

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment
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Rob Gibson MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee
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Dear Rob

AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS MEDIATION etc.

Thank you for your letter of 28 October.

I spoke to Mr Stoddart that evening to discuss his situation and senior Scottish Government officials met him on 30 October to consider whether there are any practical steps the Government can take to help him over the next few weeks, before his tenancy is due to come to an end.

I appreciate the pressure Mr Stoddart is experiencing and recognise that extending the time scale for him could ease some of that pressure. The other tenants and landlords involved in similar cases have the opportunity to mediate before their tenancies may be due to end in three years' time and we are looking urgently to see if Mr Stoddart's position could be adjusted so that his case can be considered in parallel with those others.

As the Committee will understand, the existence of legal proceedings greatly constrains what I can say about the circumstances of these cases where the proceedings are based on questions of liability arising by virtue of the Remedial Order being outwith the powers of Ministers. The Scottish Government's view is that the Remedial Order is and was within Ministers' powers and the litigation will address that question. Supporting the mediation is my primary priority and none of us should be deflected from that by being drawn into making statements that are properly for that litigation.

Nevertheless, the Government hosted a discussion this morning with a range of stakeholders to discuss the practical steps to help Mr Stoddart and we are exploring these with urgency. As such, I will write to you again later this week with an update on progress.

RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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