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Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Edward

Draft Biodiversity Delivery Plan

Thank you for your letter of 8 February in which you set out the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee response to the draft Biodiversity Delivery Plan. I welcome the scrutiny and consideration of the Committee in reaching the conclusions and recommendations as set out in the letter.

I note the Committee made two over-riding recommendations, which highlighted a need for the Delivery Plan to contain more specific, concrete actions, identifying who will lead on them and for the actions to be SMARTer. It is important to note the Delivery Plan is the first of a series of 5-year rolling plans which will be regularly reviewed to ensure we are continuously focusing on, and scaling up, the right set of actions to tackle the biodiversity crisis. In the final version of this Delivery Plan the priority actions will be further drawn out, made SMARTer and with the lead delivery organisation clarified, where possible. As well as setting out the depth of individual actions, it is important to retain the breadth of actions, as identified through evidence-based logic modelling, and which we know are needed to halt biodiversity loss by 2030. While many of the actions are sufficiently developed to be SMART, some do require further development and these will continue to be reviewed over the course of the Delivery Plan.

In preparation of both the Strategy and Delivery Plan we have worked closely with our stakeholder engagement group bringing together a wide range of interests including local authorities, businesses, eNGOs, land management representatives, marine organisations,

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public bodies and youth groups. The Committee's calls for "*further and deeper consultation and co-design with key stakeholders*" has been partially addressed through our recent public consultation on the overall Strategic Framework for Biodiversity, which gained over 600 responses encompassing a wide range of views. In summary, respondents welcomed the ambition but echoed the Committee's concerns that many of the actions are not sufficiently SMART and will not collectively add up to halting biodiversity loss by 2030. In addition, there was a desire for more clarity on priorities, identification of lead delivery organisations and a spatial approach that underpins the strategy and overlapping policy initiatives. I can confirm that there will continue to be engagement with our stakeholder group and more widely as we finalise the Strategy and Delivery Plan.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy acknowledges lessons learned from factors which limited the success of previous strategies. It includes important enabling conditions for success which echo the recommendations made by the Committee. The need to work more strategically and at scale, to ensure biodiversity is mainstreamed across all relevant sectors and government policy, to ensure sufficient investment from an appropriate blend of public and private finance, and to strengthen accountability for delivery, are all themes which the Committee has recognised. The Strategic Framework, of which the Delivery Plan is a key component, is designed to collectively address these factors.

A more detailed response to the recommendations under each objective is set out in Annex A.

I note the Committee's interest in how we measure biodiversity outcomes and how we ensure that our biodiversity policy is being effective. I would like to thank the Committee for their consideration and look forward to working with you to ensure we adequately tackle the biodiversity and climate crises.

Kind regards

LORNA SLATER

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Objective 1 - Accelerate restoration and regeneration**Objective 2 - Protect nature on land and at sea, across and beyond protected areas (includes comments on 30 by 30 and Nature Networks)**

I acknowledge the importance of having a spatial approach to restoring and protecting biodiversity. Indeed, expanding and improving protected areas and developing nature networks, which are key pillars in our biodiversity strategy, are spatial by nature.

I am grateful to the Committee for their strong support in achieving the 30 by 30 target and officials have been working on ensuring the framework we consulted upon last year is further developed into a substantive programme of work, which works across different policy areas, bringing coherence and helping achieve multiple benefits. I also note the Committee's views that management of protected areas needs to be effective and enforced and I can confirm that work is being taken forward in this area.

It is important, however, that spatial approaches such as these are dynamic and respond to our changing natural environment. Climate change is fundamentally altering our natural environment and it is essential that the measures we take are helping us adapt to the changes we know are coming.

Nature Networks are a key policy in this regard, encompassing Protected Areas and other national and locally important areas for biodiversity, ensuring ecological connectivity and helping to connect people to nature and green spaces. We have worked hard to ensure that Nature Networks are embedded in NPF4 (Policy 3) and as an outcome in the draft national climate adaptation plan (SCAP3) - a good example of mainstreaming across different Scottish Government policy areas to deliver national outcomes for climate, nature, and wider society.

