

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Wednesday 3rd October 2012

5.45 – 7.30pm, Scottish Parliament

Minutes (Approved)

Present

Name	Organisation
David Miller	James Hutton Institute (speaker)
Jo Ellis	Forestry Commission Scotland (speaker)
Davy McCracken	SRUC (speaker)
Alex Fergusson	MSP (Chair)
Aileen McLeod	MSP
Alan Laidlaw	The Crown Estate
Alasdair Reid	SPICE
Amy Nimegeer-Syme	Centre for Rural Health, UHI
Andrew Midgley	Scottish Land and Estates
Claire Baker	MSP
Colette Backwell	Independent Consultant
Daniel Gotts	Scottish Natural Heritage
David Cameron	Community Land Scotland
Derek Logie	Rural Housing Service
Douglas Scott	Scottish Borders Council
Fiona Mackenzie	UHI
Graeme Dey	MSP
Ian Malcolm Macdonald	Chair of Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Jamie McGrigor	MSP
Jane Smernicki	SRUC
Jim Hunter	Vice Chair, Land Reform Review Group
Jim Hume	MSP
Joan McAlpine	MSP
Jonathan Wordsworth	Archaeology Scotland
Karen Dobbie	SEPA
Katrina Marsden	SPICE
Kim Karam	Parliamentary Researcher for Tavish Scott MSP
Laura Stewart	Soil Association
Liz Hawkins	Scottish Government
Maggie Gordon	Dumfries and Galloway LEADER
Marianna Markantoni	SRUC
Marianne Mitchelson	Parliamentary Manager to Jean Urquhart MSP
Mark Aitken	SEPA
Martin Davies	Soil Association
Mike Woolvin	SRUC
Patricia Neeson	
Peter Misselbrook	Tods Murray LLP
Richard Haw	Forestry Commission Scotland
Rob McMorran	Centre for Mountain Studies, UHI
Sarah Hunter-Argyle	SRUC
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Sheila McWhirter	East Lothian Council

Siân Ringrose	SRUC
Stephen Pathirana	Scottish Government
Steven Thomson	SRUC

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Alison Elliot	Chair, Land Reform Review Group
Artur Steinerowski	SRUC
Bryan McGrath	Scottish Borders Council
Claudia Rowse	Scottish Natural Heritage
David Gass	Upper Quartile
David Whiteford	North Highland Initiative
Diane Duncan	HIE
Eric Samuel	BIG Lottery
Eve Keepax	Policy Officer, Eco-Schools Scotland
Jamie Dent	D&G Small Communities Housing Trust
Jane Atterton	SRUC
John Watt	Director of High Life Highland
Julia Latto	Scottish Enterprise
Julian Pace	Scottish Enterprise
Lorna Philip	Aberdeen University
Rebekah Widdowfield	Scottish Government
Richard Simpson	MSP
Sarah-Jane Laing	Scottish Land and Estates
Susan Smith	East Lothian Council
Tanya Castell	Soirbheas Ltd
Vicki Swales	RSPB Scotland

1. AGM

Alex Fergusson MSP (Chair) opened the evening with the Annual General Meeting for 2012-2013. Attendees unanimously approved the four proposed co-convenors for 2012-13. These are:

- Alex Fergusson MSP
- Graeme Dey MSP
- Jim Hume MSP
- Claire Baker MSP (who will replace Elaine Murray MSP)

AF noted that the Secretariat SAC was now known as SRUC after the merger with Scotland's three land-based colleges on 1st October. He proposed that SRUC continue to be the Secretariat for Group and the motion was passed by the Group.

AF also wanted to take the opportunity to thank Gillian Gillies for all her hard work over the last year. Jim Hume MSP also noted thanks to Elaine Murray MSP for her input in the Cross Party Group in 2011-2012.

2. Approval of minutes from June 2012 meeting (including update on Small Towns Strategy Letter)

Copies of the unapproved minutes of the June meeting were available to everyone present. Jim Hume MSP and Maggie Gordon proposed and seconded the approval of the minutes.

The agenda, unapproved minutes, presentations will be made available on the website as soon as possible after the meeting. (http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120331/group_meetings_2012-13)

Attendees at the June meeting agreed that the Secretariat should support the four co-convenors to write to the Cabinet Secretary asking about the potential to introduce a 'Small Towns Strategy'. This was actioned by the Secretariat and the co-convenors and a letter was presented to the Cabinet Secretary recently. Richard Lochhead MSP will make a formal response at the Rural Scotland in Focus Parliamentary Reception on 31st October 2012.

AF noted this as a particularly good outcome from the Group and reflects the effort and hard work made by the Group to make meetings successful and highly relevant, generating tangible actions.

3. Future programme for the Group – Discussion

The meeting topics proposed were:

- What and who is rural for in the 21st Century? (Meeting 1: October 3rd 2012)
- Rural Housing (Meeting 2: December 4th 2012)
- Rebalancing the supply chain (Meeting 3: January 23rd 2013)
- Community ownership of assets (Meeting 4: March 27th 2013)
- Rural Transport (Meeting 5: May 22nd 2013)

To reflect the high demand of discussion topics it was decided to host five meetings in 2012-2013 instead of four.

Ian McDonald asked for further information on the 'Rebalancing the Supply Chain' meeting. Sarah Skerratt relayed the list of items proposed, IM commented that as a farmer the latter items such as supermarket power appealed. He also suggested the topic of food security would be good to include in this context as consumption levels are high. With poor harvests supply could get tight very quickly as there are no reserve food provisions.

Jim Hume MSP and Maggie Gordon also commented on financial aspects of regional food streams and building the awareness for the need to quantify financial aspect of local food and the 'trickle effects' into the local community.

Steven Thomson (SRUC) commented that the current CAP reform process and the flattening of CAP in particular the beef supply chain would fit well with this topic.

It was also noted that this meeting was organised to coincide with the CAP reform decisions in January.

Maggie Gordon also raised the issue of community assets and whether capacity is being lost, some best practice examples of community capacity retention would be good to see.

It was also suggested that it would be good to invite a housing association or a representative body to the Rural Housing meeting.

Alex Fergusson MSP asked that attendees submit ideas on the 3rd, 4th and 5th meetings to SRUC in the next week or so.

4. Welcome and Apologies

Alex Fergusson MSP (Chair and co-convenor of the Group) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy. Apologies (as listed above) were noted. Due to the additional time required for the AGM, attendees were not asked to introduce themselves except when asking questions.

5. Presentations (followed by discussion)

- **Professor David Miller (James Hutton Institute)**
- **Jo Ellis (Forestry Commission Scotland)**
- **Dr Davy McCracken (SRUC)**

Presentations gave an overview of the wide range of demands on land and the targets set for multiple issues such as woodland creation, biodiversity, climate change, etc. The presentations highlighted that land use change takes time to happen and it takes time for the benefits to be seen, however, we have only a short time frame available in which to make the decisions for the future – relating to targets set by Scottish Government for 2020.

Questions and discussion generated included the following:

- