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Dean Lockhart MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
c/o Clerk to the Committee

26 May 2022

Dear Convener,

I refer to your letter of 5 May regarding the independent monitoring of satellite tags fitted to raptors and your Committee's consideration of a petition in this regard.

You asked about both the robustness of data collected and the sharing thereof by license holders and that since changes to protocols were implemented in 2021.

Since the Scottish Government published our response to the report by the independent Grouse Moor Management Review Group on 26 November 2020, NatureScot have made changes to the data they collect from licence holders on satellite tags. They have done so by introducing three new conditions to the licences which are issued to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and which permit some licence holders to tag wild birds.

Those changes include new conditions to facilitate information sharing with the police should a satellite tag stop working in suspicious circumstances; mandate quarterly updates from the BTO to NatureScot on all active tagging projects; and require the BTO to provide a more detailed annual update on the status of all tagging projects, the first of which is due this September.

I am aware that there have been some challenges faced by the BTO in providing those quarterly updates and NatureScot have been actively engaging with them on this. The first quarterly update was received in April 2022 and I firmly expect those updates to continue. I have been assured by NatureScot that the information they are receiving is of a sufficient level so as to provide a good understanding of the satellite tagging undertaken by the BTO across Scotland.

As I have outlined above, the first annual update from the BTO is due later this year, and it would therefore not be possible to assess the effectiveness of that process at this stage. However, I am pleased by the progress that has been made thus far in improving

the robustness of data collected and that as the sharing of data by licence holders continues this will support Police Scotland in their investigations.

MAIRI MCALLAN