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From Rory Stewart OBE MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter of 7 January on behalf of a number of your constituents about the EU nature directives review.

I would like to reassure your constituents that I share their beliefs that the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives have a crucial role to play in protecting biodiversity in the UK and the EU and that I am also well aware of the strength of support for the Directives from the UK public. As your constituents are aware, the European Commission is undertaking a review of the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This is part of a wider exercise the European Commission is carrying out which is assessing European legislation in many areas. Reviewing a policy is an essential part of the process of ensuring that it is working properly and effectively.

The fitness check of the EU Nature Directives was discussed at a meeting of EU Environment Ministers in Brussels on 16 December 2015. Member States noted the importance of the EU Nature Directives and the need to retain them in their current form to provide certainty and avoid any diminishing of standards. On behalf of the UK I raised concerns over the implementation of the Nature Directives but concluded that the best way to address these would not be through reopening the Directives themselves, but instead through looking at much better approaches to implementation. We now await the publication of the Commission's fitness check which is expected later in the spring.

I hope that this provides you with the information that you require to respond to the questions raised by your constituents.

RORY STEWART