

Rt Hon David Miliband MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
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7 August 2006

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to raise concerns about alleged cuts of up to £200m from Defra's budget. Collectively, Wildlife and Countryside Link's members have the support of approximately 8.4 million people in the UK. We are alarmed that budgets appear to be being cut in such a drastic way, and have written in similar terms to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We are seriously worried that the budget of Natural England has been cut before the organisation has even been formally established and support the assertion of Sir Martin Doughty, the new Chairman of Natural England, that "*the scale of these cuts risks the wheels coming off the organisation even before it reaches October's launchpad*". This organisation should be 'delivering more than the sum of its parts' from early on, and these cuts make that far less likely.

The Government has made significant advances towards more environmentally sustainable agriculture support, particularly through the agri-environment schemes. We are troubled by cuts to the funding of these schemes. Adequate funding of the higher-level Environmental Stewardship scheme is essential if Government commitments to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) are to be met, in terms of species and habitats. The scheme is also vital to ensure management and enhancement of traditional agricultural landscapes, their character, and their historic and archaeological features. Furthermore, despite recent progress, the delivery of well established Public Service Agreement targets for farmland birds and Sites of Special Scientific Interest will be jeopardised without adequate levels of funding. It is also the means by which wider public benefits, such as an attractive countryside available to all, can be delivered.

In the run-up to the Comprehensive Spending Review, and in the light of the current stringent financial climate, we urge you to promote increased investment in the environment. Such investment will be essential not only to stay on track to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, but also to continue to reap the considerable rewards of the essential ecosystem services which healthy biodiversity provides. Furthermore, well managed traditional farmed landscapes make a considerable contribution to national



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"Bringing voluntary organisations in the UK together to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside"

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and international tourism in England, and to the quality of life of everyone who visits, works or lives in the countryside.

These cuts are being made against a backdrop of increasing public concern about the environment and climate change. The recent heatwave and drought have brought home to people the need to invest more, not less, in our environmental future.

We look to you and your Department to provide leadership across government on this issue, and hope that you will focus on the long-term benefits of investing in a healthy and thriving natural environment for all.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executives of Environmental NGOs

Arlin Rickard
Director, Association of Rivers Trusts

Amy Coyte
Chief Executive, Bat Conservation Trust

Matt Shardlow
Director, Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust

Martin Warren
Chief Executive, Butterfly Conservation

Mike Heyworth
Director, Council for British Archaeology

Kathy Moore
Chief Executive, Council for National Parks

Tony Juniper
Executive Director, Friends of the Earth

Simon Reddy
Director, Policy & Solutions, Greenpeace UK

Linda Bennett
Director, The Hawk and Owl Trust

Dr Tony Gent
Chief Executive Officer, The Herpetological Conservation Trust

Robbie Marsland
UK Director, IFAW

Sam Fanshawe
Director of Conservation, Marine Conservation Society

Tony Burton
Director of Policy and Strategy, National Trust

Kate Ashbrook
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Dr Steve Head
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Christine Elliott
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Mark Avery
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Ali Hood
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John Everitt
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Mark Simmonds
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Dr Glyn Davies
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