

CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING
Meeting 14 of Parliamentary Session 4
Scottish Parliament, room Q.1.03
Wednesday 01 May 2013 at 17.30

MINUTES

Present:

Jamie McGrigor MSP¹ (Chair)
Patrick Krause SCF (Sec)
Jean Urquhart MSP
Lorna Dawson JHI
Colin Kennedy CC
Susan Walker CC
Gwyn Jones EFNCP
Dave Thompson MSP
Lucy Sumsion NFUS
George Farlow HC
John Brownlee SG
George Campbell RSPB
Andrew Midgley SLE
Jean Balfour SLE
Norman Leask SCF
Gordon Jackson SG
Kim Karam office of Tavish Scott MSP
Douglas Pattullo office of Jamie McGrigor MSP
Brid McKibben SAS
Pam Rodway SAS
Angus MacDonald MSP

1. Welcome and Apologies.

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

Derek Flynn SCF; Karen MacRae SCF; Russell Smith SCF; Rhoda Grant MSP; Rob Gibson MSP; Tavish Scott MSP; Billy McKenzie SG; Richard Frew SG; Brian Inkster SLE; Fiona Mackenzie UHI; Hugh Donaldson HIE; Neil Ross HIE; Vicki Swales RSPB; Amy Corrigan RSPB; Sandy Murray NFUS; Billy Neilson NFUS; Nigel Miller NFU.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of 20 March 2013 agreed.

3. Matters arising

Questions were addressed to Gordon Jackson on the issue of the fault in the 2010 act affecting owner occupier crofters.

¹ **Acronyms:** CC Crofting Commission; EFNCP European Forum for Nature Conservation & Pastoralism; HC Highland Council; HIE Highlands & Islands Enterprise; JHI James Hutton Institute; MSP Member of the Scottish Parliament; NFUS National Farmers Union Scotland; RoS Register of Scotland; SAS Soil Association Scotland (Crofting Connections); SCF Scottish Crofting Federation; SG Scottish Government; SLE Scottish Land & Estates; SPICe Scottish Parliament Information Centre; RSPB Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; UHI University of Highlands and Islands; WCP Woodland Crofts Partnership.

Will the Crofting Commission just carry on as usual? Will the Crofting Commission process paperwork for decroftings?

The issue is being dealt with as quickly, but thoroughly, as possible and the intention is to have the amending bill by recess. Only the decrofting problem will be dealt with, no other amendments will be considered at this stage. On Friday, 10 May there will be a stakeholders meeting regarding the bill, in which legal expertise from the crofting law group, SCF, NFUS, SLE and so on will be consulted. It will be a one-day consultation.

Will other issues be looked at in due course? Yes, but not in this bill process. It is important to get this error amended as soon as possible.

Is a one-day consultation not too short? If issues come up at the consultation meeting it is possible to extend it; as it is a Friday it would be possible to have comments by Monday at 9AM. If there were any serious issues then it would cause a delay. This bill is part of a series of Parliamentary processes therefore the Scottish Government cannot commit to longer than that day. Therefore we wish to keep to the problem at hand.

Cross-party group on crofting to support narrow focus of Bill? **Agreed.**

4. Control of wild goose numbers

George Campbell, RSPB, gave a short presentation on the problems associated with large populations of resident wild geese, and the damage caused to crops and grassland, focusing mainly on the Uists.

The number of visiting greylag geese in 1990 was 1,800, there are now over 10,000 resident birds. The island of Coll, even though much smaller than the Uists, reputedly also has over 10,000 resident greylags.

Last year 4000 geese were shot and this even does not keep the population stable. Unfortunately the geese carcasses cannot be sold as it is against the law so whilst some may be given away most are dumped.

Do people get paid to control the case, as on Islay? No, it is a different species on Islay (not a quarry species like greylag). Goose control on Islay costs about £1 million per annum.

Crofters do not have the legal right to control marauding geese. So why don't the estates do more? The estates are being more active but they can't possibly keep up with the numbers.

Crop protection in the Uists will end unless further funding can be found. SNH have a budget of £10,000 for an adaptive management program but this alone will not cope with the rising goose numbers. The adaptive management program needs a longer timescale and more money invested in it. The aim is to have the population of 10,000 down to 3.5 thousand, this being a healthy sustainable population size.

