

CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING
Meeting 29 of Parliamentary Session 4
Scottish Parliament, room Q.1.03
Wednesday 03 June 2015 at 17.30

MINUTES

Present:

Jamie McGrigor MSP ⁱ (Chair)	John Brownlee SG
Patrick Krause SCF (Sec)	Ian Davidson SG
Lucy Sumsion NFUS	Murdo MacKay CnES
Sandy Murray NFUS	Dave Thompson MSP
Donna Smith CC	Uisdean Robertson CnES
Catriona MacLean CC	Claire Slipper NFUS
David Campbell CC	Rea Cris RSPBS
Brendan O'Hanrahan AF	Angus MacDonald MSP
Russell Smith SCF	Douglas Pattullo office of Jamie McGrigor
Neil Ross HIE	Tom Edwards SPICe
Jean Urquhart MSP	Gordon Jackson SG
Robin Haig SCFYC	Chris Bathgate SG

1. Welcome and Apologies.

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

Fiona Mandeville SCF¹; Derek Flynn SCF; Rhoda Grant MSP; Rob Gibson MSP; Ross McLaren SCRG; Brian Inkster CLG; Colin Campbell ASC; Colin Kennedy CC; Andrew Midgley SLE; Janette Sutherland SAC; George Farlow HC; Charlie Hanks NS; William Neilson NFUS; Iain MacKinnon Coventry University; James Shewan SCFYC; Pam Rodway SAS; Eleanor Garty WTS;. Fiona Mackenzie UHI

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the last meeting held on 22 April 2015 were agreed.

3. Matters arising

Item 3. The meeting referred to under item 9 of the previous meeting will be a week Friday.

Item 4. Angus MacDonald MSP spoke to the minister for crofting Aileen McLeod and she is happy to come to a crofting conference. Jean Urquhart MSP will talk to HC about hosting it.

Item 8. Jean Urquhart MSP has been lobbying on the matter of making video conferencing available to CPGs. There is a room with VC but CPGs are not allowed to use it.

Action: Jamie McGrigor MSP and Jean Urquhart MSP will write to the Parliamentary Executive about this and Tom Edwards (SPICe) will also investigate.

¹ See 3. Matters Arising

4. Crofting in Land Reform

A presentation by Brendan O'Hanrahan, a director of the Assynt Foundation on the role of new crofts in Scotland.

Main points:

Glencanisp is one of the biggest community-owned estates in Scotland.

It is difficult to manage land-reform in small rural communities.

There are no crofts on the estate so it was the intention to create some – the land at Ledbeg (Ledbeg house was formerly the farm house) is the significant patch of in-bye on the estate. Received help from SCF, HC, HIE, NTS (Balmacara) in the planning of the crofts. There is interest in crofts but the priority is housing.

This area (Elphin) is demographically declining in that any houses that come up for sale go to retired in-comers. So the new crofts could provide housing and land for young families.

The planners were not very keen on the plans; their view was that "the area is characterised by isolated dwellings". Well it wasn't; there used to be a community there and there is evidence of it.

If there were to be consideration, the planners wanted full project detail including services etc. This put it out of reach as that level of detail would very expensive and time-consuming.

Scottish Government need to decide – if new crofts are wanted a realistic method needs to be set up. The demand is there but SG record on the creation of new crofts is poor.

The 2003 Land Reform Act started off well then activity declined as the difficulties became apparent – a buyout can take 10 years at least. So it has lost momentum and crofting is part of land reform.

This could be supported through HIE and Las.

The Land Reform Bill is not just about communities buying estates – it should also include crofts, woodland crofts, small-holdings, allotments and so on. Small parcels of land get more people using the land.

There is a lot of interest in woodland crofts but FCS need to be conducive. It is not easy for individuals or even groups to buy forestry land.

The CHGS could be used to help build more houses on croft land.

Strathbrora is now empty but it used to be populated. Good in-bye is left for the deer to graze – this is not right.

Discussion

Was planning the big problem?

It was one of the problems. There was also disagreement over the use of Ledbeg House. But planning is not good with models that are not within the standard. Councillors say they are supportive but they are not supportive enough when it gets to the planning committee. Crofts seem to no longer have a presumption to have a house. If new crofts are created there should be a presumption that they have a house on them. Rules for the creation of new crofts need to be established. Planning is a nightmare in this country – it induces so much stress.

The Community Land Fund has focussed on buying land but more should go to helping the community then develop their land. It is after the buy-out that communities really need help in developing their asset, to keep up the momentum. This is especially true of crofting communities.

MSPs would like to help with this but really just don't have the facility to do so. Can Crofting Commission help?

Crofting Commission have no remit for crofting development any more – it is with HIE. HIE provide after-care support – it is with the Community Assets Team.

Do private estates have any desire to create new crofts?

Possibly – as part of Land Reform in Scotland. It may be of interest to SLE?

How many crofts were planned for in Ledbeg?

There is 30ha so 4 crofts, possibly 3.

It would be useful to prepare a short paper on these issues for the Scottish Parliament. Who?

If SCF start something CC can help on the regulatory side.

The West Harris Trust put up 10 new houses 5 years ago; it would be much harder to do that now.

Planning seems to stand in the way of community development. The planners say it is down to the Local Plan, but this seems to be a 'get-out'.

It is not just community-owned land; any land will run in to the same problems.

What happened to the idea of a deer farm on Glencanisp?
It was decided against for marketing reasons.

Action: SCF / CC to prepare a brief paper on the creation of new crofts.

5. Crofting Development (Standing item)

CC: The issue of the convener is not settled yet but it is being worked on; the crofting census has an 84% return, and 90% of responders say they are working their croft. Statistics are available from CC.

Discussion:

What will CC do about those who didn't respond and those who have said they don't use the croft or live on /near it?

The CC doesn't have the resources to deal with this, the aftermath of the census.

What's the point of it?

It is in the act so the CC has to do it. The intention is to understand more about what is happening on the ground. It can help in tackling absenteeism and neglect by identifying who aren't using their crofts. Ultimately the purpose is to free up crofts. It also provides information on what crofters are doing which can be collated as 'the situation of crofting' report.

SG: SRDP is now approved by the EC and the CHGS analysis should be completed and published within 2 weeks.

HIE: Are working on how to work with partners in crofting community development.

Stakeholder Forum: Are working on a draft vision for crofting; will meet again as an enlarged group in a facilitated workshop.

This could be linked with the potential crofting conference?

The last crofting conference was hosted by CnES 5 years ago. Will HC host one this year?

Action: Jean Urquhart to talk to contacts in HC.

Film: 'Crofting's new Voices' was shown and greatly appreciated. This film, produced by Robin Haig on behalf of the SCF Young Crofters gathering, was funded by the CC. The film is receiving acclaim and is [now online](#).

6. CAP and Crofting (Standing item)

SG update on CAP / SRDP reforms

The ANC group met – the minutes are on SG website.

The SAF deadline is 15 June. So far 12,500 have been received with an expected 21,000 total. 15 June is also the deadline for National Reserve applications.

The RACCE has concerns regarding the implementation of CAP, especially the IT. £150M has been spent yet it doesn't seem to work. There is a letter from RACCE to SG (R Lochhead) voicing "extreme concern" on the SP website.

Paper forms are now available again, prepopulated. This will be widely advertised.

It is impossible to register common grazings as the system wants them as an individual business whereas all shareholders have their own business identification numbers registered.

The regions (2 and 3) are contradictory on common grazings. As usual the SG system simply cannot cope with common grazings.

SG will convene a stakeholder group to discuss common grazings & CAP issues.

Bad weather payments: SG will convene a working group. WI will have a particular problem with diminished crops and a further increase in wild goose numbers.

7. Crofting Law

Progress on The Sump and consolidation of the crofting acts

In abeyance.

8. AOB

None

9. DONM

09 September

Then:

28 October

16 December

ⁱ **Acronyms:** AC Animate Consulting; AF Assynt Foundation; ASC Assist Social Capital; CAB Citizens Advice Bureau; CC Crofting Commission; CAGS Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme; CCx Crofting Connections; CFS Care Farming Scotland; CHGS Croft House Grant Scheme; 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; NS Nourish Scotland; NTS National Trust for Scotland; RACCE Scottish Parliamentary Committee on Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment; RoS Register of Scotland; RSPBS Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland; SAC consulting arm of SRUC; SAS Soil Association Scotland; SCF Scottish Crofting Federation; SCFYC SCF Young Crofters; 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.