

CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING
Meeting 27 of Parliamentary Session 4
Scottish Parliament, room Q.1.03
Wednesday 11 March 2015 at 17.30

MINUTES

Present:

Jamie McGrigor MSP ⁱ (Chair)	Angus MacDonald MSP
Patrick Krause SCF (Sec)	David Barnes SG
Lucy Beattie SCF	Derek Flyn SCF
Lucy Sumsion NFUS	David Finlay CC
Sandy Murray NFUS	Uisdean Robertson CnES
Susan Walker CC	Fiona Mandeville SCF
Catriona MacLean CC	Russell Smith SCF
Neil Ross HIE	Gordon Jackson SG
Fiona Mackenzie UHI	Trudi Sharp SG
Pam Rodway SAS	Aileen McLeod MSP Minister for Environment
Lee-Ann Sutherland JHI	Jean Urquhart MSP
Tom Edwards SPICe	Douglas Pattullo office of Jamie McGrigor MSP
Drew McFarlane-Slack SLE	Rob Gibson MSP
Eleanor Garty WTS	
Lynsey Muir LANTRA	

1. Welcome and Apologies.

Jamie McGrigor welcomed everyone and invited introductions. Apologies were received from:

Dave Thompson MSP; Rhoda Grant MSP; Brian Inkster CLG; Andrew Hamilton SLE; Andrew Midgley SLE; Janette Sutherland SAC; Colin Kennedy CC; Murdo MacKay CnES; John Brownlee SG; Billy McKenzie SG; Phil Burns SG; George Farlow HC; William Neilson NFUS; Ross McLaren SCRG; Robin Haig observer.

2. Minister for crofting Dr Aileen McLeod

The minister gave a summary of Scottish Government support to crofting, highlighting some pertinent issues such as wild goose control and making the SRDP relevant to crofting.

She pointed out that delays in opening agri-environment schemes were due to a delay in approval from EC; but that preparatory work such as an environment plan could be started now by those intending to join a scheme. If a contract is still running it will carry on – participants don't have to re-apply for the same contract to continue.

SG (SNH) is looking at using domestic funds to maintain continuity of schemes on designated sites e.g. chuff and corncrake.

Items 3, 4 and 5 were postponed to move on to first part of item 6.

6. Crofting Development

Lucy Beattie SCF gave an update on the Crofting and Small-holders Training Programme, funded by SG and HIE.

The main points were:

The programme is aimed at crofters who are looking to acquire information and a broad range of crofting skills. Entry-level classroom-based courses cover crofting theory (history, legislation, crofting and agriculture regulations, environment, CAP, business planning etc) and are open to all. Practical Skills Courses and Seminars are open to all as well, but aimed at more experienced crofters.

The project remit is to run 8 Entry-Level Induction Courses, 48 one day Practical Skills Courses per annum and a range of seminar networking events. To date the programme has trained:-

Entry Level Courses – 269 new and aspiring crofters.

Practical Skills Courses – 676 crofters.

Seminars – 71 crofters.

Certified Courses – 48 crofters.

Total trained in our current programme – 1064 crofters/smallholders

Information on the achievements in years 1 & 2 can be found in the annual reports.

There has been a clear indication from attendees that non-certified skills-based training they can take back to croft is what they want.

The programme is monitored by a Training Panel comprising representatives from agencies with training and development expertise (see hand-out).

SCF are developing a new programme 2016 to 2019. As well as building on current successes the programme will progress partnership working:

The Woodland Trust Scotland; SCF will facilitate training to help crofters to access SRDP funding. This programme of training and knowledge transfer will be delivered as part of the Croft Woodlands Project between 2015 and 2020.

Coigach Assynt Living Landscape Partnership (CALLP); has secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to access bespoke training for crofters residing within their development area, and have asked SCF to work in this.

Foundation for Common Land (FCL) have commissioned SCF in piloting a crofter-led training programme which has successfully been run by hill farmers in England and Wales. The objective of the training is to provide conservation professionals with practical experience of crofting.

New work will include an entry-Level E-Learning Option working in partnership with UHI and LANTRA; Social Crofting Leadership Programme working in partnership with Social Farming Across Borders; training communities in Crofting Community Mapping; developing a Crofting Mentoring Scheme to connect new entrant crofters with experienced crofters.

The minister left the meeting at this point.

