

**CROSS-PARTY GROUP on CROFTING**  
**Meeting 12 of Parliamentary Session 4**  
**Scottish Parliament, room Q.1.03**  
**Wednesday 06 February 2013 at 17.30**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Jamie McGrigor MSP<sup>1</sup> (Chair)  
Patrick Krause SCF (Sec)  
Billy Neilson NFUS  
Jean Urquhart MSP  
Derek Flyn SCF  
John Brownlee SG  
Arthur MacDonald CC  
Jamie McIntyre WCP  
Gordon Jackson SG  
Brian Inkster SLE  
Jean Balfour SLE  
Russell Smith SCF  
Douglas Pattullo Office of Jamie McGrigor MSP  
Gary Cocker Office of Jean Urquhart MSP  
Kim Karam Office of Tavish Scott MSP  
Fiona Mackenzie UHI  
Pam Rodway SAS  
Dave Thompson MSP

**1. Welcome and Apologies.**

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

Norman Leask SCF; Karen MacRae SCF; Rhoda Grant MSP; Billy McKenzie SG; Richard Frew SG; Susan Walker CC; Simon Allison CC; Hugh Donaldson HIE; Neil Ross HIE; Lucy Sumsion NFUS; Sandy Murry NFUS; Tavish Scott MSP; Gwyn Jones EFNCP; Vicki Swales RSPB; Amy Corrigan RSPB; George Farlow HC; Andrew Midgley SLE; Rosi Waterhouse SG; Angus MacDonald MSP; Rob Gibson MSP.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

Minutes of 12 December 2012 agreed.

**3. Matters arising**

Actions achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> **Acronyms:** CC Crofting Commission; EFNCP European Forum for Nature Conservation & Pastoralism; HC Highland Council; HIE Highlands & Islands Enterprise; MSP Member of the Scottish Parliament; NFUS National Farmers Union Scotland; RoS Register of Scotland; SAS Soil Association Scotland; 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.

#### **4. Woodland Crofts Partnership response to the Land Reform Review Group**

Jamie McIntyre of the Woodland Crofts Partnership gave a presentation based on their response to the Land Reform Review Group, with background material on woodland crofts. His presentation was circulated to the CPG.

##### *Discussion*

Communities can apply to buy land from Forestry Commission Scotland under the National Forest Land Scheme, whether the land is for sale or not.

Sunart has a SSSI on it – how can a crofter there integrate other activities? Silviculture intervention is needed even in SSSIs – thinning, replanting etc.

How did Mull create 9 new crofts, all tenanted? It was community driven; they created crofts under the 2007 Act and have their own letting policy which included things like there being no Right to Buy, only one house is permitted on the croft, the plot is allowed to be decrofted but has to stay with the croft.

There is a lot of value in forest – how can people buy or rent? Trees belong to the landlord; they can be made over to a tenant as part of rent (difficult) or paid for as used. There can be difficulties over some forestry blocks only being suitable for clear-fell.

There are differences in Europe; even small units may be part of a larger forestry management scheme. Scandinavia has large co-operatives rather than state; non-timber products, integrated land use, population are all important – it's not just about timber. It puts employment on the land, in the localities. Whereas in Scotland we have thousands of hectares of monoculture which has to be mechanised and clear-felled; fewer people employed, no integration of land use and population.

Woodland crofts work well with livestock and tress; good management of trees requires up to 20% open space so livestock in trees are very good as an integrated system.

Rather than clearing land of people, as mono-cropping forestry blocks do, woodland crofting does the opposite, it gets as many people involved in forestry management as possible.

#### **5. Call for new crofts**

Russell Smith, SCF gave a presentation on the call for new crofts.

In submission to Land Reform Group – SCF again called for creation of new crofts - 10,000 by 2020.

Crofting is an efficient way of keeping people in remote rural areas by giving them a base, a part time income and a stake in the area – it works. Not much else does.

Try driving from Bonar Bridge north to join the A9 at the Mound. First you pass through Migdale and Airdens, crofting areas – the land is worked, there are sheep and cattle, there are small contracting businesses, a couple of self catering cottages for tourists run by local people, new houses are being built, children go to school. Then go over the hill past Loch Buidhe on to estate land and there is one house in 8 miles occasionally occupied, the land is mostly unimproved and only grazed from time to time. And this comparison can be made in many other places.

So if we are serious about retaining population and about food sovereignty and in encouraging new businesses and high nature value farming then WE NEED MORE CROFTS.

How do we create them?

Woodland crofts – we have heard about

New crofts on:

Public land (govt, FC, local council)  
Private estates - for stable labour force?  
Community estates  
Existing crofts  
Common grazings  
Subdivide (if big enough, e.g. amalgamated crofts)  
New areas  
Moray, Arran  
Rest of Scotland  
Smallholdings (OO) can convert.

