

Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands

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The Scottish Parliament

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Dear Mark,

In response to your questions on advisory groups and recent changes involving the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB) and the Land, Agriculture and Nature Delivery (LAND) Group, I have set out additional information below.

I wrote to members of the ARIOB in August to confirm that the Board would no longer continue. At that time members were informed that the Scottish Government was forming a new stakeholder group, the LAND Group, which will be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs.

The LAND Group will be multi-disciplinary with a focus on how we work together to deliver against the multiple asks of our land. It will be made up of 12 member organisations reflecting the mix of key interest areas. These include agriculture, forestry, peatland, biodiversity, wildlife and species management and water. It will meet three times a year and will take forward strategic discussions around how land use can be integrated to deliver the multiple benefits needed to achieve our collective wider ambitions for Scotland and our people.

The LAND Group is not a direct replacement for the ARIOB but instead reflects the strategic understanding of our land as an interactive system and the expanded responsibilities in the current Climate Action and Rural Affairs portfolio. This approach ensures our stakeholder engagement is structured to provide a truly holistic approach to land use issues.

I want to be clear that the group will not remove stakeholder engagement at a policy level. For example, groups such as the Agriculture Policy Development Group (APDG) and the National Biodiversity Forum (NBF) will remain key to ongoing policy development in those areas, with the secretariats working closely to ensure a two-way flow of information between all relevant discussions.

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The APDG, which was originally set up to support the ARIOB, has been expanded and has met a number of times since the last meeting of the ARIOB. I attended their meeting in May to make clear the APDG is an essential part of our engagement with the industry on agricultural reform and the Scottish Government will rely on it as we move into the delivery phase. I will chair the Group going forward and we will continue working towards positive outcomes for agriculture in Scotland.

Officials will liaise with Committee Clerks to provide the Terms of Reference for each group reflecting these changes, including membership details in due course.

Clearly agricultural reform is a broad area with ongoing stakeholder engagement, user research and co-development activities. This is not limited to any one advisory group. This broad engagement informs policy development. As set out within the Rural Support Plan section on 'Approach to Reform and the Rural Support Plan':

'Stakeholders include industry bodies, membership organisations, representative stakeholder groups, Scottish Government sponsored stakeholder groups, government organisations, non-government organisations, statutory bodies, customers (farmers, crofters, and land managers) and rural communities.'

More detail on this broad engagement is provided within the accompanying consultation statement: www.gov.scot/publications/rural-support-plan-rsp-consultation-statement

In relation to developments within rural support policy following the publication of the Rural Support Plan, the plan covers a five-year period and includes the Agricultural Reform Route Map. We have delivered what we set out for 2026 and are continuing to prepare for what we set out for 2027 and beyond. We will, of course, continue to update and publish the Route Map as more detail emerges from agricultural reform and this will be reflected in subsequent Rural Support Plan amendments.

I am happy to discuss these areas further when providing closing evidence at the Rural Affairs Committee inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

JIM FAIRLIE