

21 September 2020

First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH3 3DG

Dear First Minister

### **Covid -19 – Access to the outdoors**

I write following your announcement on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September which suggested that more national restrictions would have to be considered in response to the rise in Coronavirus cases over recent weeks. We are seeking reassurances that in taking the steps necessary to protect public health, the Scottish Government will ensure that the public will still be able to travel to exercise their right of responsible access to the outdoors, and enjoy the physical and mental benefit this brings.

Mountaineering Scotland is the national representative body for climbers, hillwalkers and ski tourers and the governing body for competitive climbing, representing almost 15,000 members from all across Scotland. We would like to assure you that our organisation, and our members, have helped play their part in tackling the challenges we have faced in response to Covid – 19. As well as providing detailed guidance to climbers and hillwalkers at each phase in our exit from lockdown, we have also been working to promote responsible access in response to the increased interest we have seen in outdoor recreation and domestic tourism over the summer.

We share your concern about the risks the current situation poses to individuals and communities across Scotland, and are committed to continuing to play our part in helping to address them. Mountaineering Scotland welcomed the early recognition from the Government and Public Health Scotland that outdoor activities present a relatively low risk in the transmission of the virus, and as a result were included in the first phase in exit from lockdown. We are currently unaware of any recorded cases of transmission which are linked to outdoor activity or exercise.

We acknowledge the need for local and more targeted restrictions to limit the spread of the virus where necessary. As further measures are considered, we believe it is important that where the risk of transmission is low people should continue to be able to travel out with their local area for leisure and recreation. It has become evident over the last few months that outdoor recreation has played an important role in the health and wellbeing of not just our members, but people from all over Scotland.

We hope the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland will avoid the need for any nationally imposed travel restrictions which would have a negative impact on the ability of people to exercise

their right of responsible access to the outdoors beyond their local area. We would be grateful for your assurances this will not be the case?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stuart Younie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'S'.

Stuart Younie

Chief Executive Officer

CC. Joe Fitzpatrick MSP, Minister for Sport, Health and Wellbeing  
Angela Leitch, Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland