



Dear Roseanna Cunningham MSP,

We write this joint letter to you today to seek information regarding the Government's plans for the Scottish countryside and to express some shared concerns at potential impacts to Scotland's celebrated landscapes if land use policy is not sufficiently joined together.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association and Mountaineering Scotland, in representing our respective memberships, do not agree on all matters. There is a respect, however, for differing views and a shared passionate and common interest in the landscape of Scotland. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland's opinions are shaped by the enjoyment derived by its members from Scotland's varied and unique landscapes while the SGA's views are shaped by the land as a working canvas which also provides homes and livelihoods.

Our joint concerns are perhaps best understood in the context of the uplands. Since 2000, Scottish administrations have published detailed Forestry strategies as national vision documents guiding forestry activity. These are reviewed and regularly assessed against targets. Scottish Government has a target of increasing forest cover in Scotland from 17 per cent to 25 per cent by the year 2050 and has pledged to plant 10 000 hectares per year until 2022. There are discussions regarding the quickening of planning approval for new planting and a new £6.5m grant scheme was announced recently to provide confidence within the productive conifer industry.

Neither the SGA or Mountaineering Scotland opposes well sited, planned tree planting and agree there is more room within the landscape for trees.

Our concern is whether adequate weight is being given to the significant changes this will have on the landscape of Scotland and in particular the dramatic open views and vistas which have come to signify to the outside world that which is unique about our country.

While Scotland's open landscapes and upland moors are classed as rare in global terms, there is currently no policy position safeguarding them. Some areas are designated as of special ecological or scenic interest but most are unprotected and disregarded. We welcome Scottish Natural Heritage's work on scoping a strategic vision for the uplands since, in the absence of such a vision and the strategy to make it happen, key areas can be lost to agriculture, energy and afforestation with insufficient attention to what is being given up.

Until a vision and strategy for Scotland's uplands is in place, there is an obvious failure to join up what is required from the land to meet forestry targets and what we might want to keep in terms of internationally rare and valuable landscapes and ecosystems.

We would appreciate it if the Scottish Government could share its thinking on the relative value placed on woodland and moorland and how, pending the development of an uplands strategy, decision-makers can best ensure that forestry expansion does not jeopardise our globally distinctive open moorland habitats and landscapes.

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss this further with you, preferably in a meeting, and pledge our organisations' support as interested stakeholders in helping develop a strategic vision and plan for Scotland's uplands.

Yours.

Mike Watson, President, Mountaineering Scotland.

Alex Hogg, Chairman, The Scottish Gamekeepers Association.