



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Rural Affairs Committee

Gillian Martin MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs
Scottish Government

16 September 2026

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Rural and Islands Proofing

In discussing its work programme, the Rural Affairs Committee has agreed to explore whether the issue of rural and island proofing requires further attention to ensure that the needs and circumstances of rural and island communities are properly considered in policymaking.

The Committee also received [a letter from a cross-party group of MSPs](#) representing island communities. While I understand different approaches exist to policy making in respect to rural and island proofing, in scoping its work the Committee would welcome updates on the following.

Scoping work on rural proofing

Considering how policies and proposals affect rural areas is clearly a cross-Government task. The recently published [Scottish Rural Communities Policy Review: stage 4 final report](#) comments on the several challenges facing rural policy making but also the opportunities to develop a process for rural proofing which learns from approaches in other countries and builds on the Rural Assessment Toolkit.

The Committee would welcome further information on the Scottish Government's current approach to rural proofing, specifically:

- what the Scottish Government's approach to rural proofing looks like in practice, including what guidance and expectations are placed on policy teams to consider the impacts of policies on rural communities, and how that work has been developed, applied and monitored in practice
- what governance practices are in place at Cabinet level to ensure other Cabinet Secretaries consider rural perspectives in policy development and siloed working is avoided

Contact: Rural Affairs Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.
Email rural.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

- any plans you have to further develop rural proofing practices across Scottish Government throughout the coming parliamentary session, including whether the Scottish Government still intend to publish a Rural Delivery Plan
- the role of the Rural Renewal Bill, and associated timescales for this work

Islands proofing

I understand that rural and island proofing are often different practices, with island proofing work specifically governed by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. However, I am sure the same principle - that communities, too often distant from decision making, have their views and circumstances properly considered - applies. It is therefore worrying to read about ongoing concerns with island communities impact assessments shared by colleagues. To support the Committee to respond appropriately to the concerns raised by island MSPs with the Committee in their letter, I would welcome further information on:

- your response to concerns about the effectiveness of island impact assessments
- what guidance and information is provided to officials when conducting island impact assessments
- any plans you have to improve the effectiveness of island proofing the Scottish Government's policy development work, whether that be through improved island impact assessments or otherwise

Taking into consideration the Cabinet Secretary's, and Minister's, evidence session proposed with the Committee on 7 October, I would be grateful for a response by **1 October 2026**.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Ruskell MSP
Convener