

**CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING**  
**Meeting 24 of Parliamentary Session 5**  
**Great Glen House, Inverness**  
**Friday 06 March 2020 11.00-13.00**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Beatrice Wishart MSP <sup>i</sup> (Convener)	Malcolm Mathieson CC
Patrick Krause SCF (Secretary)	Russell Smith SCF
Aileen Rore SG	David Campbell CC
Gordon Jackson SG	Murray McCheyne SLE;
Michael Nugent SG	Neil D Ross HIE
Bill Barron CC	Mairi Mackenzie CC
Fiona Thomson NRMHF	Sandy Murray NFUS
Yvonne White SCF <sup>TC</sup>	Ian Wilson NFUS
Janette Sutherland SAC	Barney MacAskill
Mary Ross CC	Maria de la Torre SNH
Rod Mackenzie CC	Zoe Russell Uni Sterling
Joseph Kerr CC	Seonaidh Mackenzie BBC
Maria Scholten SCF	Alasdair Allan MSP (phone)
James McPherson SCF	

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The convener welcomed everyone. Apologies were received from:

Rhoda Grant MSP; Fiona Mandeville SCF; Donald MacKinnon SCF; Robin Haig SCF; Emma Harper MSP; John Scott MSP; Edward Mountain MSP; Donald Cameron MSP; Gail Ross MSP; John Finnie MSP; Donald Crichton CnES; Murdo MacKay CnES; Angus MacDonald MSP; Graeme Dey MSP; Donald Cameron MSP; Rosemary Champion SHS; Stephen Leask SIC; Donald Meek, Jamie McIntyre WCP; Megan Rowland SLE; Lucy Sumsion NFUS; Zoe Meldrum NFUS; David Campbell CC; Eleanor Garty WTS; Billy Neilson CC; Brian Inkster CLG; Ross McLaren SCRG; Liz Barron-Majerik LS; James Scott CC; David Finlay CC; Leanne Townsend JHI; Christina Noble JHI; Rhona Elrick RoS; Richard Frew RoS; Roz Corbet LWA; Anne Campbell CALLP; Siobhan MacDonald SAC.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2020 were approved.

**3. Matters Arising**

Under 3. MA - disposal of plastic waste – a representative of SEPA was unable to make the meeting but will endeavour to attend the next.

Under AOB: Sandy Murray commented that he had written to the minister in 2015 supporting the recommendation to form a Scottish Government crofting stakeholder forum.

## 4. Crofting Development

### 4.1. Introduction to crofting Development.

Russell Smith, SCF, on the background of crofting development.

Summary:

#### **Extension of the Crofting Areas**

The Crofting Reform etc. (Scotland) Act 2007 permitted the crofting areas to be extended. They now include the whole of the Highland Council area; Moray; the parishes of Kingarth, North Bute and Rothesay in Argyll and Bute; and the islands of Arran (including Holy Island and Pladda), Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae in North Ayrshire.

There is no body actively pursuing the extension of crofting in these areas. This means that, if no new crofts are registered, opponents will be able to claim there is no demand.

#### ***Nobody doing this***

#### **Functions of the Crofting Commission**

Whereas the Crofters Commission had functions which were taken over by the Crofting Commission, several of the functions, powers and duties were removed by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. The lost functions, powers and duties were:

The general functions (i) of developing crofting and (ii) of promoting the interests of crofters

The particular powers and duties of:

- the improvement of land and livestock,
- the planting of trees,
- the supply of agricultural equipment and requisites,
- the marketing of agricultural produce,
- experimental work on crofting methods,
- the provision of demonstration crofts,
- the needs of the crofting communities for public services of all kinds,
- the provision of social amenities and the need for industries to provide supplementary occupations for crofters or work for their families; and
- to make such recommendations as they may think fit on any of the matters aforesaid.

#### ***None of this being done***

The first 6 points are to do with crofting agricultural development and are not addressed by HIE. Knocknagael and the Bull Hire Scheme are run by SGRPID.

The effect has been that there is now no body charged with the development of crofting.

#### **Other Crofting Development Areas**

SCF has identified a number of areas that require development – some of which we are pursuing as resources permit but others are in abeyance.

