

Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy

5 August 2021

Dear Ms Forbes,

Advisory Council on Economic Transformation; preparation of strategy for economic transformation

We write with reference to your announcement on 9 July of the appointment of a new Advisory Council to help shape a 10 year National Strategy which will “drive Scotland’s economic transformation as the country recovers from Coronavirus and transitions to a net zero economy”.

We are pleased that the Scottish Government has committed to create this new strategy but we are deeply concerned that there is no-one on the Council with a background in the environmental movement nor anyone who will speak from a climate change or biodiversity perspective with a track record of insisting that the priority for economic policy has to be to keep to (or get back within) planetary limits.

The public call for a new economic strategy which keeps within planetary limits originated from the environmental movement and it was adopted in the 2021 manifesto asks of Scottish Environment LINK and the Just Transition Partnership. Its central motivation was that neither the current strategy nor its updates address the economic changes needed to meet Scotland’s climate change targets; it was also motivated by concerns about unsustainable levels of material consumption and the lack of progress on protecting biodiversity; and about its ineffectiveness in promoting social inclusion and addressing generic problems in the Scottish economy.

It is our considered view that any review of economic strategy must have at its core the requirements to decarbonise and to restore nature at a scale and pace necessary to meet our statutory targets and to end Scotland’s contribution to climate change (and not at the expense of increased emissions in other countries). We have become familiar with vaguer phrases about creating, for example, ‘good green jobs’ or a ‘sustainable economy’ which do not enshrine these outcomes as an imperative. They may give rise to some specific initiatives but they also allow most of the economy to continue as usual, hence our desire to see tighter wording than that used in the announcement.

Something as influential as a 10 year economic strategy, at this point in the climate emergency, warrants the most substantial of consultations and engagement with those most affected, including those suffering economically from the pandemic and those affected by the climate and nature crises. This will not be fulfilled by the current call for views ending on 27 August so we are seeking reassurance that the draft strategy will be subject to comprehensive consultation; and that the environmental effects of the draft will be clearly set out. Commitment to participation in policy making has been a repeated claim by the Scottish Government so we look forward to seeing an expanded engagement with specialist groups and stakeholder public interests.

For all of these reasons we are asking you to:

- seek to add to the Advisory Council’s membership at least two people with a strong environmental and climate change background;
- place the economic pathway to meeting our ambitious statutory climate change targets through a just transition into the remit of the Council and at the core of the new strategy;
- arrange for a presentation of these issues to one of the Council’s meetings, hearing from the expertise in the environmental movement;
- ensure that the voices of people who have suffered economically as a result of the pandemic have a place on the work of this crucial group.

We are keen to contribute to the work of creating a strategy for economic transformation which is fit for the challenges of the 21st century and we are seeking a meeting with you to discuss these points.

Yours truly

Mary Church, Friends of the Earth Scotland
Dr. Phoebe Cochrane, Scottish Environment LINK Economics Group
Aedan Smith, RSPB Scotland
Chris Tuckett, Marine Conservation Society
Catherine Gunby, Fidra
John Thomson, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Beryl Leatherland, Scottish Wild Land Group
Denis Mollison, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
Catherine Gee, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Fabrice Leveque, WWF Scotland

(Reply to Matthew Crighton, Sustainable Economy Adviser, Friends of the Earth Scotland
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