3. AGM – appointment of office-bearers

Nomination for Chair: Jamie McGrigor MSP

Nomination for Vice-chair Jean Urquhart MSP and Rhoda Grant MSP

Nomination for secretary: Patrick Krause SCF

Rob Gibson MSP proposed that all nominations be moved; Sandy Murray NFUS seconded;
Agreed.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of 28 January 2015 agreed, subject to amendments:

1. RoS – Item 5 - the community mapping project is funded by RoS and SG; JMT and SG have not submitted any applications but this does not indicate disinterest;
2. NFUS – item 6 - 'away-wintering' not 'over-wintering'.

5. Matters arising

1. Crofting census (in AOB). Returns are now at 74% (Highland and WI 70-73%; Orkney 64%; Shetland 80%). Reminders are currently going out giving 3 weeks and reminding recipients of their statutory requirements, and emphasising how useful this exercise is to crofting. Whilst there is potentially a £200 penalty for non-compliance, the focus will be on the value of the information. The CC will decide how to proceed regarding those who have not responded at the next board meeting 24 April. Options will be determined by resources available.

It appears that there is a positive effect – there are more assignments and sub-lets coming through. All stakeholder organisations are asked to help publicise the positive benefits of complying with the census.

2. NFUS pointed out (re. item 4) that FCS communications are still not good in Sleat.
3. DF intimated that there was a proposal to map a Highland crofting estate including croft boundaries of several townships and their common grazings. This would involve all agencies including SCF. CPG would be kept informed of progress.

6. Crofting Development (cont)

Lee-Ann Sutherland JHI gave an update on crofting related research – her presentation 'Recent Research on Crofting Futures' has been circulated.

2013 CAP Intentions Survey of recent and anticipated structural changes to Scottish agricultural holdings, funded by the Scottish Government through RESAS. Analysis compares livestock crofts, livestock farms in the traditional crofting counties, and livestock farms outside of the traditional crofting counties.

Telephone survey yielding 2414 responses; 277 of which were holdings which included croft land.

The main findings were:

As expected, crofts differ structurally from other farms in Scotland, being smaller, more part-time and less commercial.

There are similar percentages of identified successors and length of tenure.

Crofters are significantly older, and more dependent on subsidy income.

Crofters under the age of 65 are more active - more involved in environmental schemes, up-take of new technologies, intend to make changes.

There are somewhat more 'new entrants' (of a range of ages) to crofting than other livestock farms - 16% of respondents had less than 10 year's experience.

Aggregate levels of change were low; high levels of increased (31%) and decreased (27%) numbers of livestock; high levels of increased (27%) and decreased intensity of production (17%). 27% of responding crofters increased the size of their holdings, whereas 8% reduced.

Changes most strongly influenced by input costs, regulations and commodity prices.

Changes to the Single Farm Payment were of mid-importance.

Responses to a 25% SFP increase - increased activity, but less than for other livestock farms.

Responses to a 25% SFP decrease - decreased activity but much more so than for other livestock farms.

2014 ProAKIS study - Case study of new entrant knowledge networks on Skye, Harris and Lewis, Funded by the European Commission

'Prospects for Farmers' Support: Advisory Services in European AKIS' - collaborative project with 8 European partners. Case studies on new entrants to farming in Bulgaria, Portugal, Poland and the UK (www.proakis.eu).

Preliminary case study findings; complex information networks and needs formal advice to access subsidies and reliance on local knowledge for production and innovation through off-croft work experience.

Discussion:

Diversification is increasing.

Theoretically the *total* receipt to crofters can increase under the new CAP but it is yet to be seen how this pans out in practice.

JHI will re-run the research in a number of years to analyse progress.

Updates:

Pam Rodway gave an update on **Crofting Connections**.

One of the recent highlights is that pupils from Papa Westray Primary, which has been part of Crofting Connections since 2009, are hoping to rent an acre of land belonging to the neighbouring small-holding, where they already grow their own produce and keep hens and sheep. The six primary pupils and one reception pupil are already active 'crofters' so we are looking into how this arrangement could become more formal. It is an excellent model for small island schools.

Planning for a next phase of CCx has started. As part of that process, we are undergoing an evaluation of Crofting Connections Phase 2 by a team from Glasgow University School of Education.

HIE: helping work on the future phases of Crofting Connections and the SCF Training Programme.

SG: The list of SRDP schemes is available – many of which are suitable for crofters to apply for. EC feedback is favourable.

