

CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING

Meeting 8 of Parliamentary Session 4

Scottish Parliament, room Q.1.04

Wednesday 20 June 2012 at 17.30

MINUTES

Present:

Jamie McGrigor MSP (Chair)
Patrick Krause SCF (Sec)
William Neilson, NFUS
Simon Allison CC
Derek Flyn SCF
Gwyn Jones EFNCP
Rhona Elrick RoS
John King RoS
Hugh Welsh RoS
Billy McKenzie SG
Richard Frew SG
Jean Balfour SL&E
Murdo MacLennan CC
Norman Leask SCF
Nick Reiter CC
Russell Smith SCF
Hugh Donaldson HIE
Fiona Mackenzie UKI
Ian Davidson SG
Rosi Waterhouse SG
Jean Urquhart MSP
Dave Thompson MSP
Katrina Marsden SPICe
Barbara Stütz MSc Student
Douglas Pattullo Office of Jamie McGrigor MSP
Kim Karam Office of Tavish Scott MSP
John Finnie MSP

1. Welcome and Apologies.

Jamie McGrigor welcomed everyone and introduced new faces. Apologies were received from:

Rob Gibson MSP; Rhoda Grant MSP; Sarah-Jane Laing SL&E; Tavish Scott MSP; Claire Baker MSP; Sandy Cross CC; Jim Lugton SCF; Nigel Miller NFUS; Lucy Sumsion NFUS; Sandy Murray NFUS; Sarah Anderson NFUS; Isobel McCallum Highland Council; Amy Corrigan RSPB; Andrew Midgley SL&E

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of 02 May agreed.

3. Matters arising

None

4. Mapping the Common Grazings

Simon Allison, Crofting Commission, gave a presentation on the mapping of the common grazings being undertaken by the commission.

Discussion

It was felt that there should be more publicity on what the CC are doing regarding mapping the grazings. However, there is a lot of interest in being shown by grazings who want to be involved.

There is a lot of onus on crofters to provide information yet it is becoming apparent that they do not have it – in some cases grazings committees / shareholders do not know who their neighbouring common grazings belongs to yet alone who has shares in it. The emphasis is on the shareholders to provide the information, the lines on maps.

The mapping is starting with the IACS map and the boundaries are then amended to show the real boundaries (not just areas claimed on). It is somewhere to start and information gathered can be fed back to SGRPID for the IACS (or FIS).

Would the information registered overrule an estate's title deed? If there was a challenge it would be up to the SLC to direct on it. In practice both are 'right'. The registration with RoS is the legal boundaries of the common grazings, showing land in crofting tenure. There will be other registers of land, e.g. the estate title deeds which denote ownership.

5. Direct Payments and the Common Grazings

Gwyn Jones, European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, gave a presentation on how CAP support to common grazings could be reduced under the proposed reforms. A summary has been circulated.

Discussion:

Agricultural entitlements cannot be claimed by new entrants anyway, but common grazings are a unique situation – they offer public goods on huge areas yet are short-changed. Policy makers, regulators, representatives: what are they doing about it?

A good test for rural policy in Scotland would be "does it work on common grazings"?

Why should someone who hasn't the right get paid? (in reference to someone claiming for more than their souming because the other grazing shares are under-used). Because payment should be on grazed land, on a managed landscape. If this happened it could be a good incentive to re-invigorate grazing, grazings committees and stock clubs.

Scotland is behind most of the rest of Europe on payments from the CAP (UK is also but less so). The UK needs to get a higher European share and give Scotland a higher UK share.

What allies do we have? Ireland.

The regulations are not really the problem, the use of them is. Scotland needs a working group to feed in information to discussions and policy formation on the future CAP.

Action: form a working group on common grazings. Send a summary of the issue to David Barnes and ask for it to be distributed to the Future CAP stakeholder group.

6. Mapping the in-bye – the crofting register

John King, Registers of Scotland, Registers of Scotland, gave an update on the preparation of the Crofting Register.

A prototype is ready and has been demonstrated to a stakeholder group. A consultation will be held in July and modifications made, with a view to commencement taking place as scheduled in November 2012. The first year is aiming at getting communities to register their crofts. RoS can provide OS maps – at a cost (which will be lower than if buying from OS).

Action: RoS to give a demonstration of the register at a future CPGoC.

7. Mapping the in-bye – Badrallach pilot community mapping

Russell Smith, SCF, gave an update on community mapping and the pilot in Badrallach.

SCF are promoting community mapping as it is more accurate, cheaper, quicker, less disputes and so on. Crofting communities are keen, not only because of cost but because it provides information that can be used for community development.

Information comes from various sources and a map was provided by RoS. A public meeting was held at which all the anomalies that the various sources through up were resolved. This was helped in great part by the use of an independent facilitator (SCF).

There were issues brought to light that needed dealing with, such as land that had been decrofted not appearing on the CC register). This was seen as a positive outcome. Also the bringing together of the community to deal with this together was itself seen as a very positive reason to do the mapping as a community. It gave the opportunity for all sorts of other information to also be offered / collected.

Badrallach will be included in the list of common grazings to be mapped by the CC.

The facilitation of the exercise was a strong motivator for the community to work together to get their crofts mapped. The SCF feel that the £100k pledged by the SG to incentivise community registration would be better spent on facilitating community mapping rather than offering a discount for registrations.

8. Consolidation of Crofting Acts

This is a standing item on the agenda until something happens about it.

9. AOB

- Croft House Grant Scheme should be on a future CPGoC agenda.
- Crofts sold for residential care payment – deferred to next meeting.
- Still no convenor of the CC – chair to write and ask minister for progress.

10. DONM

19 September, evening