We are also working with local authorities and other stakeholders to enable implementation of nature restoration that involves local communities. Through the Nature Network project, a toolbox is being developed by NatureScot to help inform and advise implementation – drawing together skills, expertise and learning into one central place. This is the start of a process and there is ongoing consideration of the potential for this hub to be expanded, and where appropriate integrated with a climate intelligence service.

We were pleased to be able to provide an additional £5 million of funding to local authorities in the last financial year to help them deliver nature networks in their area. This is additional to the £5 million which they also received as part of the Edinburgh Process strand of the Nature Restoration Fund, which helps them to tackle local biodiversity priorities in their areas.

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Regarding the introduction of further fisheries management measures in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), measures for the most vulnerable sites in the Scottish MPA network were implemented in 2016. Putting in place the remaining fisheries management measures to protect MPAs and priority marine features remains a top government priority. Developing evidence based and effective fisheries management measures for over 160 sites in the inshore area alone is a complex and challenging process, but we are committed to put these in place as soon as possible and have been working with all stakeholders to deliver in line with the timetable set out in the draft Delivery Plan.

We are developing a new National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2), to help manage use of our marine space in Scotland to maximise the opportunities a blue economy approach can deliver for our environment, marine sectors and coastal communities. This is a complex and an iterative process which depends on stakeholder expertise at every stage, and a solid evidence base. Outputs will be shared as they become available to enable co-development of policies in the plan with stakeholders. We will explore, with stakeholders, the potential options for spatial policies as part of the NMP2 process, whilst balancing the need for protection and enhancement of the marine environment with the sustainable development of existing and emerging sectors. NMP2 will continue to provide the context for regional and sectoral marine planning, adopting an area-based approach to reflect the unique and varied communities and environments around the coast of Scotland. Sectoral Marine Plans, such as those supporting offshore wind development, already provide a spatial framework for the sustainable development of our seas. Consultation on a draft updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (SMP-OWE) will commence in Autumn 2024 and a final plan will be adopted by Spring 2025.

Objective 3 - Embed nature positive farming, fishing and forestry

I agree entirely with the Committee that the Delivery Plan offers a key opportunity to mainstream biodiversity thinking across policy development and bring together the key actions which will help us achieve our biodiversity ambitions. I also recognise the importance of ensuring a just transition, which is both the outcome – a fairer, greener future for all – and the process that must be undertaken in partnership with those impacted by the transition to a net zero, nature positive Scotland.

The upcoming Land and Agriculture Just Transition Plan (LAJTP) will focus on the livelihoods, skills, health, and wellbeing of those who live in and rely on Scotland's as well as focusing on maintaining and supporting thriving rural and island communities.

As this will be the first Just Transition Plan for the land and agriculture sectors, its focus will be on introducing and promoting our baseline approach and policy actions across land use and agriculture whilst setting out the strategic direction of travel for future LAJTP plans.

The Scottish Government's Vision for Scottish Agriculture sets out how we intend to transform farming support and food production in Scotland so that we become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. To achieve this, the Scottish Government

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is committed to having a support framework that provides for high quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature restoration. This commitment is at the heart of a robust and coherent framework to underpin Scotland's future agriculture support regime, to be delivered through the Agricultural Reform Programme from 2025 onwards. The Delivery Plan sits alongside this Programme and we are working closely across government to ensure we identify all possible opportunities for ensuring we provide our farmers and land managers with the support they need to help us deliver on our climate and biodiversity ambitions, while still ensuring high quality food production.

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill clearly states that one of the objectives of agricultural policy includes the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration. There is a significant programme of work already underway to ensure the future agricultural support regime enables this objective to be achieved, and I welcome the Committee identifying the important role of the Biodiversity Delivery Plan in this regard as a key mainstreaming tool.

