Dear Maureen,

PUBLIC SERVICES REFORM (SCOTLAND) BILL

I am writing to expand on and clarify a point that was raised during my discussions with your Committee at its meeting on 16 September.

In response to a question from John Scott about the order-making powers in the Bill, I said that I had no plans to make use of the power in relation to the public bodies for which I am responsible (see the Official Report for 16 September 2009, col 1943). That remains true, in that as Environment Minister I have no other specific proposals of that kind.

As your Committee may know from the evidence submitted to the Finance Committee, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has developed proposals to reform its current Regional Board structure and to replace it with more flexible and responsive arrangements for ensuring local engagement. The Scottish Government supports these proposals as an important element of SEPA's work to improve its customer focus. Implementing these proposals would require a minor change to the primary legislation in the Environment Act 1995, and the order-making powers in the Bill once it has passed onto the statute book could provide a suitable vehicle for making this change in due course.

/.../
I hope this clarification is helpful to your Committee. I am copying this letter to Andrew Welsh as Convenor of the Finance Committee, for his Committee's interest as the lead Committee considering the Public Services Reform Bill.

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