

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands
Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Chùisean Dùthchail, Ath-leasachadh Fearainn agus Eileanan
Mairi Gougeon MSP
Màiri Gougeon BPA



Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity
Ministear an Àiteachais agus Ceangal
Jim Fairlie MSP
Jim Fairlie BPA

Finlay Carson MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

07 January 2026

Dear Convener,

As you are aware, Scottish Environment LINK wrote to the First Minister informing him that Pete Ritchie, Mike Robinson and Vicki Swales would not attend future meetings of the ARIOB or its Policy Development Group (PDG).

We are thankful for their valuable contributions to date and welcome their commitment to on-going and constructive engagement towards policy development. We will continue to have constructive discussions with SE Link and its member organisations on future policy development going forward.

The experience and insight on such groups, along with the time committed by individuals, is not taken for granted. Reforming our approaches to agriculture support is a complex process and there are differing perspectives as to how this is to be achieved and the pace at which it ought to be progressed.

Scottish Ministers are clear that we will only meet our climate and nature outcomes and support sustainable food production with a base of resilient and successful farming and crofting businesses. Our approach is focussed on developing policy to ensure we avoid creating unintended consequences and building consensus wherever possible.

Our Vision for Agriculture has the resilience of our food producers at its heart and makes clear that there is no contradiction between producing food and doing so in ways that benefit nature restoration and deliver for our climate outcomes. Co-development with our industry, environmental partners and all who support a thriving rural Scotland is the approach that will deliver that Vision. The ARIOB is an important part of that approach.

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It is an approach that informed the Vision itself, that helped construct the four-tier framework and that delivered the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024. Reform and development of new policy is already underway – the latest being enhanced greening meaning next year 2400 additional farmers and crofters will be managing Ecological Focus Areas, ensuring more land is actively farmed in a way that protects nature and is good for the climate. This builds upon the new conditionality introduced in the form of the Whole Farm Plan which will help deliver key baselines in terms of emissions and biodiversity and our calving interval conditionality for the SSBSS – supporting active farmers whilst delivering emissions reductions.

We are committed to maintaining Direct Payments to invest in active farming and food production, at the same time we are asking farmers and crofters to do more for the climate and nature in return.

Our policy approach is balanced between relevant factors – underpinning our world class food and drink sector, maintaining our beautiful countryside, supporting emissions reductions and improving nature and, crucially, keeping people on the land – ensuring thriving rural communities. Wherever possible we will seek to build consensus by ensuring reforms are balanced and deliver on the full range of outcomes.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON



JIM FAIRLIE

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