- Scottish Crofting Produce mark – to develop a brand and so add value to produce (and tourism services) which are from crofts. **SCF attempting to do**
- Low cost housing – to develop a starter house which uses local materials, is energy efficient and can be expanded as the crofter requires and can afford. **Nobody doing**
- Promoting the creation of new crofts (within the existing Crofting Counties) and woodland crofts **WCP doing in a limited way**
- Promotion of local abattoirs – using the feasibility study in Skye as a template. **No take-up by SG**
- Development of alternative approaches eg stock clubs to re-invigorate common grazings **Crofting Commission?**
- Development of a demonstration croft **Nobody doing this**
- Community Mapping and Township Development Plans – using the need for mapping and registering crofts as a way in to getting townships to think about development opportunities. **Nobody doing this.**

Russell concluded that the fundamental development initiative is to get land back into use; crofting needs new entrants, young families.

#### **4.2. National Development Plan for Crofting.**

Michael Nugent, SG crofting policy team, on progress towards the NDPC.

Summary:

- Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum (SGCSF) – Priority Papers:
  - Simplify Crofting Legislation
  - New Entrants
  - Increase Affordable Housing
  - Crofting Development
  - Financial Incentives
  - Common Grazings
- Forum Vision – ‘Crofting: Living, Working, Growing Together’
- Vision to be supported by the following outcomes and methods:
  - Population Retention and Rural Cohesion
  - Environment and Habitats
  - Create Opportunities for New Entrants
  - Promote Collaborative Working
  - Economic Opportunity and Growth
  - Regulation
- December ‘19 and February ‘20 SGCSF meetings discussing:
  - Common grazings – public good delivery, activities, peatland restoration and management, tree planting, and committees
  - Succession
  - Knowledge Transfer
  - Presentations – SNH, Scottish Forestry, and Crofting Commission

#### **Environment and Biodiversity**

- Opportunities for crofters.
- Pilot projects on Scottish Ministers’ Estate.
- Peatland Project and Common Grazing Engagement.
- Land management and the sharing of good, responsible practices.

#### **Development Role**

- Single body to take responsibility for delivering Crofting Development.
- Crofting Commission and the possible role:
  - Encourage diversification – engage with existing CG committees, encourage appropriate use of the grazings including peatland restoration and tree planting.
  - Encourage new committees into office.
  - Encourage succession and turnover of crofts – from people who no longer wish to work them, to those who will.
  - Continue to tackle neglect and absenteeism.
  - Reinstate the CG registration work.
  - Supporting new croft creation. Explore the possibility of creating new crofts on existing CG.
  - Work to increase capacity among crofters and crofting communities – assistance to understand and access support schemes, practical advice/capacity building, training, and development of local projects

#### **Housing**

- Enabling more people to live on and work their land is key to crofting.
- Croft House Grant scheme – Self Build Loan Fund.

#### **Future Funding**

- Stability and Simplicity Consultation.

- a period of stability, with little change to the current system, until end 2020, followed by:
- a period of simplicity, where simplifications and improvements will be made, and potential new schemes for longer term policy will be piloted, between 2021-2024.
- Agricultural Transformation Programme

## **CAGS**

- CAGS Review:
  - Access and the eligibility criteria.
  - Preparatory work required by the crofter before submitting the application.
  - Payment process and timings.
- Five Recommendations:
  - Widen the scope of CAGS beyond just agricultural activities.
  - Introduce interim payments.
  - Introduce standard costing.
  - Remove the need to "engage a consultant" to help establish a common grazings committee. The one off grant can be used for placing adverts, booking halls etc.
  - Introduce an income test

## **Deer, Geese and Sea Eagles**

- Negative impact on croft businesses.
- Management Schemes.
- Future work.

## **Signposting**

- 2018 survey for the "Economic Condition of Crofting" showed that:
  - 73% of crofters were aware of the Crofting Commission
  - 59% were aware of the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme
  - 48% were aware of the Croft House Grant Scheme
  - 56% were aware of the SCF
  - 51% were aware of the NFUS
  - 39% were aware of the FAS
- Sources of advice and support available to crofters, such as:
  - Scottish Government – local RPID office
  - Crofting Commission
  - Highlands and Islands Enterprise
  - Scottish Natural Heritage
  - Scotland's Rural College
  - Scottish Forestry
  - Farm Advisory Service
  - Membership Organisations
  - Business Gateway
  - Crofting Community

## **Roundtable discussion**

Question: will there be anything in the NDPC on the resources that will be required?

