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Dear Stakeholder

## PEATLAND RESTORATION

I am writing to provide an update on Scottish Government's thinking and plans for peatland restoration, both for this year and for future years.

As you will be aware, an application round for new projects would normally be well underway already. However, you will appreciate that in recent months the government's necessary focus has been on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic including, in this sector, the development of guidance to underpin the inclusion of safe resumption of outdoor working in phase one of *Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis*. This focus has interrupted our work in a number of areas, including the launch of a new round of peatland restoration funding this year.

Despite that, given its importance in addressing the climate emergency and biodiversity challenge, and delivering a number of other nature-based solutions to societal challenges, we remain fully committed to peatland restoration - to the ambitions and targets set out in our Climate Change Plan and to the ten year funding package announced in February.

Moreover, the context has evolved significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and we now turn our minds to forging a green recovery. The report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, published on 22 June, has firmly underlined the importance of restoring degraded peatland as a key component of a green economic recovery post-Covid. As well as its contribution to sequestering carbon and to biodiversity, restoring peatlands can also catalyse the creation and development of land-based jobs and skills in rural or remote communities across Scotland. This, in turn, can support ancillary sectors



including hospitality and food which, again, underlines the multiplicity of benefits of this work.

I am therefore very pleased to have recently announced the launch of a new round of applications for peatland restoration projects to take place this year or over coming years. As you may be aware, in this round we are introducing the first of what we expect to be a number of adjustments to the way peatland restoration is managed and funded going forward.

First, to begin streamlining the application and approval process, the national parks will from this year be able to directly approve any applications for projects located in their areas and, as they already have in hand, they will be developing longer-term plans with landowners. Forestry and Land Scotland, which manages Scotland's national forests and land on behalf of Ministers, similarly will be able to proceed directly with funded peatland restoration activity - indeed some is already underway this year. Other projects will continue to be approved by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Second, a number of organisations have highlighted the importance of finding a way to support the planning and delivery of large-scale projects, over multiple years. Such projects offer improved flexibility around planning and delivery and are likely to be of the size needed to deliver the step change in restoration we collectively need to achieve at the landscape scale in the coming years. Whilst detailed applications should be submitted as described above, my officials would be interested to hear directly from organisations who wish to discuss ideas for large-scale, multi-year projects.

Covid-19 will have an unavoidable impact on the restoration we can achieve this year. However, the above measures should help us to re-group and create a pipeline of projects that can be delivered in the coming months and years and put us back on track to meet our ambitious targets.

Looking further ahead, I would like to discuss with all interested organisations how we could further adjust the way we organise and support this important activity within a Scottish Government-led programme. I will therefore shortly convene a virtual peatland summit, later this month or in early September, where we can consider how best to build momentum towards our targets, improve capacity and resilience across the sector, including developing skills and employment opportunities, and foster a sense of shared ownership of this endeavour.

I look forward to your continued support for this important and exciting work, and in the meantime hope you remain safe and well in these uncertain times.



**Roseanna Cunningham**