



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finlay Carson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee  
The Scottish Parliament

**Net Zero, Energy and Transport  
Committee**

c/o Clerk to the Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

By email only

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29 March 2023

Dear Finlay,

### **Outcomes of the 15th UN Conference on Biodiversity (COP15)**

This month our Committee has heard evidence on the [15<sup>th</sup> UN Biodiversity Conference](#) ('COP15') and what its outcomes mean for Scotland.

At our [meeting on 7 March](#), we held an evidence session with a panel of experts in biodiversity policy to reflect on the new Global Biodiversity Framework and nature restoration targets which were agreed at the summit. [On 14 March](#) we took evidence from the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to hear the Scottish Government's view on COP15 and take stock of its recently published draft [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#).

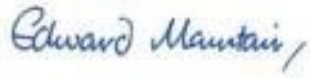
As part of our consideration of COP15, we noted that a number of elements of our discussion may be of interest to your Committee in the work you have been pursuing. The clerks have prepared a short annexe listing these matters.

Regarding next steps for biodiversity policy and tackling the nature crisis, your Committee will be aware that the Scottish Government is planning on publishing a Delivery Plan to sit alongside the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, which will contain more detail on sectoral approaches and how nature recovery will be mainstreamed.

The Committee heard from the Minister that the Scottish Government is preparing for a further round of consultation in late spring and early summer, for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan together, with a view to publishing both as a package in late summer or early autumn. Our Committee will consider its next steps in relation to biodiversity scrutiny when the Delivery Plan is published. Your Committee would be very welcome to contribute to that scrutiny. If so, I would be happy to discuss this with you further.

I hope this information will help to inform your scrutiny of these subject matters.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Mountain". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Edward Mountain MSP  
Convener  
**Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee**

# Annexe

## Agriculture

Changes to the current regime of agricultural subsidies was identified by our panel of experts as being a vehicle for the Scottish Government to encourage nature and climate-friendly farming practices. It was argued that farmland could help to contribute to the '30 by 30' target for nature conservation agreed at COP15.<sup>1</sup>

Agroforestry, agroecology and organic farming were all referenced as illustrations of how food production and nature conservation could coexist through effective land management and deliver multiple benefits.<sup>2</sup> Experts noted the research conducted by the James Hutton Institute on intercropping and the sowing of different mixtures of species together. They said the research could help to deliver improved cropping yield and strengthen habitats and ecosystems.<sup>3</sup>

The stakeholder panel said it was the role of the Scottish Government to help maximise the benefits of effective land management and to help facilitate these enterprises by creating the correct conditions and funding mechanisms for such initiatives to be encouraged.<sup>4</sup>

We discussed with the Minister what actions the Scottish Government was taking to ensure considerations in relation to biodiversity were reflected in policy development across government. The Minister said that work around mainstreaming of biodiversity was being realised through reforms the Scottish Government was taking forward regarding agricultural subsidies.<sup>5</sup> She said that the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy sets out the Scottish Government's commitment to transition 50% of all funding for farming and crofting from unconditional to conditional support by 2025.<sup>6</sup> She said this would support economic activities such as farming within a wider framework which ensures biodiversity and nature restoration is a key priority.

## Fisheries

Experts highlighted that fisheries management was a key feature of discussions around COP15 and the targets agreed at the summit and noted a need to join up fisheries and biodiversity policies.<sup>7</sup>

The stakeholder panel agreed that spatial marine planning in Scotland should be integrated, equitable and biodiversity-inclusive.<sup>8</sup> They said an 'ecosystem approach' to fisheries management could be a useful decision-making tool for the Scottish Government in seeking to tackle biodiversity loss and deliver food security.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), cols 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 30.

<sup>3</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), cols 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), cols 30-32.

<sup>5</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 15.

<sup>6</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 19.

<sup>7</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 11.

<sup>9</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 31.

The Minister told us that the Scottish Government has designated 37% of national waters as a Marine Protected Area and intends to designate 10% of waters as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) by 2026.<sup>10</sup> She noted a similar approach to the proposals for HPMAs has been taken in California where ‘no-take zones’ have been implemented as a method of protecting marine areas. The Minister explained that the California experience demonstrated that marine protections allow for species to breed and thrive uninterrupted, which in turn improves yields for fishers.<sup>11</sup>

The Minister said the Scottish Government has been developing its plans for HPMAs and is currently consulting on its proposals. Scottish Government officials mentioned that due to increased restrictions on commercial activities anticipated in HMPAs, they have also been working through specific challenges in relation to enforcement of these spaces.<sup>12</sup> Officials said they are exploring a range of compliance measures including extending the requirement for vessel tracking and monitoring systems across the whole commercial fishing fleet by the end of the current session of Parliament.<sup>13</sup>

## Forestry

The panel of experts said Scotland’s programme for woodland regeneration needed to meet the ambition and scale required to reconnect areas of forestry with native species. Experts said it was the role of the Scottish Government to incentivise initiatives for woodland conservation through grants schemes.<sup>14</sup> However, experts noted that a key challenge with regard to grant schemes is the short timescales involved; impact is expected to be demonstrated in five years, while ecological processes may work on longer timescales, and it may therefore be longer before results are known.<sup>15</sup> Upcoming reviews within forestry policy were mentioned as a good opportunity to resolve these issues.<sup>16</sup>

Scottish Environment LINK also raised the damaging impact of the current deer populations on forest ecosystems. The organisation stressed the importance to control deer populations in an effective and robust way to allow woodland to regenerate and for native species and habitats to thrive.<sup>17</sup>

The Minister told us that the Scottish Government was committed to providing the package of funding required to drive woodland restoration at scale. She mentioned the new £65-million Nature Restoration Fund would provide a multi-year funding for conservation projects in Scotland’s woodlands as well as other habitat restoration.<sup>18</sup> She noted a number of projects the fund was currently supporting, including the work being undertaken by Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust in restoring Argyll’s Atlantic rainforest.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 26.

<sup>11</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 13.

<sup>15</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 14.

<sup>16</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 7 March 2023](#), col 18.

<sup>18</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 5.

<sup>19</sup> Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. [Official Report, 14 March 2023](#), col 5.