This is the Year of Food & Drink; there is not enough appreciation of primary production, especially livestock. Crofting produce e.g. 'wedder lamb' (young mutton) needs to be promoted in any major events. Neil Ross (HIE) will look out appropriate events.

7. CAP and Crofting

David Barnes, Chief Agriculture Officer SG, gave an update on CAP implementation.

Registration for claimants opened in January. As yet only about 50% of producers have registered. Crofters need to be encouraged to do it soon as dead-line is 15 May. It can be done on-line at home or in RPID local offices or ring the office for a hard-copy form.

The on-line Single Application Form (SAF) went live on Monday 16th March. This form has the advantage of self-checking. But if people prefer hard-copy forms they can get them. Previous hard-copy claimants will receive pre-populated paper forms, and all previous claimants' pre-populated data in on the on-line system.

Discussion: It is difficult to register common grazings – it seems the grazings committee (clerk or constable) has to provide information on all share-holders? Yes, an entity registering to claim support payments has to supply information for all recipients, i.e. any shareholders of a grazing, or board members of a limited company, who will receive support. If the organisational structure is not clear RPID can advise.

Pillar 2 capital grants have not been approved by EC yet but are open 'at risk' so that applicants can register interest – which will be looked at as timely application.

LFASS will remain largely unchanged until 2018 (though small changes may get extra people in) when ANC will take over. An ANC working group will be formed soon.

Stocking density will not be measured across the whole parcel of common grazings, only on the share-holders stock on his share equivalent area; this is to prevent a share-holder being penalised for other share-holders' not using their shares. RPID will not be allocating a mapped area per share-holder as before.

8. Progress Regarding Crofting Law

There has not been sufficient time yet for the minister to respond to the 'the Sump'. However stake-holders, practitioners and SG are all working together on this and are going in the same direction.

9. AOB

1. *Seasonal lets of common grazings shares.* There is no intention by RPID to usurp common grazings committees or the Crofting Commission in regards use by one share-holder of another's un-used shares.

CC pointed out that a SG form existed to facilitate a share-holder not using all or any of their shares to let someone else use them; this is not legal though as un-used shares have to be re-allocated by the grazings committee.

SG - The form may give the wrong impression. It may be that the form could be amended to reflect that there is no right to use the 'spare' shares and that grazings committee procedures/crofting law must be complied with. A meeting will be arranged to discuss how this can be done as all agree that shares should be used where possible.

2. *North Ballachullish.* The owner of part of a croft may apply for that part (only) to be decrofted (SLC decision). The problem is that partial crofts fall out of crofting legislation – they are neither owner-occupied nor tenant. Fragmentation of crofts could become rampant. The SLC ruling has made it more urgent to sort out this legislative glitch.

3. *Succession.* SG, CC, Grazings Committees and NGOs need to work with older crofters on succession planning. This topic to be taken to SGCSHF.

9. DONM

22 April 2015

Further dates were also given:

03 June 2015

ⁱ **Acronyms:** CAB Citizens Advice Bureau; CC Crofting Commission; CCx Crofting Connections; CFS Care Farming Scotland; CLG Crofting Law Group; CnES Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; CRSF Crofting Register Stakeholder Forum; DEFRA UK Gov Dept for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; EC European Commission; EFNCP European Forum for Nature Conservation & Pastoralism; FCS Forestry Commission Scotland; HC Highland Council; HIE Highlands & Islands Enterprise; HSCHT Highland Small Communities Housing Trust; HWU Herriot-Watt University; JHI James Hutton Institute; JMT John Muir Trust; LANTRA Land-based & Environmental Industries Training; MSP Member of the Scottish Parliament; NFUS National Farmers Union Scotland; NTS National Trust for Scotland; RACCE Scottish Parliamentary Committee on Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment; RoS Register of Scotland; SAC consulting arm of SRUC; SAS Soil Association Scotland; SCF Scottish Crofting Federation; SCRG Scottish Churches Rural Group; SCVO Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations; SG Scottish Government; SGCLSG SG Crofting Legislation Stakeholders Group; SGCSF Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum; SGRPID (RPID) Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate; SLE Scottish Land & Estates; SNH Scottish Natural Heritage; SPICe Scottish Parliament Information Centre; SRA Scottish Rural Action; SRUC Scottish Rural (University) College; RSPB Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; UHI University of Highlands and Islands; WCP Woodland Crofts Partnership; WTS Woodland Trust Scotland.