

## OPEN LETTER TO SCOTTISH MINISTERS

Mairi McAllan MSP  
Minister for Environment and Land Reform

Mairi Gougeon MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands

Michael Matheson MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport

Lorna Slater MSP  
Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity

Cc:

Mark Ruskell, MSP for Mid-Scotland and Fife  
John Swinney, MSP for Perthshire North  
Jim Fairlie, MSP for Perthshire South and Kinross-shire  
Graeme Dey, MSP for Angus South  
Ariane Burgess, MSP for Highlands & Islands

11<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Dear Scottish Ministers

### **Beaver Policy in a time of Biodiversity and Climate Crisis**

In advance of COP 26, the First Minister wisely called for “*credible action, not face-saving slogans*” (BBC News - 25 October 2021).

The undersigned ask that the same principles are applied to the Scottish Government’s approach to the biodiversity and climate crises, and specifically that ‘credible action’ is urgently taken to address a critical shortcoming in Scottish Government’s current beaver policy.

Since the Eurasian Beaver was declared a European Protected Species in May 2019, over 200 of these biodiversity-boosting animals have been shot under government licence in Tayside. That is over one fifth of Scotland’s total estimated beaver population killed in 24 months – the vast majority of which could have been moved to suitable habitat in other parts of Scotland where their ecosystem engineering would bring multiple environmental benefits to both human and wildlife communities. The failure to consider translocation to new river catchments within Scotland of these hugely popular mammals makes a mockery of the Scottish Government’s ‘face-saving slogan’ that “*lethal control is always a last resort*”.

Last month, in judicial review proceedings brought in the Court of Session by the charity Trees for Life, Lady Carmichael ruled that NatureScot had “erred in law” by issuing licenses to kill beavers without sufficiently explaining why lethal control measures were necessary. Killing such high numbers of a European Protected Species – especially one which brings multiple environmental benefits – is a national embarrassment. The Scottish Government urgently needs to endorse ‘out of range’ translocation in order to avoid such disgracefully high levels of killing in future.

We call for the following specific changes in policy:

1. To lift the *de facto* prohibition against the “out of range” translocation of beavers to suitable new river catchments in Scotland and to financially support such translocation where necessary.

2. To implement a meaningful 'hierarchy of mitigation' for beaver conflict, moving from 'acceptance', through 'mitigation' to 'translocation' and only then (as a genuine last resort) contemplating lethal control.
3. To revoke all existing lethal control licences.
4. To refrain from issuing any new lethal control licences without giving detailed reasons explaining why lesser measures (specifically including translocation to new areas of Scotland) are inappropriate.

Scotland's beavers are a significant ally at a time of climate change – with beaver created wetlands mitigating both drought and downstream flooding, sequestering carbon, improving water quality and creating rich habitat for a wide range of other species. Moving family groups to new river catchments, away from conflict sites in low-lying agricultural areas, would be a win for beavers and farmers, a win for the wider environment and a win for Scotland's people.

An announcement of this change in beaver management policy in the wake of COP26 would be well-timed, publicly popular and send a message that the Scottish Government really takes the biodiversity and climate crises seriously.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Bantick OBE  
Gordon Buchanan  
Professor Roger Crofts, CBE  
Jim Crumley  
Roy Dennis  
Professor Alastair Driver  
Holly Gillibrand  
Professor James Hunter  
Sir John Lister Kaye, OBE  
Professor Fiona Mathews  
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