

Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

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Rob Gibson, Convenor
Rural Affairs, Environment and Climate Change Committee
Committee Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Rob

Thank you for your letter of 16 July, following the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's evidence session of 24 June on the control of wild geese arising from the Scottish Crofting Federation petition PE1490.

I note the Committee's recommendation that a review of goose management policy should be carried out by an external body. I agree that we would benefit from the transparency and potentially from some fresh thinking that an external review could provide. I do, however, have concerns about the cost of a full policy review carried out by external contractors. Based on the experience of the review in 2010, I expect a similar review now would be likely to cost in excess of £100,000, this of course being money that would be better spent on the ground on goose schemes.

However, as you note in your letter, we had already planned for SNH to carry out a review at this point. Can I suggest therefore that we might obtain the benefits of independent input by asking SNH to continue with this work while also convening an independent panel to consider the output and make recommendations. I would of course ensure that the views of the farming and crofting communities, as well as other interests, were properly represented on any such group and I would be happy to provide the Committee with further details in due course of how a review under these arrangements might operate.

On the general policy, I think it is unlikely that we could support an objective of allowing agriculture to be completely unhindered by geese if that implies 100% compensation to farmers and crofters. It is right that we seek to minimise the impact on farmers and crofters as a result of agricultural damage by the presence of geese, particularly where there is a concentrated local impact, but we cannot undertake to compensate for all losses and to do so has not been the basis for goose schemes for many years.

I would like to make a couple of further observations. First I would like to assure the Committee on the data that is used. Current data from counts and damage monitoring is

used to inform and update policy within local goose management schemes and adaptive management pilots. Local goose management schemes are supported through fortnightly counts when migratory geese are present and adaptive management pilots dealing with resident greylag geese conduct annual counts.

Finally, I agree with you that the lack of a response to our enquiries to other countries has been disappointing. I have no doubt that there are important lessons to learn from the experience of other countries in dealing with these issues while ensuring compatibility with the EU Birds Directive. I will ensure that this point is pursued further in the review.

Kind regards

AILEEN McLEOD