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3 June 2024

Dear Finlay,

Thank you for your letter of 23 May 2024 relating to the Rural Support Plan in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill.

At Stage 2, I spoke on the content and scrutiny of the Rural Support Plan. As I highlighted to the RAI Committee, I recognise that there is clearly a lot of interest in the scrutiny, content and role of the Rural Support Plan. It is crucial that we do not consider amendments on the rural support plan in isolation but as a coherent whole to ensure the plan can be drafted, delivered and function. This is to ensure that the plan it is able to function now, in this period of transition, and in future, with the framework we are co-developing with stakeholders. At Stage 2, I committed to taking every proposed amendment away for consideration, and to engage collaboratively with members of Parliament and with stakeholders.

Following my most recent round of meetings with RAI Committee members, it is my intention to come back at Stage 3 with an effective framing of the Rural Support Plan's requirements to cover a wide range of issues raised at Stage 2 and, indeed, by stakeholders. I would like to thank you, personally, for meeting me on Wednesday 29 May to discuss amendments, including those on the Rural Support Plan. I welcome that discussion, as well as discussions with other members of the RAI Committee, and I very much hope we can continue to work together to help strengthen and improve the proposals in the Bill in that spirit of collaboration.

Stage 3 is due to be held in Parliament in the coming weeks. The proper convention is for Ministers to lodge amendments in Parliament by the deadline, which I intend to do.

Yours sincerely,

MAIRI GOUGEON

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