

# Scottish Government Rural Economy Stakeholder Group

Rural Economy & Communities Division

## **Correspondents on behalf of Stakeholder Group:**

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## **For the attention of:**

Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance & the Economy

Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs & Islands

John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery

01 July 2021

Dear Ms Forbes, Ms Gougeon and Mr Swinney

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIFIC VISION & ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR RURAL AND ISLAND SCOTLAND**

As Scotland emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, rural and island businesses and communities will be at the forefront of building a sustainable recovery and enabling the country to maximise its economic potential.

Now is the time for great ambition but it is also a time to build strong foundations that will enable our ambition to be fulfilled. The foundation of Scotland's rural and island economic policy is unfinished business. In 2019, the Scottish Government, with participation from CoSLA, set up the Rural Economy Action Group (REAG) with the specific remit to develop a framework for the rural and island economy and a suite of indicators on rural economic activity to inform government strategy. The REAG's work was suspended in February 2020 due to Covid-19.

The members of the Stakeholder Group urge you to take on board the recommendation of the 2021 Scottish Rural Parliament to ensure that the REAG is reinstated and that it is integral to the recovery plans for rural and island Scotland. We would welcome a refreshed REAG, with cross-portfolio support, to set out a programme of work underpinned by wellbeing economy principles and informed by a robust analytical strategy. The emerging framework must play to the strengths of rural and island economic resilience as we contend with the impacts of Brexit, the pandemic and the climate emergency.

It is our view, borne of experience on the ground and at strategic level, that rural and island economic policy cannot be mainstreamed effectively into national economic policy. We would therefore also urge you to apply the framework to inform a specific Vision & Economic Strategy for Rural and Island Scotland that is fully aligned with but distinct to the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

We thank you in anticipation of your response,

A. Clark, J. Brierton and A. Pana on behalf of the Rural Economy Stakeholder Group

## APPENDIX 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The Rural Economy Stakeholder Group

The Rural Economy Stakeholder Group was set up in April 2020 to support delivery of the Covid-19 pandemic response in rural and island Scotland. It provides a platform to facilitate information sharing and to ensure optimal alignment of members' activities, including the activities of the Scottish Government. As of October 2020, the Stakeholder Group has shifted focus to supporting the economic recovery of rural and island businesses and communities.

In addition to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Rural Network, the following external organisations are members of the Stakeholder Group:

South of Scotland Enterprise	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Scottish Community Development Centre	Rural Youth Project
Scottish Council for the Development of Industry (SCDI)	Scottish LEADER network (now CLLD Network)
GrowBiz Scotland	Federation of Small Businesses
InspirAlba	Scottish Rural Action
Support in Mind Scotland - Rural Mental Health Forum	Scottish Enterprise
Lantra Scotland	Scottish Gamekeepers Association
Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs	Development Trusts Association of Scotland (DTAS)
James Hutton Institute	Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
Scottish Land and Estates	RSABI
Snowsport Scotland	Women's Enterprise Scotland

The Rural Economy Stakeholder Group last met on 15 June 2021. External members agreed to add their weight behind the recommendation of the 2021 Scottish Rural Parliament for a specific Vision & Economic Strategy for Rural and Island Scotland, and communicate this recommendation to the Cabinet Secretaries.

It was noted during the meeting that the David Hume Institute, Scotland's leading independent think tank, has, in its report [A Scotland of Better Places](#), also called for a specific approach to the rural and island economy, including for the Rural Economy Advisory Group to resume its work.

### The 2021 Scottish Rural Parliament

A member of the European-wide network of Rural Parliaments, the Scottish Rural Parliament takes place every two years, each time hosted by a different rural community - Oban in 2014, Brechin in 2016 and Stranraer in 2018. Secretariat and coordination is provided by Scottish Rural Action and the Scottish Islands Federation.

The Scottish Rural Parliament programme is designed through a process of grassroots consultation – surveys and regional meetings - and input from expert organisations who become session ‘curators’.

Responding to the pandemic reality, the **2021 Scottish Rural Parliament** took place online in March 2021. In total, over 1,600 people took part in the surveys, regional meetings and main event.

Unlike traditional conferences, the 2021vSRP is a grassroots democratic assembly, bringing together people who live and work in rural and island Scotland with decision makers and influencers. Priorities for rural development are identified and actions to strengthen our communities and safeguard our natural environment are debated and captured in a Manifesto for Rural and Island Scotland.

### **The 2021vSRP Economy Session**

The Economy Session was curated by InspirAlba and GrowBiz Scotland. The full session report and recommendations can be found here: <https://www.sra.scot/our-work/scottish-rural-parliament/vsrp-2021/rural-and-island-economy>