Answer: yes; e.g. the development role of the CC will need to be funded.

Question: The SGCSF started looking at crofting development in 2015; when will it be realised?

Answer: The NDPC will be published in the autumn this year, assuming it is approved. But it is an on-going process – some things are happening now.

Question: next year we have Scottish elections; will the plan be in place before then?

Answer: yes, it will be published this autumn.

Question: who is responsible for implementation?

Answer: several agencies.

Question: wouldn't it be better if one organisation has overall responsibility, ownership of crofting development?

Answer: there is probably not one soul 'owner'. Stakeholders will also be involved in the ownership of this.

Question: but surely SG will have responsibility to deliver this?

Answer: yes that is correct, SG will track and monitor progress but the implementation will be by several bodies.

Question: will there be extra budget made available?

Answer: it is acknowledged that it needs to be resourced properly. The plan itself doesn't have a budget but the components will be budgeted – for example crofting development being under CC, CHGS, CAGS et cetera.

Comment: there is clearly a need for a central organisation for the first point of contact, signposting. It makes sense it is the CC.

Comment: FAS has a national advice line which could play a role, except that there is a low awareness of FAS - 39%; awareness of CC is much higher. If CC has the role of crofting development then they should be first contact and give crofting advice,

Comment: there needs to be CAS - Crofting Advisory Service.

Question: part of the crofting development plan is to increase the number of regulated common grazings, to get more grazings committees working. Who would want to go on a grazings committee when they are not protected from liability?

Answer: this is being looked into.

Comment: it is good that Scottish Government are looking at the role crofting plays in peatlands management. Peatlands are very important in crofting and crofting is very important to peatlands preservation.

Question: the question of CHGS being under an income test has been raised, how would this work with a township application?

Answer: the focus group will look at this further, but probably an income test would not apply to joint applications.

#### **4.3. Crofting Diversity Pays!**

Maria Scholten, SCF, on progress of this project looking at development of crofting landraces. Summary:

1. The project funded through the Social Innovation Funds / Scottish Government, Highland and Island stream, aims through research to add value to crofters' landraces (traditional varieties) that are currently of 'low value', i.e. used for animal feed. Investigating innovative and full supply chains, from field trials to tasting and branding and new artisan products and supported by scientific nutritional analysis.

2. The project comprised twelve months, two crops (kale, rye) three locations: Shetland, Lochaber and the Outer Hebrides with Scottish Crofting Federation as lead partner, Queen Margaret University Gastronomy, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA) and SME's such as crofters on South Uist, micro-bakers and brewers as academic and respectively grass-root research partners.

3. Project outputs: new products such as croft-grown marketable seed; Hebridean rye beer and bread; in addition and unforeseen, value was also created by raising awareness about

landraces in research and artisan producer communities; in the positive feedback and interest from non-partner academic researchers in the research design encompassing the entire value chain with a strong social involvement and impact focus. Funding for follow-on work will be sought.

### **Roundtable discussion**

Comment: fantastic! What an important project, well done.

Question: how did this project happen?

Answer: SCF has a fantastic network which I was able to use and combined with my specialisation in land races and some available European funding we had a project which started in 2018.

Question: this seems, to me, quite unusual; is it?

Answer: there are many others in Scotland interested in this topic and we have made many connections, SASA, JHI, QMU. We have the call and we need to keep this going.

Comment: the link between researchers, producers and processors is really good.

Comment: the SG rural innovation service is opening again soon isn't it? It should fund this.

### **4.4. Farm Advisory Service.**

Janette Sutherland, SAC, on FAS advice to crofters – her presentation was distributed.  
Summary:

FAS has been collaborating with CC which has been very successful - thanks CC.  
The Crofts and Small Farms service is being used - there is a lot of information on the web, including crofting videos and tools and guides  
The mentoring service is extremely good and needs further promotion.

### **Roundtable discussion**

Comment: the practical stuff like condition scoring is very good.

Answer: yes, we get good feedback.

Question: what percentage of the subscription covers the actual costs of interventions?

Answer: the cost is supported by the Scottish Government at 65% for the subscription. We have £1200 for LMP which usually covers the cost - the recipient pays the VAT element.  
Carbon audits are covered 100%.

Question: is there less uptake of the FAS in crofting areas?

