

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform
and Islands

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Chùisean Dùthchail, Ath-
leasachadh Fearainn agus Eileanan
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Our Reference: 202400412274

Your Reference: Letter on agriculture and climate change

21 May 2024

Dear Miriam,

Thank you for your email of 2 May 2024, in which you raised concerns about Scotland's 2030 climate targets and expressed interest in the Scottish Government's strategies for reaching net-zero emissions, and the policies for meeting climate and nature goals.

We remain fully committed to delivering net-zero, our next Climate Change Plan will set out our approach to delivering on Scotland's net-zero targets in a way that is just and fair for everyone, and I welcome Scottish Environment LINK's support and contribution to this work.

Your letter rightly points out the challenges faced by Scotland's farmers, crofters, and land managers due to climate change. We value their part in cutting emissions and addressing climate change in ways that actively benefit both the climate and nature. Many are already adopting low-carbon farming practices that will help cut emissions. We now want to build on this and accelerate action while creating new opportunities for the sector.

Scotland's climate targets are indeed ambitious; it is imperative that every sector, including agriculture, plays their part in our collective efforts to achieve net-zero emissions. Scotland is already halfway to net-zero and continues to decarbonise faster than the UK average. We remain fully committed to meeting our target of net-zero emissions by 2045, and in 2024–25 alone, we are committing £4.7 billion to support the delivery of our climate change goals.

However, we are reliant on actions from the UK government, which holds key policy levers with which to deliver a net-zero future. Additionally, we are facing a real-term cut to our UK capital funding of 8.7 percent over five years, totalling around £1.3 billion. This reduction is a significant concern, as it has implications for the delivery of climate ambition in Scotland and our ability to produce a draft Climate Change Plan as intended.

We are transforming the way we support farming and food production in Scotland to deliver the [Vision for Agriculture](#) and become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. Our [Agriculture Reform Programme](#) will deliver a support framework that supports high-quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature restoration. Through the

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programme:

- We have already published the [Agricultural Reform Route Map](#), which sets out the process for changing to a new agricultural support framework. The Scottish Government is committed to a co-development approach including through representative bodies including the Agriculture Rural Development stakeholders and the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB), as well as a cohort of individual farmers.
- We continue to deliver [Preparing for Sustainable Farming](#), through which we are supporting farmers to undertake carbon audits and soil testing and helping them to make their businesses even more economically and environmentally sustainable. This will support farmers and crofters to understand their emissions and encourage the best use of nutrients from inorganic and organic fertilisers (including slurry and farmyard manure) by matching applications to crop requirements. It should thus reduce the loss of nutrients to the environment, and additional benefits include reduced diffuse pollution and emissions and improved carbon capture on farmland.
- In March 2024, we shared additional details about our transition to a new support framework, which includes the introduction of the first [Whole Farm Plan](#) conditions starting in 2025. This will require farmers and crofters to complete two baselining activities from a list of options, including carbon audits, biodiversity audits, soil analysis, the creation of animal health and welfare plans, and integrated pest management plans. This initiative aims to promote sustainable farming practices that are beneficial to nature, and as your letter notes, we will add nutrient management plans to the whole farm plans by 2028, with the details developed through our co-design approach. Proportionate carbon audits will also be required by all farms receiving public support by 2028 at the latest.
- We laid the [Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill](#) in September 2023, which is currently at stage 2 in Parliament and aims to create a framework that will allow us to support farmers to farm in a sustainable and regenerative way.

The [Bill](#) will help us deliver on key outcomes such as high-quality food production; climate mitigation and adaptation; nature restoration; and wider rural development. This approach will ensure flexibility and adaptivity to mitigate against future challenges in an increasingly uncertain world. It will enable tailored provisions and support to be implemented through secondary legislation and further adapted on a regular basis, as the sector requires.

The [Bill](#) will facilitate the adoption of a four-tiered approach to delivering future agriculture support. For this transformational change to occur, farmers and crofters will need to be incentivised to make more choices that contribute towards restoring nature. That is why the proposed future support framework specifically includes a tier (Tier 4, complementary support) designed to enable access to training, knowledge sharing, and professional development that will help support farmers and crofters in their transition towards sustainable and regenerative farming practices.

- We are supporting and encouraging the uptake of low-carbon farming practices and investing in our farmers and crofters by offering financial support, providing practical advice, guidance, and skill development opportunities, and demonstrating the climate and business benefits of taking action. This is being delivered through initiatives such as [Scotland's Farm Advisory Service](#), the [Monitor Farm Programme](#), the [Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund](#), and the [Integrating Trees Network](#). These efforts are all part of our commitment to sustainable and low-carbon farming practices.

I want to assure you and the co-signatories to your letter that we are fully committed to combating climate change and working tirelessly to meet our climate goals. We want to ensure that farming across Scotland, including the islands, continues sustainably into the future, producing high-quality food for the nation, helping to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gas emissions, and delivering wider environmental benefits and improved biodiversity. I also welcome the contributions of your members to our ongoing policy development, including through ARIOB.

I hope this response addresses your concerns in a comprehensive manner. Thank you for taking the time to write to me on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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