Will the cross party on crofting support pressing the Scottish Government for more funds for an adaptive management program? A letter to the Minister from the group? **Agreed.** The problem is not just on the Western Isles it is on the northern isles and mainland too so the letter should include all the crofting areas. **Agreed.**

Action: Lucy and Patrick to draft a letter to be sent through the chair

5. 'South Uist or Strichen? Targeting agri-environment in the 2007-13 SRDP'

Gwyn Jones, EFNCP, gave a presentation on the performance of the agri-environment schemes in the present SRDP (circulated).

Discussion

The evaluation of the agri-environment measures within the SRDP carried out by a consultancy company for the SG concluded exactly the opposite of reality. Why?

The fact that 85% of Scotland is LFA is fine; the problem is why it is that so much goes to Aberdeenshire compared to the amounts going to the crofting areas, areas that are claimed to be important for environment? It doesn't make any sense that money goes to Strichen; it would be fair enough if it went to designated sites, but it doesn't. Much goes to repair the post-war damage.

The way the scheme operates puts small units off applying - it is geared to big business. Why aren't crofters applying? More to the point is not why a croft on sky wouldn't get in but why a large Aberdeenshire holding would. Big units employ consultants to prepare applications. However, even places with plenty of advisers in crofting areas are not getting applications accepted. Analysis doesn't show what options are being used, but it begs the question, is the structure at fault? The points structure for example. Also, many on smaller units think it is not worth the while as the payments are too low to justify the restrictions.

Consultation has been launched today on the SRDP - encourage all to feed into this as some of these concerns are addressed / recognised.

A fundamental that should be remembered is that these mechanisms are about additionality, the use of public money to buy public good, not profit.

6. Update on SRDP

Consultation on the proposed SRDP has been launched, responses are needed by the end of June.

7. Update on CAP reform

John Brownlee gave an update on the CAP reform.

The three European players, the European commission, the Council of ministers, and the European Parliament, have stated their positions. They now move into 'trilogue'.

Meanwhile in Scotland the James Hutton Institute have been modelling different payment scenarios and this was presented at a 'CAP - moving forward' conference on 17th April. There were 30 scenarios presented and there is an online consultation, 15th of May being the deadline.

It will be 2015 before the new CPAP is implemented and there will be a rollover in the meantime. The budget is not known yet so the Scottish system cannot be designed. It is not helpful to base any ideas for the future CAP on past payments.

Will the small farmer scheme benefit crofters? It might; there is a €1000 limit which is not very attractive. Scotland want it to be €2000. It is likely to be between €1000 and €1500. It is attractive to the government as it simplifies things. However the small farmer scheme is not good for crofting if there is no necessity for activity.

Modelling shows that there should be more winners than losers at the small unit and. HNV areas also do better in models.

Crofters are only allowed to stock to souming and so can only claim for souming even if there

are shares vacant. The Scottish government is aware of this.

An objective is to stop 'slipper farmers'(the Scottish clause); the current regulation exempts producers who claim less than €5000 from penalty for inactivity and the Scottish government are pushing for a €2000 threshold.

There may be coupled payments – this depends on the outcome of the triologue – as does nearly everything. Agreement is aimed for June – the Irish presidency finishes then and they want the negotiations finished in their term.

Action: ask Keith Matthews from JHI to come to the next group to talk about the CAP scenarios.

8. Implementation of the 2010 Crofting Act

The voluntary period for registering Croft boundaries end is in November; after November registering will be compulsory upon application for crofting commission direction.

Consolidation - there was a reply from the Minister on this subject in the last minutes; there is no point in consolidating the act until all possible glitches have been identified and corrected. Will common grazings shares and the purchase of croft acting as a trigger be considered? Yes there are a number of issues that need addressing including these. Any omissions will also be looked at. Scoping exercise will take place.

The Crofting Commission are planning conferences for local assessors and will have speakers from Registers of Scotland. It is apparent that there is a lack of knowledge concerning mapping crofts amongst crofters. The SCF proposal on community mapping addresses this and SCF have been holding a series of meetings for crofters explaining what community mapping is.

It is essential that CCAGS is included in the interim period of the SRDP. This group was assured by the government that CCAGS would be included; this needs to be confirmed.

9. AOB

- Lorna Dawson from JHI gave a short talk about the book 'Soils of the Crofts' and presented a copy. This was produced by the JHI for the crofting connections project. The children involved in the project are extremely interested in soils.

10. DONM

19 June 2013 evening