Dear Edward,

**National Council of Rural Advisers**

In a Parliamentary debate on 19 January on the future of funding for rural development, Parliament agreed an amendment which called on Ministers “to establish an independent group involving relevant stakeholders to provide advice as to the principles and policies that should underpin options for appropriate rural support beyond 2020”.

As you know in that debate there was cross party agreement that public funding for rural development was critical in terms of driving the rural economy as well as protecting and enhancing the natural environment. MSPs were also clear that any mechanisms put in place to support rural development need to stem from an agreed set of principles that are focused on growing the rural economy.

To this end I launched the National Council of Rural Advisers on 22\textsuperscript{nd} June. The Council’s remit is to:

- provide advice on the implications of Scotland potentially leaving Europe as part of the UK (Brexit), and;
- provide advice and recommendations on future rural policy and support that makes best use of our natural resources to drive a vibrant, sustainable, inclusive rural economy.

I have invited Lorne Crerar, who you will know from his role as Chair of HIE and Alison Milne, who is a consultant and farmer to co-chair the Council given their wealth of experience in rural development. I have also appointed individuals with particular expertise in operating or supporting rural businesses. The 4 agriculture champions appointed to further develop the vision for agriculture are included in these appointments.
Overall the Council has a diverse range of members, with the appropriate expertise from across rural Scotland. The other Members of the Council are:

Archie Gibson  David Sulman
James Graham  Sarah Simpson
Alan Laidlaw  Marion McCormack
John Kinnaird  Henry Graham
Jim McLaren  Lynn Mann
Sarah Allison

A webpage has been developed to host the work of the National Council:
www.gov.scot/NationalCouncilofRuralAdvisers

I should add that the National Council will have scope to agree the approach to its work but I anticipate that this will involve a number of work-streams, covering a range of key issues where policy development is required – these will give an opportunity to involve a wider range of stakeholders and individuals with appropriate expertise. I would also expect any relevant existing groups or initiatives (such as the Griggs group on CAP greening) to contribute to the Council’s work.

I envisage the first formal meeting of the Council to take place in September, with an interim report by December and a full report produced with recommendations to be with Ministers by late Spring 2018.

I trust this is helpful

Yours sincerely,

FERGUS EWING