What do we need to do to support them?  
CAP reform / LFASS target to LFAs / SRDP accessible  
Maintain CCAGS  
Support for small businesses for outside employment  
Decentralisation of local / central government jobs  
Housing grants / planning rules  
Croft Entrant scheme  
Support for townships  
Township mapping  
Township development plans

The CPG on Crofting is asked to endorse this vision.

### *Discussion*

There is concern that the CC is loath to carry out its duties under the 2010 Act – e.g. watering down the 'Duty to Report' criteria; this would provide essential information to manage township development. Are they going to water down the Annual Return for individual crofters too? The annual return must be sent out and acted upon.

The Duty to Report was made more acceptable as there was a danger of grazings committees resigning. No GCs would not be good for crofting. There is no intention to water down the annual return.

There is demand for crofts.

There is a lack of off-croft employment, which is essential. People are having to go away for work and then are liable for breach of duties, and risk eviction.

Would new crofts be appropriate in 'good' agricultural areas? Why not? It puts more people on the land.

Crofting Connections wants to have school crofts; is this possible? A school holding could be called a croft though not actually under crofting tenure. A croft could be tenanted by an individual crofter who lends it to the school for use.

CC have prioritised dealing with absentees of longer than 10 years. This is not legislation; the Act says that if the CC know of an absentee they have a duty to do something about it. Is this watering down the Act again?

The CC have decided to prioritise 10 year and over absentees as these are identifiable and generally cause the most problems to the rest of the township. There is no intention to not carry out duties regarding any absentees that are brought to CC notice.

Eviction is a very emotive word. People want to keep their family croft even if it is not worked. The Act tries to get crofts worked. There needs to be communication between all parties concerned and a development plan agreed. The Occupancy Initiative is about helping with crofting development – it should be seen as a positive initiative.

If people are looking for crofts they should get them. Highlands and Islands land should not be controlled by people who live far away. Land should be seen in a community development way – that is why the Duty to Report and the Annual Return are important – for crofting community development. This is why the SCF are promoting crofting community mapping.

New croft tenants need to have croft plans (as do any new tenants) and these need to be followed up by the CC.

**Action: HIE to be asked to next meeting to talk about Crofting Community Development.**

## **6. Crofting Commission policy on New Crofts and update on croft-land statistics**

Arthur MacDonald, Crofting Commission, distributed some statistics on croft land (this has been circulated) and spoke to it.

### *Discussion*

There is more land being taken out of crofting than is coming in.

The CC doesn't have a proactive policy on the creation of new crofts.

The CC are taking a stronger stance on de-crofting.

**Action: Crofting Commission to be asked to next meeting to talk about the Occupancy Initiative.**

## **7. Update on Crofting community mapping steering group**

Russell Smith updated on the crofting community mapping steering group which met today. Alternatives for funding a wider pilot project are being explored.

**Action: Invite a crofter from the pilot project to the next meeting.**

## **8. Implementation of the 2010 Crofting Act**

Gordon Jackson gave a summary of SG position on implementation of the 2010 Act: Trigger on first purchase of croft and shares details on crofting register are both "under consideration". Still? Yes. Adding to the triggers would require primary legislation. Consolidation of Crofting Acts is desirable but not on the SG agenda yet. It should not be a big job so why doesn't SG just get on with it? MSPs could ask a PQ.

## **9. AOB**

John Brownlee, SG, gave an update on CAP reform:

### **European Parliament**

- European Parliament Agriculture Committee (COMAGRI) voted on a series of compromise amendments (whittled down from the thousands that were originally submitted) to the 4 main CAP regulations on 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> January.
- The COMAGRI position will now go forward to the Parliament's Plenary session in the middle of March.

### **Agriculture Council**

- Ireland now hold the European Presidency and their Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney is keen to secure an agreed Council position on the CAP at the March Council.
- If Council reach an agreed position formal trilogies will take place between the Council, Parliament and Commission with a view to reaching political agreement on the CAP by the end of the Irish Presidency in June.

## **Scottish Government**

- Ministers and officials working to try and secure Scotland's asks in the negotiations.
- Modelling work on various scenarios for payment regions being undertaken by James Hutton Institute. Results will be presented to stakeholders at a Conference/Workshop in April.

### ***Crofting Commission Plan:***

***Action: Ask CC to come and speak on the CC Plan when it is approved.***

**CHGS** – grants are higher on islands than in many mainland areas where costs are actually higher. There needs to be some research into house building costs.

***Action: SPICe to be asked to research. Invite CHGS officer to a future meeting.***

## **9. DONM**

20 March evening