him and services would continue in-between meetings and as issues arise. He did not respond to a question on the circular economy but at the end of the meeting acknowledged we had not discussed this; he seemed slightly dismissive of our points regarding the need for more sustainable agriculture but noted that environment/climate and forestry policies are not incompatible though on occasion differences of opinion will arise. He noted that inshore fisheries bill will be delayed (not coming for another two years) and highlighted concern that “we are talking about people’s livelihoods” and importance of addressing fishermen concerns.

**Attendees:**

* LINK members: Helen, Bruce, Lloyd, Sarah & Daphne
* Scottish government: Fergus Ewing,  Keith Connal (Deputy Director, Natural Resources) and Jim Watson (Inshore Fisheries Team Leader). Trudi Sharp (Deputy Director, Agricultural and Rural Development and Land Reform) who was also going to attend, did not in the end.

**In detail:**

* Briefly introduced LINK, but quickly went on to discuss agenda items as we were told we would have less than our allocated 1hr; in the end we stayed with Cab Sec for about an hour. Were able to get things on track with agenda despite suggestion by Cab Sec to go around the table “and tell him what our concerns are”. We were hoping to open up with a more positive message and after a few minutes of discussion were able to convey that.
* On the economy, we discussed the opportunities in terms of sustainable practices. We were not able to go into great detail and were challenged to provide examples on how better land use can help in policy-making. We responded to that by referencing large scale infrastructure projects etc.
* We discussed our work on the circular economy and offered our views; there was no response from Cab  Sec on his plans or how this policy priority links with his portfolio and sectors.
* He was more forthcoming on forestry where he noted that “we need more commercial planting” and effective restocking as for example we want to use wood for home building (more sustainable material). He noted that there is a gap n the availability of species and that forestry policies can be aligned with climate aspirations. He accepted that sometimes conflicts will emerge and there will be disagreement on policies.
* On agriculture and land use, we seemed a bit dismissive of our position that there is a need for sustainable practices. What he has picked up is that there is not contention there and that all land managers accept and respect that. According to him “we [ie LINK members] have succeeded there” and not “only pushed an open door but gone through it” – or words to that effect. [*DV note: I don’t think we completely agree with that so it might be worth flagging some concerns and data we have on this in a follow-up*]
* He picked up on the point made regarding our willingness to join forces to support a better deal for Scottish farmers in a post-Brexit environment if funding is linked to green measures. He seemed open to that idea though did not comment beyond saying that this was good to hear.
* The Cab Sec noted that in terms of subsidies the Brexit situation will mean that there will be a lot of pressure. Current level of funding will not be maintained – he thinks.
* On marine, he seemed to have had several meetings with the more disgruntled part of the industry. He noted that we need laws to better enable inshore fisheries management. But need to recognise competing interests and that this is a very highly charged issue. “We are talking about people’s livelihoods”.
* He agreed that we need to fish sustainably and that it took us years to agree on how to deal with discards. He felt that fishermen “feel beleaguered” and are already well-regulated.
* We clarified some of the issues on marine and referenced Living with the Seas Report (left behind a copy for him). He was interested in the fact that we are also supportive of an evidence-based policy regarding the impact of legislation on fishing activities and the benefits that provides. We referenced research done in other areas of the world where MPA style policies have helped fishing activities. Cab Sec indicated that he has received a lot of concerns from fishermen on MPAs. We clarified that there are differences of opinion among fishermen.
* He proactively referenced the Good Food Nation Strategy nothing this is also about fish. He mentioned that Scottish produce has benefited from high animal welfare standards and environmental protections. The idea that all this would be removed following Brexit is a complete illusion given need to get access to the single market.
* He ended the meeting by noting his dissatisfaction with how slowly things progress.

**Next steps:**

* Send follow-up letter confirming agreement on meetings with LINK and interactions. Provide additional information on agriculture/land concerns, forestry and marine. (DV to draft and share with group)
* Consider offering a visit for Fergus on marine issues (boat?). (Sarah, Calum, Nick, Esther and Daphne to put proposal together ahead of next Marine Group meeting)
* Liaise with low impact fishing industry to facilitate meeting with Fergus. (ibid)