I agree entirely with the Committee that it is essential that we have coherence across our key strategies. Our Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture sets our expectations for the development of the sector and anticipates that the sector will continually work to minimise negative environmental impacts and collaborate with other stakeholders to protect and restore Scotland's biodiversity in the freshwater and marine environment. We will consider further how to ensure there is adequate read across between these two important documents.

Key delivery bodies such as SEPA have been closely involved in the development of the Delivery Plan and continue to provide important input. We are also engaging with COSLA and SOLACE given the essential role our local authorities play. We note the suggestion by the Committee of mirroring the approach to establishing a net zero 'intelligence unit'. As noted above, we have been giving active consideration to how the work we are already doing with local authorities can be further developed.

Objective 4 - Protect and support the recovery of vulnerable and important species and habitats

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and this first Delivery Plan has a focus on actions needed to support landscape scale restoration of habitats and wider ecosystems. Healthy, connected ecosystems are central to supporting many of our important species and habitats and helping them adapt to the effects of climate change that we can already see. However, the importance of continued species and habitat conservation is recognised, and as mentioned above, are looking to see where associated actions can be made SMARTer.

I agree entirely on the importance of meaningful consultation, and where possible co-design, to ensure those potentially impacted upon by species management and reintroduction programmes are involved in the development of plans. An excellent example of how this has

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worked in practice is of Scotland's Beaver Strategy where more than 50 stakeholder organisations, including NFUS, Scottish Land and Estates and Scottish Wildlife Trust, collaborated on its development.

Objective 5 - Invest in Nature

As the Committee recognise a key condition for success is to ensure sufficient investment in nature restoration, through an appropriate blend of public and private funding. Our Biodiversity Investment Plan will be an important and significant document, which will be one key lever in helping ensure we increase the flow of investment into biodiversity. It will look at a wide range of nature finance sources, including public, private and philanthropic. It will set out how the Scottish Government intends to encourage public and private investment to deliver outcomes for biodiversity and support a nature-positive economy. It will do this by identifying mechanisms and approaches that will guide investment so that it supports delivery of the Biodiversity Strategy's outcomes. The Plan will aim to provide certainty and clarity for different types of investment, and it will help prepare Scotland for developing nature markets, aligning with our forthcoming Natural Capital Market Framework. The Market Framework will support our vision for responsible investment that contributes to a just transition, community benefits and robust environmental outcomes.

I agree entirely with the Committee that certainty and continuity of public funding for nature restoration is crucial and plays an important role in encouraging private investment. That is why we have committed to invest £65 million over the course of this Parliament in the Nature Restoration Fund. We need to recognise the value of our natural capital which makes a significant contribution to our economy, and work to restore and improve our natural environment. This is a public and private responsibility. The investment plan will set out our approach and the actions needed to mobilise public and responsible private investment to deliver nature restoration across different sectors.

Objective 6 - Take action on the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss

I welcome the Committee's suggestion of having a ministerial-level biodiversity champion. It is essential that we embed biodiversity across all portfolios and ensure there is a strong cross-ministerial ambition in delivering the existing statutory duty (placed upon all public bodies) to take action to conserve biodiversity.

One of the Conditions for Success identified in our Biodiversity Strategy is the need to mobilise actions by individuals, organisations and businesses and adopt a whole-of-society approach to deliver a nature positive Scotland. We have committed to developing a programme of public engagement to increase understanding of the nature of the biodiversity crisis and the drivers of loss.

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In addition, there are a range of actions included in the Delivery Plan which relate to the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and which are intended to address the issues identified by IPBES relating to wider behaviour towards nature. These currently focus on increasing awareness and understanding of the need to protect and restore nature, across the whole of government, business sectors, wider communities and people. A key part of all these actions will be utilising existing and fledgling partnerships and community fora to ensure there is an adequate connection between our high level ambitions and how these can be delivered on the ground within and by our local communities.

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