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Finlay Carson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

19 March 2024

Dear Finlay,

I am writing to highlight to you a recent issue identified with the publication of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening, relating to the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill, and the subsequent steps taken to rectify this.

The publication of the SEA screening should have been published prior to the Consultation on the Agriculture Bill late August 2022. This was delayed due to a system error on the publishing platform. The uploading of material onto the SEA database was then interrupted for a period in 2022 due to technical issues. Officials have since been working to address the resultant backlog and I would like to apologise for this delay.

Specifically in relation to the Agriculture Bill, the information which had not previously been uploaded to the database was: i) a screening request of 12th August 2022 and ii) the responses to the screening request subsequently received from the consultation authorities. Both of these uploads have now been successfully made to the SEAs Gateway platform as of 16 February 2024 and a subsequent determination was then published on 27 February. Details of both publications can be found here;

<https://www.strategicenvironmentalassessment.gov.scot/Details.aspx?id=SEA\01753&sid=2>

The Consultation Authorities supported our view that the Bill is enabling in nature and was therefore unlikely to have significant environmental effects. The Scottish Government has however taken a precautionary approach, as recommended by the Consultation Authorities, and aims to review for likely significant environmental effects when developing secondary legislation where it can be more meaningfully undertaken.

Yours sincerely,



**MAIRI GOUGEON**

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