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Ms Jo Swinson MP
House Of Commons
LONDON
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Dear Jo

Thank you for your letter of 5 February, on behalf of your constituents, about Scotland's environmental policy.

The Scottish Government recognises that Climate Change is one of the defining challenges of our time. Scotland is widely recognised as an international leader in the fight against climate change, and has already succeeded in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 49% since 1990.

The Scottish Government has introduced a Climate Change Bill to the Scottish Parliament to raise Scotland's long term ambition in reducing emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report, published last year, says that the world needs to be carbon-neutral by the middle of the century and with the proposals set out in our Bill, this is exactly where Scotland will be.

On the specific queries raised by your constituents:

Ocean Plastic

The Scottish Government recognises that marine litter is an important national and international problem and we are introducing policy and legislation to help protect our seas. We have prioritised actions in our Programme for Government to demonstrate our commitment to this issue and we are currently leading the UK in tackling marine litter pollution.

We have a Marine Litter Strategy with over 40 action points which aim to reduce the amount of litter entering our waters. These cover improving the attitude and behaviour of people and businesses, reducing litter sources, improving how we monitor and respond to the problem,

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making sure that what we do makes a difference, and working with other countries to tackle this global problem.

We also have many initiatives to reduce the amount of litter entering our seas, and fund organisations which educate members of the public, organise beach litter cleans and promote the safe-disposal of marine litter. Examples include:

- Supporting KIMO's project 'fishing for litter', which helps fishermen remove and bring ashore litter that they catch in their nets. 18 harbours are now part of this scheme and have removed 1262 tonnes since 2005;
- Supporting KIMO's 'pick up 3 pieces' project, which encourages beach visitors to take 3 pieces of litter with them when they leave; and
- Funding of Local Coastal Partnerships around our coastline which all have a role to play in supporting beach cleans and other efforts to reduce marine litter.

We are also working with industry to reduce loss of pre-production plastics into the environment. The recently announced innovation fund will invest up to £1 million in projects which explore innovative solutions in marine plastics capture, collection and recovery. We recently brought in a new law which means that nobody will be allowed to make or sell rinse-off personal care products which have plastic microbeads in them. We are also the first in the UK to propose banning the sale and manufacture of plastic-stemmed cotton buds. We held a public consultation between April and June 2018 on this proposal and the subsequent legislative procedures have begun.

Reusing and recycling is key to reducing the levels of litter in our seas. At the moment there are very few ways of removing the litter that is already in the sea, but one thing that we can all do is remove the litter that arrives on our beaches to stop it going back out to sea. If your constituents are interested in taking part in a beach clean, there are many groups that can organise that, including Marine Conservation Society; they can see www.mcsuk.org for details.

Air Quality

The Scottish Government is committed to improving air quality across the country. We have seen significant reductions in pollution emissions over recent decades through tighter industrial regulation, improved fuel quality, cleaner vehicles and an increased focus on sustainable transport. In 2017 air quality monitoring data confirmed that air pollution levels are continuing to decline across Scotland, including the main urban areas. Although a few hotspots of poorer air quality remain in some Scottish cities and towns, we are working with local authorities and other partners to address these as soon as possible. Scotland's first Low Emission Zone (LEZ) became operational in Glasgow on the 31 December 2018 and further LEZs will be introduced in Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh in due course.

In November 2015 the Scottish Government published Cleaner Air for Scotland – The Road to a Healthier Future. It is Scotland's first separate air quality strategy and sets out how the Scottish Government and partner organisations plan to deliver further improvements to air quality over the coming years. To build on this, on 6 November 2018, I announced that Professor Campbell Gemmill will chair an independent review of Scotland's air quality strategy. The review will explore the progress and impact of Scotland's previous air quality

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strategy, assessing progress to date and make recommendations for future priorities. This will be completed by autumn 2019.

Protecting natural habitats

The protection of Scotland's biodiversity is a key priority for the Scottish Government and we are committed to doing more to safeguard our biodiversity, species and habitats. We have set out these ambitions in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity. This report can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/2020-challenge-scotlands-biodiversity-strategy-conservation-enhancement-biodiversity-scotland/>

We deliver much of the operational activity to achieve the outcomes we are looking for through our public bodies, particularly Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). For example, we announced the Biodiversity Challenge Fund in the 2019 Programme for Government. Through this new fund, SNH will invest up to £2 million for projects that create and improve habitats for key species, and where appropriate, encourage increased access to nature. This will enable targeted action for priority habitats and species, and to accelerate efforts that will help Scotland meet its international biodiversity commitments. The priorities for the Fund will be reduction of habitat loss; sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and forestry; action to tackle invasive alien species; and ecosystems vulnerable to climate change. These priorities are designed to address the areas where Scotland is at risk of falling short of meeting internationally agreed targets unless we focus action.

Forestry in Scotland has been a significant success story over the last one hundred years and with the continued collaboration between the Scottish Government, the forestry sector and others, the new Scottish Forestry Strategy will help to ensure that it will continue to grow and succeed over the next 100 years.

The new Forestry strategy re-iterates our commitment to the principle of planting the right tree, in the right place, for the right purpose. This will ensure that we create a range of suitable woodland types, using a range of native and other tree species for a range of purposes including timber production. The Scottish Government also has ambitions for the expansion of forest cover from 18% to 21% of Scottish land area by 2032. This is included in the Climate Change Plan, published in 2018, which also explains how we will meet this target by planting 10,000 hectares of woodland every year by 2025.

I hope this is helpful in responding to your constituents



Roseanna Cunningham

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