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Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
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6 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of the National Rural Crime Network, representing over 30 Police and Crime Commissioners from all parties, as well as various groups ranging from Crimestoppers to Countryside Alliance and National Farmers Union to Neighbourhood Watch.

We are collectively very concerned at the impact Covid-19 could have on already vulnerable rural communities, as well as the rural economy more widely. We have seen time and again that rurality is not considered in the course of policy development, not least via our bi-annual rural policing surveys, research into domestic abuse and analysis of government funding.

Some of the issues of concern have already, helpfully, been well covered by the media, for example the exodus of metropolitan areas to more rural areas – both permanently, for example to holiday homes, and temporarily, for example with day-trippers.

This has huge risks for spreading the virus to people who are already much more likely to be in the government cohort of 'vulnerable' and into communities that do not have the infrastructure to support the government response as currently underway, because of the aforementioned lopsided approach to policy development and funding.

Our concerns also spread into the following:

- **Continued use of Rights of Way**, which anecdotally we know are still being used by large numbers of people. We don't necessarily propose they should all be closed, but there should at least an awareness campaign so those using them are aware they are on land of someone who could be self-isolating and consideration of whether their journey across the land is essential. It should also be considered whether landowners should have the right to temporarily close these Rights of Way if that landowner is being shielded for medical reasons.

- **Increasing feedback from the rural community that criminals are capitalising on police attention being diverted to target rural businesses** via the rural road network, and concerns that risk only grows regarding supply issues i.e. wildlife (poaching) and livestock theft. We know these issues are underreported compared to 'urban' crime, and not recorded well when reported, so we would appreciate this matter being kept under review regardless of crime statistics.
- **The viability of rural businesses and food security more generally.** This isn't the bailiwick of the National Rural Crime Network per se, but is of significant enough concern that we need to raise it with you. We haven't seen any specific measures that cater for rural businesses going through unprecedented times. There will be organisational memory of the foot and mouth outbreak, and a similar level of support needs to be provided now.
- **Increases in domestic abuse should be expected.** Again, this affects rural and urban people alike, but our report last year, ['Captive and Controlled'](#) - outlines the additional vulnerability of rural victims of domestic abuse, and their increased harm and risk they endure or carry. There are well-founded concerns across the Violence Against Women and Girls sector that family isolation will significantly increase the rates of domestic abuse, and so this is a particular concern to us now knowing women in rural areas are at additional risk, yet are harder to identify and support. Any support needs to consider urgent accommodation needs, which are almost always based in urban centres, and are often totally inappropriate for rural victims.
- **The closure of waste and recycling centres** will inevitably, in our opinion, drive even greater criminality in the waste sector, including fly-tipping. Whilst this might apply equally to urban and rural alike, the difference is that the cost is directly picked up by the landowner in rural cases, impacting them to a much greater degree. The closures of these centres needs to be revisited in our opinion, not least because fly-tipping came as the number one issue of concern to rural areas in our survey of 20,000 rural people, and it has increased in scale since then, before the outbreak of Covid-19 may provide a further catalyst. Anecdotal feedback is that this is already on the increase.
- **There appears to be a differing approach across the country regarding slaughter and livestock markets.** I am concerned the closure of slaughterhouses will in turn effect the supply of food most notably, but also have significant ramifications for rural businesses who can have a small window within which to sell their livestock at the proper market value. Subsequent concerns about increased livestock on farms who were planning on selling those animals, and increased costs of livestock management for those businesses. This is very much linked to the general rural economy and food supply issues.



As you can see, our concerns are as broad as they are significant. We would be grateful for a response to the specific concerns we have raised here, as well as general reassurance that rural areas are being *specifically* catered for within Government plans and modelling during this difficult time for us all.

We are also conscious that these concerns span a number of Departments, but we would be grateful for a single response we can share with NRCN Members. In addition, given the importance of this issue, I will be releasing this letter to the media.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia Mulligan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Julia Mulligan

Chair, National Rural Crime Network, and
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire