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Improving Soil Health in the UK

Response 2: Scottish
Government, Directorate for
Environment and Forestry



AMI Team
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Dear AMI Team,

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 February 2026 to Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, in relation to soil health in Scotland. As an official within the team responsible for soils in the Scottish Government, I have been asked to reply.

Healthy soils are recognised as a vital natural asset in Scotland, underpinning ecosystems, agriculture, wider environmental quality and our adaptation to climate change. Soil health is embedded across key Scottish Government strategies, including our Climate Change Plan, our National Adaptation Plan, our Vision for Agriculture, National Planning Framework 4 and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045.

The recommendations in your report broadly align with existing Scottish Government priorities on soil health. In particular, we recognise the importance of a shared, operational definition of healthy soil, supported by agreed soil health indicators that capture biological attributes, and of management practices that sustain soil functions and contribute to net zero. While the biological and microbial dimensions of soil health are increasingly recognised, we acknowledge that further work is needed to build the evidence base and practical tools required to embed these aspects more fully and systematically in policy development, monitoring arrangements and the advice provided to land managers and other stakeholders.

In 2024, we commissioned ClimateXChange to produce a Soils Route Map for Scotland, which offers strategic recommendations to strengthen soil policy development, delivery, monitoring and the supporting evidence base. This work supports our strategic direction by identifying key areas for improvement and alignment, helping to ensure that our policies effectively promote sustainable soil

management and ecosystem health. ClimateXChange is now taking forward phase 2 of the Route Map, which will explore in more detail how these recommendations can be implemented in practice.

Through the Scottish Government's Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Strategic Research Programme we are also funding work at the James Hutton Institute on "Healthy soils for a Green Recovery". This project, which will complete in 2027, is delivering data that is underpinning significant advances in our scientific understanding of soil function and the complex role that soil has in contributing to ecosystem services.

Thank you again for sharing your report and Executive Summary. We appreciate the opportunity to consider your findings as part of our ongoing work on soils policy.

Yours sincerely

Claire McFadden
ND : Peatland Unit