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23 May 2024

Dear Edward,

### **People's Panel on Climate Change**

Thank you for your recent letter of 2 May highlighting the valuable work of the People's Panel. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the People's Panel for their collective statement and recommendations. As you noted in your letter, the panel made a number of recommendations in their report and I wanted to use this letter to directly respond to a selection of those most relevant to public engagement.

Public engagement has always been a core component of the Scottish Government's response to climate change in recognition of its importance as well as the statutory duty to engage the public. I agree with the panel that it is vital that everyone understands the nature and scale of the climate emergency, has access to information about how they can help tackle it and can participate and shape decisions about our national approach to climate change. That is why the Scottish Government continues to put engagement at the centre of our action on climate change, through our programme of Climate Action Hubs, Participation Programme and wider engagement work.

Through the Just Transition Participatory Budgeting programme, supported through the Just Transition Fund, we are empowering and supporting communities to have a direct say on how money is spent in their local areas. £2.5 million has been allocated over the past two years, supporting 98 community projects across the North East and Moray, and engaging 19,000 people in the voting process.

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Also through the Just Transition Fund, support has been made available for delivery of the Just Transition Communities project. The project aims to actively engage communities across the region, including within deprived and disadvantaged areas, in discussions on what a just transition to net zero looks like for them. Key outputs from the first two years of delivery include: development of over 20 community action plans, over 30 community projects and over 1700 adults, and 3400 young people participating.

The Panel challenges the Scottish Government to strive to increase the consistency and reach of its engagement. We acknowledge the call for honesty about the scale of the challenge, consistent evaluation of projects and commitment to understand where action is needed and barriers to participation. We are seeking ways to address this as we review our current engagement strategy. As you and the Panel will be aware, all our engagement activity is underpinned by our climate change public engagement strategy (PES). The PES contributes to the Scottish Government's mission to maximise the opportunity of a fair, green and growing economy by encouraging and enhancing public involvement in taking climate action. In addition to the statutory requirement to review the strategy every five years, we have committed to a mid-point review which is due to begin shortly and will be completed this summer.

I can confirm that the Panel's report and recommendations will be used as part of this review to help shape and inform the remainder of the strategy's implementation. In addition to the Panel's report, the mid-point review of the PES will draw together the data we have collected from our programme evaluations to date, our national indicators and research to provide an assessment of our overall progress towards our strategic objectives.

We will also use this as an opportunity to gather feedback from key stakeholders and delivery partners on what aspects of the strategy they think are working well and any suggestions for improvement. The PES implementation plan for 2024/25 includes the Let's Do Net Zero marketing campaign, Climate Action Hubs, Public Participation Programme, Climate Engagement Fund, Climate Week and Climate Policy Engagement Network.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting community climate action to enable communities to make the transition to low carbon and climate resilient living. The Panel concluded that collaboration with expert local and community-led organisations is the key to success citing the importance of education, the cultural sector and listening to the public about their experiences. I agree, which is why these are all key elements of the Government's current strategy and will continue to be. The Scottish Government has taken forward its [Open Government climate change commitment](#) and established a network of organisations and individuals to enable meaningful participation with delivery of climate change policy, providing advice, accountability and supporting transparency. This is known as the Climate Policy Engagement Network. The network is hosted through an online platform and is open to organisations or individuals across Scotland who have an audience or a skill relevant to the network and an interest in climate policy.

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Government is currently supporting engagement with young people through the Climate Action Schools initiative and community-led action through our network of Community Climate Action Hubs. Through this framework, we are providing a vehicle for communities to come together and engage in collective climate action. The Scottish Government will be providing up to £5.5m of funding in 2024/2025 for our network of Climate Action Hubs alongside a support package to ensure it can deliver effectively. The hubs empower communities to identify the actions that are most appropriate to their needs. They support peer-to-peer learning, promote collaboration between projects, and help groups to take advantage of funding opportunities.

The Scottish Government also provides funding to Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) to support wider efforts to inform the public of the climate emergency and ways to take action in their local community. In particular, to help develop and grow the existing SCCAN network activity so as to better support and enable its members to proactively shape rapid and transformational change towards net-zero, and to build resilient communities.

The Panel called for more longer-term funding to support engaging with the public and communities on climate action. We are operating within a very tight economic environment but we have prioritised funding for engagement initiatives in 2024/25 where possible and we will always look to maximise the impact of that funding. In addition to the Climate Action Hubs outlined above, the Climate Engagement Fund is in its second year of operation. It was set up to enable external organisations and groups across Scotland to lead their own climate change engagement initiatives as 'trusted messengers'. Eight projects were provided £550k funding last year and the latest application round has recently closed with a record number of applications to be assessed.

The Panel also called on Government to ensure there is an effective communication plan for engaging with the public and that positive climate stories are shared. It should be noted that the Scottish Government's Let's Do Net Zero (LDNZ) marketing campaign has so far been successful in reaching the target audience and motivating them to take action, with independent evaluation showing that visibility of LDNZ brand activity is key to driving individuals to take climate action. In addition, Scotland's Climate Week is a Scottish Government initiative celebrating Scotland's actions on climate change. It aims to raise awareness of how people, businesses and organisations can adapt to a low carbon lifestyle. It has been delivered annually since 2016.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Panel for their work and reiterate Government's commitment to use the findings as part of our PES mid-point review later this year. The Scottish Government remains committed to engaging with the public and will continue to encourage and enhance public involvement in taking climate action.

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In your letter you asked for further details on the establishment of the participative process Ministers committed to as part of the policy package announced in April. The intention is to use the PES mid-point review referenced above to help determine the most effective structure for this and I would be happy to provide further details to the committee in due course.

I will respond more fully to each of the individual recommendations following the mid-point review later this year.



**MÀIRI MCALLAN**

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