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Aileen McLeod MSP  
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

26<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Dear Dr McLeod,

### **Our meeting of 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

Thank you for meeting us at our regular meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> September. We were most grateful for the opportunity to discuss a wide range of subjects.

#### **1. Land Reform**

We discussed LINK's overall support for the Land Reform Bill before the Parliament and our strong support for the centrality of the concept of balancing rights and responsibilities in land in the legislation. LINK are less concerned with ownership than with stewardship of the land, and look forward to contributing to consultation on a draft of the proposed Rights and Responsibilities Statement. We are particularly concerned that land ownership and land use should be considered within government in a joined-up fashion and hope that the Land Use Strategy can be linked more closely with the Rights and Responsibilities Statement in the emerging framework for land policy. We will continue to make inputs as the Bill progresses, especially where amendments might strengthen the Bill.

We noted that the high deer population is having a major impact on ecological status, and is a significant issue from which conflicts are arising. We support the measures in the Bill to further strengthen SNH's role here, but in discussion of the improvement of the voluntary deer management systems, we expressed frustration at the slowness of progress towards practical results and our continuing view that a statutory management system is required to properly uphold the public interest.

We discussed the progress of improvements to the planning system in respect of hill tracks as another example to illustrate the need for rights and responsibilities to be clearly stated. LINK members are continuing to monitor the privileged arrangements for land holders in

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order to assess whether the best balance between the private and public interests has been achieved.

We underlined our recently expressed concerns about massive culling of hares in Scotland. We look forward to receiving a response to the paper recently provided to Scottish Government by the NGOs, a copy of which is enclosed for your information.

We discussed wildlife crime, in very broad terms and with an eye to longer-term policy adjustments in the balance between rights and responsibilities. We look forward to participating in the review of game bird licencing under consideration, and the review of the Protection of Wild Mammals Act. We outlined some early thinking from within LINK with regard to the possibility of modern hunting legislation on a wider European model for Scotland, emerging as a solution to many of the problems the country faces in this area.

## **2. Planning**

We discussed the scope of review of the planning system announced by the Government, and just how concentrated on housing issues it might be. LINK intended to pursue the consideration of the issue of equal rights of appeal. We agreed to put our thinking in a letter to Ministers and to continue to participate with the intention of strengthening sustainable outcomes.

## **3. Food**

We welcomed the Government's recent work on food, and outlined recent developments in thinking within this area in LINK. We hope to see increased consideration of the social rights to grow food and eat well. We will continue to pursue improvements in the environmental impact of farming and marine practices. We welcomed the Government's consultation on the circular economy and noted the applicability of the principles involved to the shortening of food chains, the importance of the rights of people who work in the primary and processing food industries, and the reduction of food waste. LINK is working on the production of a food atlas and will contribute to the discussions of the Future of Agriculture.

## **4. Marine**

We reviewed developments in the implementation of the Marine Act with particular reference to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. We warmly welcomed the progress being made and will continue to participate fully in the process.

## **5. Economics**

LINK have continued to deepen and widen involvement with environmental economics, and have identified several areas of interest including the circular economy. We are concerned, however, about the gap in achieving climate emission considerations within Scottish infrastructure investments. We discussed the need to improve this in the development and delivery of RPP3, and the need to emphasise this within all public bodies, including local councils. In addition, we reported the continuing campaign for divestment from fossil fuels being run by LINK members.

We agree that a discussion of the circular economy might be a valuable item on the agenda of a future Ministerial meeting.

#### **6. Social justice/fairness**

We reported that LINK are working on a contribution to the Fairer Scotland debate being pursued by the Scottish Government, and that we would be happy to provide early sight of this to you. We also agreed that this work related strongly to the work being done on the Sustainable Development Goals and their inclusion within the National Performance Framework.

I hope that this provides a useful summary of the subjects and initiatives discussed during the course of our very constructive meeting. Thank you once again for your willingness to engage with LINK and its members. We are looking forward to your joining us for the evening of our Congress on 16 November.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Todd".

Helen Todd, Chair

Enc: Mountain hare culls and the law paper