

## Open Letter to Jim Fairlie, Scottish Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Dear Minister,

Firstly, I'd like to wish you and your team a very happy new year, and express how much we value the constructive interactions we've had in 2025. Now that you are rolling up your sleeves to get 2026 tasks done before the election in the spring I'd like to bring to your attention the asks on behalf of NSA Scotland.

You will be well aware of the importance of continued farm support and the need to have ring fenced multiyear farm settlement to increase at the very least by the same percentage as the increase in the block grant from UK treasury. Such guaranteed support is critical in underpinning business confidence as farming undergoes a just transition.

### White Tailed Sea Eagles

Our members who are affected, urgently need to know what future plans are for the Sea Eagle management scheme and how the budget affects them. We welcome the continuation of enhanced shepherding initiatives, but practical and economic realities cannot be ignored. The scheme is not cost-effective, and the industry already faces a shortage of skilled staff. Funding is appreciated, but sustainability remains questionable. We believe these measures could play a valuable role in wider environmental schemes, particularly where shepherds could contribute to monitoring programmes and biodiversity data collection, provided they are designed with sustainability and value for money in mind. However hard, difficult decisions will need to be made, and after all other reasonable options have been tried, lethal control may be required in some isolated cases for the survival of businesses plagued by rogue birds.

### Grants and Support

As there is no alternative for the moment LFA and SUSSS are vital to help keep sheep in the less favoured areas of Scotland. The Farming and Food Infrastructure Scheme (FFIS) injected £21 million into Scottish agriculture, yet lacked transparency. Understanding how many farmers benefited would be invaluable. While the 100% grant rate may have been overly generous, it was transformative for some businesses. The scheme offered valuable learning opportunities. We strongly advocate for future investment to maintain momentum and confidence in the sector.

### National Flock and Market Conditions

Sheep numbers are contracting, driven by economic pressures, tree planting, rewilding and predation. If this trend continues, UK production could fall short by 37,000 tonnes

by 2030. Marginal land is better utilised for grazing, and sheep remain a cost-effective option. With markets currently strong, we must prioritise investment, domestic consumption, and export growth. The national flock should not decline, but increase when conditions are now so favourable and meet their potential for this economic growth for the future.

### Additional Pressures

Inheritance tax changes due in April threaten livelihoods and family farms. Furthermore, proposed FSA charging reforms for smaller abattoirs risk undermining local supply chains. Without these facilities, many Scottish producers will struggle to operate. We also call for greater integration and support for new entrants to ensure generational renewal.

### 2026 and Beyond

NSA Scotland believes its members would benefit from the following actions:

- Provide assurances on a multiyear ringfenced farm settlement
- Review the viability and sustainability of enhanced shepherding schemes.
- Commit to transparent, well-targeted future investment in agriculture.
- Support measures to maintain and grow the national flock.
- Address policy changes that jeopardise farm succession and local processing infrastructure.

This new year offers an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and vision for Scotland's rural economy. We look forward to working with you to ensure that sheep and agriculture remains a cornerstone of Scotland's prosperity.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Myles

NSA Scotland Chair  
National Sheep Association