Dear Minister

We are writing this open letter to ask you to honour the undertaking that the First Minister gave to Linda Holt at the Scottish Cabinet's public meeting in Cupar on July 6th.

Linda asked the Cabinet to hold a summit for communities and organisations which welcome the UK Government's new proposals on wind subsidies and planning along the lines of the summit which you organised for over 200 members of the wind industry in Glasgow on July 9th.

The First Minister made a point of responding personally to Linda's request. She stressed that "we'll meet and discuss with both sides of any issue ... we take great care to listen to both sides of any issue". She added that if Linda left her details, she would make sure you contacted her and that you would be "happy to hear [our] particular perspectives on these things just as [you] ... will hear the perspective of business and developers" in Glasgow (from 1:04:10 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yci5lHUZncA). Linda left her contact details and awaits a response.

The reason for holding a summit for communities, organisations and businesses adversely affected by wind development is basic fairness. Any failure of the Scottish Government to meet in the very near future groups with opposing views would be seen as highly undemocratic and not in keeping with Scottish Planning Policy.

Listening - and being seen to listen - only to those who make their living from an extremely generous system of public subsidy cannot be right, and will give rise to the impression that government policy is skewed in their favour.

Many of these individuals do not live in the places which are forced to host wind farms and which are subject to endless speculative applications, while the wind developers they work for are rarely Scottish-owned, and this causes more resentment. Those companies and individuals who profit from wind development will inevitably present a one-sided picture which obscures the economic and social costs all stages of these developments create.

One example will have to suffice. The media reports of your recent summit with the wind industry contain a claim from Jenny Hogan of Scottish Renewables, the trade organisation which lobbies for the Scottish wind industry, that closing the Renewable Obligation (RO) will cost 3000 jobs and £3 billion in investment. This cannot be true.
The RO was always going to close in 2017 as it is being replaced by a new system of subsidy, Contracts for Difference (CfD), so all the industry is losing is one year’s worth of RO-qualifying projects. The industry must already have had longer term planning in place for the switch to price-competitive CfDs, and in any case the Conservative promise to cut subsidies after the election was heavily trailed for two years.

The vast majority of these jobs are in planning, development and construction, so by their nature are not permanent (unless one assumes there would never be an end or a slowdown to building onshore wind farms). Signs such as the 2020 100% renewable energy target being met, growing opposition to the encroachment of turbines on valued landscapes and communities and the unsustainability of electricity consumers funding ever-rising subsidies gave wind developers ample opportunity to adjust their business planning. The first CfD auction confirmed that costs have come down and the support of ROCs is no longer necessary.

As for the £3 billion in promised investment, the bulk of this would have been spent abroad on the hardware for wind farms, with no benefit to the Scottish economy.

Both figures also suffer from ambiguity - do they represent losses of actual jobs and definite investment or merely the most optimistic numbers in the industry's forecasts?

The larger problem with the information put out by Scottish Renewables is that it is not independent. Even when it is collected by so-called independent consultants, it is commissioned, paid for and influenced by Scottish Renewables.

Claims about losses incurred by closing the RO early have to be balanced by information about the losses caused by continuing subsidised wind farm development. These include economic losses such as increased electricity costs for families, businesses, schools and hospitals; damage to tourism; loss in residential property value; planning blight. But they also include non-monetary things such as the loss of cherished landscapes, peatlands, animal habitats, birds and bats, and of course, residential amenity, quality of life and sometimes even health for wind turbine neighbours.

It is crucial that the Scottish Government takes equal cognisance of the other side of the argument about wind. A useful start would be a summit for those in communities, businesses and NGOs who have direct experience and knowledge of the adverse impacts of wind energy policy in Scotland. As Minister for Energy, you represent Scotland and speak for the whole country, not just the wind industry and its associates.

Applications for turbines and associated infrastructure have attracted over 50,000 separate objections from individuals in the last few years. Opposition to new wind development grows year on year. It is the reason why so many community and regional groups have come into being, and why Scotland Against Spin, an alliance of almost five thousand individuals, was formed to campaign on a national level. Don’t all these Scottish people and groups deserve an opportunity to make their case that the UK government's reforms to wind policy are pro-business and pro-communities?

Yours sincerely
SCOTLAND AGAINST SPIN

Graham Lang
and the following:

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL SCOTLAND
SCOTTISH WILD LANDS GROUP
SCOTTISH CAMPAIGN FOR NATIONAL PARKS
LOCH OF SHINING WATERS
BORDERS NETWORK CONSERVATION GROUP
SUSTAINABLE SHETLAND
KIRKMAHOE AGAINST PYLONS
COCKSBURNPATH CONSERVATION GROUP
CLATTO LANDSCAPE PROTECTION GROUP
AUCHTERMUCHTY LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP
KENLY LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP
STOP PROLIFERATION OF TURBINES
CERES AND DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT AND AMENITY PROTECTION GROUP
SAVE CARNBEE AND ARNCROACH LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT
ANGUS COMMUNITIES WINDFARM ACTION GROUP
TW312
AIRRIEQUHILLART WINDFARM PROTEST
SAVE WIGTOWN BAY
GALLOWAY LANDSCAPE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY
KEEP RANNOCH WILD
CAITHNESS WIND FARM INFORMATION FORUM
SAVE STRAITON FOR SCOTLAND
SAVE OUR REGIONAL PARK
LAUDERDALE PRESERVATION GROUP
PENICUIK ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ASSOCIATION
STANDINGFAULD ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GROUP
SAY NO TO STRATHALLAN WIND FARM
BORDERS NETWORK CONSERVATION GROUP
HERMITAGE ACTION GROUP
THE BERWICKSHIRE CIVIC SOCIETY
THE LAMMERMUIR PROTECTION SOCIETY
THE LAMMERMUIR COMMUNITY COUNCIL
SAY NO TO FALLAGO
MINTO HILLS CONSERVATION GROUP
DULATER HILL WIND FARM ACTION GROUP
FRIENDS OF BACKWATER
GLENISLA AGAINST TURBINES