Answer: meetings are always well attended but yes, there is scope for reaching more crofters (and FAS is aiming to do that through different platforms of communication). Perhaps the 'Farm' in FAS doesn't bring up the FAS content in internet searches for crofting.

Question: have SAC resources been increased to run the FAS?

Answer: SAC run the one-many Service and Ricardo runs the one-one service. Both are funded by CAP. SAC have always run an advisory service, so FAS work increased staff for media and websites – advisor numbers have stayed about the same.

Comment: I have found FAS events really useful.

Answer: feedback is good, 92% say they will implement recommendations.

Question: how many crofters have participated - is this monitored?

Answer: it is not easy to disaggregate crofters in the statistics as they have the same codes. However I will take this away. [*Update – over the past year (Oct 19 – Sept 20), 1039 people have attended events in the crofting counties, and 2104 crofters took out subscriptions.*]

## 5. Crofting Administration

Bill Barron, CEO CC, gave an update on the work of the Crofting Commission.

Summary:

- CC is getting much better feedback on the services provided.
- CC is in discussion with RPID about climate and biodiversity on common grazings, including tree cover, peatland restoration, good agricultural practice and so on.
- CC will be presenting to the Convention of Highlands and Islands which will be taking place in Lewis later this month. The focus will be on population retention and the use of land in response to the climate emergency.
- Minutes of the CC board meetings can be found on the website. Of note is the minute of 6th February which includes the commissioners' vision for crofting.

## 6. Crofting Legislation

Notice: Law Society Scotland are holding a consultation on four aspects of crofting law, including aspects of succession; owner occupier status; statutory conditions of tenure; and the definition of crofting community. Members asked to contribute if they can.

## 7. Crofting Support

SG update on crofting support schemes:

### CHGS Figures:

19/20 – 66 Eligible Applications Received – 54 Approved – 82% - £1.8m approved.  
(20 out of 23 applications were approved in the December tranche, the last tranche in the 19/20 FY, value of over £600k)  
20/21 – 23 applications received in the March tranche, first tranche of the 20/21 FY – applications still being processed.

### CAGS Figures:

For the last 4 years:

	Received	Approved	% Approved	Value Approved
2016-17	778	665	85%	£3.285m
2017-18	765	654	85%	£3.038m
2018-19	736	618	84%	£2.93m

19/20 figures to be confirmed but early indication is that it is over 750 applications received with approximately £3m approved.

## 8. Rural mental health

Fiona Thompson from the National Rural Mental Health Forum delivered a presentation on the upcoming campaign to respond to the mental health impacts of Brexit on rural communities and businesses.

Summary:

The presentation covered an introduction to the aim of the forum and research plans for March/April. The forum will be circulating a survey to all forum members and rural communities that seeks to gauge anxiety around Brexit and identify possible information/signposting support. In addition, the survey will inform policy recommendations for the Scottish Governments' approach to improving mental health and wellbeing in rural areas. CPG members were asked for their help and support in promoting the survey.

## **Roundtable discussion**

Question: how do we recognise if somebody needs help?

Answer: there are several providers of a two-day course in mental health first aid - some provide this for free. Look at the NRMHF website for links.

Comment: this training to be put out to all communities, possible.

Question: are you looking at particular geographical areas

Answer: RESAS identified Argyll and Bute is particularly vulnerable, but we are looking at all rural areas.

Comment: social interaction is very important to mental well-being.

## **9. AOB**

1. The valuation of a croft tenancy for care charges has been a contentious issue for many years (we covered it in this group in 2012?) and seems to be causing a great deal of angst again. We should look at it again and get it sorted.

*Agreed: to be a main topic at future meeting.*

2. There are many complex issues to take care of following getting a croft assignation – e.g. agricultural holding number, field numbers, entitlements, livestock registration etc. This should be laid out in a flow chart.

Answer: SCF have been doing very useful courses on this but funding has run out. CC/FAS(CAS) could produce a diagram.

3. Convergence money has been going into bank accounts but there have been no letters to explain this.

Answer: SG – will take away.

4. Registration of a croft becomes the responsibility of the new owner – they do not know the boundaries. The outgoing crofter should register the boundaries before parting with the croft.

## **10. DONM**

29 April 2020, 5.30 Scottish Parliament

*[Sec note: this was cancelled due to C-19]*

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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; LS Lantra Scotland; LWA Land Workers Alliance; 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; SIM Support In Mind; 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; ZWS Zero Waste Scotland.