**FOOD & AGRICULTURE STAKEHOLDERS’ TASKFORCE (FAST)**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**16.11.22**

**FAST calls for urgent co-design commitment**

**from Scottish Government**

The recently-established Food & Agriculture Stakeholders’ Taskforce (FAST) today challenged the Scottish Government to take urgent steps to include the farming industry in the co-design of future agriculture policy.

During a seminar at AgriScot, FAST representative, Doug Bell, called on Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, to clarify her co-design plans, ahead the closing of the Agriculture Bill consultation early next month.

Mr Bell, Managing Director of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, was speaking on behalf of FAST, an independent group of 19 organisations which represent agriculture and food production in Scotland.

Mr Bell said: “FAST is a dynamic taskforce of people with experience, grass-roots knowledge and an ardent drive to protect and promote Scotland’s agricultural and food production into the future.

“As a collective we want to work constructively with Scottish Government as it sets Scotland’s future agricultural policy. Ministers continue to propose that it is essential that the industry is central to the co-design and co-development process.

“It is now a critical time to get the policy right and we are keen to ensure FAST is part of that co-design process. It is vital to avoid the impact of an Agriculture Bill and secondary legislation which generates unintended consequences for the industry and the country.”

FAST is comprised of senior representatives of Scotland’s key organisations in farming, crofting and primary food production. The group was formed to constructively move forward the dialogue in response to an evident lack of vision, dialogue and detail being seen in the run up to and during the consultation on the new Agriculture Bill, which closes on 5th December.

Mr Bell added: “The members of each of our organisations – from livestock producers to arable growers and crofters - desperately need to understand where policy is going.

“We need to know what Scottish Government plans to do with the powers granted by the consultation, what this will mean at grassroots level and how farmers, crofters and others in the supply chain can work effectively to secure the future of their businesses. FAST is willing and keen to work with Scottish Government to ensure this is clearly defined.”

FAST will be inviting the Cabinet Secretary to meet with the group as soon as possible.

The purpose of this meeting will be to share its insights and vision for the most productive direction for policy that advances food security, food production, the environment and the country’s agricultural supply chain, as well as the industry’s significant contribution to the Scottish economy and rural communities across Scotland.

**/ENDS**

**Editor’s Notes:**

* FAST members:
* Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)
* Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS)
* National Beef Association (NBA)
* National Sheep Association Scotland (NSA Scotland)
* NFU Scotland (NFUS)
* Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)
* Ringlink (Scotland)
* Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland (RHASS)
* Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RSABI)
* Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society Ltd (SAOS)
* Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers (SAMW)
* Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC)
* Scottish Beef Association (SBA)
* Scottish Craft Butchers
* Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF)
* Scottish Land & Estates (SLE)
* Scottish Pig Producers (SPP)
* Scottish Quality Crops (SQC)
* Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA)