

**CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING**  
**Meeting 20 of Parliamentary Session 5**  
**Scottish Parliament room Q1.03**  
**Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 7pm**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Alasdair Allan MSP <sup>i</sup> (Convener)	Gordon Jackson SG
Patrick Krause SCF (Secretary)	Ross McLaren SCRG
Rhoda Grant MSP	Ann Bruce Uni of Ed
Yvonne White SCF	Maria Scholten SCF
Billy Neilson CC	Darren Laing BBC Alba
Marcelina Hamilton SLE	Anne Campbell CALLP
Russell Smith SCF	Donald Bruce Edinethics
Brian Inkster CLG	Lucy Sumsion NFUS <sup>(TC)</sup>
Andrew McCornick NFUS	Siobhan MacDonald SAC <sup>(TC)</sup>
Ross Lilley SNH	
Bill Barron CC	

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The convener welcomed everyone. Apologies were received from:

Fiona Mandeville SCF; Donald MacKinnon SCF; Robin Haig SCF; Tavish Scott MSP; Jamie McIntyre WCP; Gail Ross MSP; Emma Harper MSP; John Scott MSP; Liz Barron-Majerik LANTRA Scotland; Murray McCheyne SLE; Edward Mountain MSP; Janette Sutherland SAC; Donald Crichton CnES; John Finnie MSP; Angus MacDonald MSP; Graeme Dey MSP; Rosemary Champion SHS; Sandy Murray NFUS; Pete Ritchie Nourish Scotland; Stephen Leask SIC; Richard Frew RoS; Donald Cameron MSP; Malcolm Mathieson CC; Maria de la Torre SNH; Eleanor Garty WTS; Neil Ross HIE; James McPherson SCF; Rhona Elrick RoS; Jean Urquhart; Rod Mackenzie CC; Michael Nugent SG; Murdo MacKay CnES.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 March were approved.

**3. Matters Arising**

None.

**4. AGM**

Election of office-bearers: Conveners Rhoda Grant MSP, Alasdair Allan MSP and Tavish Scott MSP **agreed**. Secretary Patrick Krause **agreed**.

**5. Crofting Development: conflict with wildlife**

Ross Lilley, SNH gave an update on SNH initiatives to control predators and pests that affect crofting.

SNH supports agriculture, farming, crofting and we are all custodians of our natural heritage; a workable balance has to be sought. We need practices that will help to increase biodiversity. People enjoy wildlife, wildlife can have an impact on people. SNH 4/ SG cannot provide all the solutions, it's everyone's responsibility.

Geese - the aim is to achieve a balance between conservation of species and limitation of damage to crops. This is a big subject that has been dealt with separately in other meetings of this group. Suffice to say that various initiatives have been piloted and are ongoing, such as increasing licensing and sale of goose meat.

Ravens - licensing has been relaxed but does not appear to be impacting on population. Ravens are very clever birds.

Sea Eagles - SNH except that sea Eagles do predate on lands and adult sheep, and are working with crofters and farmers to understand the Eagles and their habits better. Adaptive management techniques are being used and various strategies such as providing alternative food (carrion), encouraging eagles to move away from agricultural areas, keeping young lambs away from known eagle territory and so on. There is no easy solution and it is likely to always be contentious as culling of eagles will never be sanctioned but predation on livestock has to be controlled.

Deer - control of deer is the responsibility of landowners and users. In many areas it is widely felt that deer numbers are too high, impacting on deer health, road traffic, environment, agriculture, human health. SNH have statutory powers to control deer if others do not.

Management groups have been set up for all species with varying degrees of success.

*Roundtable discussion:*

Question: what is the situation with control of greylag geese? They are huge problem in the Western Isles, particularly the Uists.

Answer: the aim is that this should be self-sustaining. SNH have set up a challenge Fund of £25k to help communities to organise strategies to control geese numbers.

Question: is the £25k the total or an individual grant?

Answer: it is the total budget, the grant is £5k.

Question: is that adequate, when you have to take into account paying marksman and so on?

Answer: SNH has to prioritise its budget towards vulnerable species. We recognise that Greylags are a big issue but the budget is limited.

Question: is there an opportunity for sport shooting? Is there a market for the shop product?

Answer: yes, we hope there is opportunity for control of numbers to be sustainable, it is a shared responsibility. For example there is winter shooting in Tiree.

Comment: the sale of goose meat depends on certainty of licensing; year-to-year licensing doesn't work as no one is going to set up a processing unit with uncertainty of licensing stop

Answer: we are working on getting a long-term licence.

Comment: this could really help the economy but bureaucracy seems to stand in the way.

Comment: the demand for venison cannot be met and yet there are still too many deer

Answer: the problem is infrastructure, matching the stalking, larder, dealer, butchers and so on.

Question: when controlling population do you have in mind specific numbers for each species?

Answer they can't always be a definite number which is why we use adaptive management, to monitor effects.

Comment: when sea eagles were introduced there was presumably the assumption that they would eat fish. There wasn't any concept that they would eat lamb stop but now sea eagles are hefted and will continue to depend on lamb.

Answer: Norway does not seem to have a problem with eagles and livestock. There is an argument that small mammals, rabbits and hares for example are too few due to having been controlled; they are important species for food for the eagles.

Comment: Scotland has an international duty to protect landraces. Geese are being allowed to destroy heritage crops.

Answer: SNH are supporting the control of geese.

Comment: pressure of geese in Uists has increased, and crofters are now not producing native seed any more. This is a direct threat to the survival of native seeds.

Answer: I will take this away.

## **6. Crofting Administration**

Bill Barron, CC, gave an update on Commission business.

The decision making process – 3 tier, staff, senior staff and board – with timings, was published on the CC website this morning.

There have been two new senior staff appointments – Heather Mack, Head of Operations & Workforce and Aaron Ramsay, Head of Digital & Improvements Services.

CC has met with HIE to discuss working together for crofting. HIE do not do crofting specific development work, rather they do community development which may include crofting communities. Discussions included stage 2 legislation and the future of support when we are out of the CAP – both CC and HIE want as much support as possible to come to Highlands and Islands. Tourism is very important and a theme that both organisations have an interest in, and there is potential for other ad hoc projects that CC and HIE can work on together.

The Bill Group (SG and stakeholders) looked at the possibility of creating legislation to make joint tenancies possible in response to a request by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce. The group agreed that it should be so, but CC have since found many complexities and unintended consequences, e.g. fragmentation of crofts, dissent between joint tenants holding up progress and so on. So the board feel it is better to not go this way. Crofting law does not work well with it.

### *Roundtable discussion:*

Question: How many female crofters are there, do you have that information?

Answer: 35% of those who answered the annual census are female registered crofters.

Question: What happened to the budget given to HIE for crofting development?

Answer: this was a one-off payment which dwindled.

## **7. Crofting legislation**

Gordon Jackson, SG, gave an update on the bill;

Apologies from Michael O'Neill for being unable to attend the meeting.

The Bill team is working with the legal team to sort out phase 1 issues. There will be an update to the Bill Group soon – a meeting in August or September is anticipated. Progress of the Bill, the timetable for legislation, is a cabinet decision and will be announced soon as the Programme for Government.

Brian Inkster then gave a summary of his new book 'A practical guide to crofting law'.

## **8. Crofting Support**

Gordon Jackson, SG, gave an update on support schemes.

CHGS - March saw the allocation of £350 K in housing grant and the next tranche will be allocated in September. There has been an internal review scheme and this was shared with

SCF and NFUS. There is a lack of uptake of the grant in certain areas, e.g. owner-occupied crofts. This affects Shetland where there is the highest proportion of owner-occupied crofts. Owner-occupied crofts are now eligible though many crofters don't realise this. FAS newsletter for crofters highlighted the changes in CHGS, which was done as a response to the comments made by RPID at the meeting in Portree, organised by SCF.

CAGS - of 736 applications 618 have been approved (84%), the value of £2.73M.

CAP - at 19 March BPS had distributed £17,736. 2018 commitments for P1 and P2 have been met stop

SAF - closed on 15 May with 19,630 applications.

LFASS - Cabinet secretary is committed to continuing funding at the present level.

*Roundtable discussion:*

Comment: crofters are complaining that CAGS payments are too slow.

Answer: will take away.

Comment: I got paid in under a month, someone else it took three months.

Answer: the target is to process CAGS payments within 90 days, although this is not a legislative requirement.

Comment: they don't seem to be as many complaints as a year ago.

Answer: The process is improving as the introduction of IT functionality removes duplication of effort between Head Office in Saughton and the Area Offices.

Comment: a loan scheme would be very helpful in cash flow; CAGS is a capital grant but crofters don't have capital to spend before being able to receive the grant.

Answer: the budget is fully utilised.

Comment: perhaps the National Investment Bank could see this as an opportunity.

Answer: Perhaps there might be an opportunity to look to see whether there is a place to make use of a financial instrument such as a loan or advance for capital grant payments in the period 2021-2024, aligned to the principles of the Stability & Simplicity consultation proposals.

Comment: with research grants there is an advance payment, conditionally.

Answer: There is currently no mechanism to introduce advance payments under Pillar 2 of the CAP.

Comment: common grazings find this very difficult and shareholders end up putting money in themselves.

Comment: sheep stock clubs don't usually have the same problem as they would normally have capital.

Comment: payments being made under CAP are still not being notified; money appears in the bank with no explanation. It is difficult therefore to keep track of CAP payments.

Answer: will take away.

Comment: on-line SAF is still a problem.

Comment: there are still many reports of extreme and unfair penalties.

Answer: The Simplification Task Force is giving consideration to the inspection regime and the application of penalties, amongst other things.

Comment: also people are just getting a letter saying that a penalty is being imposed but there is no explanation as to why.

Answer: will take away.

## 9. AOB

1. Silage wrap – SEPA banned the burning of silage wrap – understandably – but there is no provision for disposal offered. SG is aiming to be a leader in environmental protection but there needs to be practical solutions. Remote areas have no collections of plastic waste, it is not economically viable. Crofters cannot burn it, bury it, or dump it. So what is the answer? SG are pushing their responsibility on to the citizens.

**Action: the group agreed that it could be useful to have Zero Waste Scotland attend the next meeting to continue this discussion.**

2. Scavenging felled timber – it is unclear as to whether FLS are still issuing scavenging licences.

**Action: Sec to write to FLS for clarification.**

## 10. DONM.

20 September, GGH, Inverness.

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i **Acronyms:** AECS Agri-Environment Climate Scheme; AF Assynt Foundation; CAB Citizens Advice Bureau; CALLP Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership; CBS Community Broadband Scotland; CC Crofting Commission; CAGS Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme; CCx Crofting Connections; CFS Care Farming Scotland; CHGS Croft House Grant Scheme; CLG Crofting Law Group; CLS Community Land Scotland; CnES Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; CRSF Crofting Register Stakeholder Forum; CWA Community Woodlands Association; DEFRA UK Gov Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; EC European Commission; ECCLRC Scottish Parliament Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee; EFNCP European Forum for Nature Conservation & Pastoralism; FLS Forest and Land Scotland; FFRWG Freight Fares Review Working Group; GFN Good Food Nation; HIE Highlands & Islands Enterprise; HSCHT Highland Small Communities Housing Trust; JHI James Hutton Institute; LANTRA Land-based & Environmental Industries Training; MSP Member of the Scottish Parliament; NDPC National Development Plan for Crofting; NFUS National Farmers Union Scotland; NGMRG National Goose Management Review Group; NISR Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal; NRMHF National Rural Mental Health Forum; NS Nourish Scotland; NTS National Trust for Scotland; RECC Scottish Parliament Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee; RoS Registers of Scotland; RSABI Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution; RSPBS Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland; SAA Scottish Assessors Association; 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; SFT Sustainable Food Trust; SG Scottish Government; SGCLSG Scottish Government Crofting Legislation Stakeholders Group; SGCSF Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum; SGRPID (RPID) Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate; SHS Small-Holder Scotland; SLE Scottish Land & Estates; SNH Scottish Natural Heritage; SPICe Scottish Parliament Information Centre; SRA Scottish Rural Action; SRN Scottish Rural Network; SRP Scottish Rural Parliament; SRUC Scottish Rural (University) College; THC The Highland Council; UHI University of Highlands and Islands; WCP Woodland Crofts Partnership; WTS Woodland Trust Scotland.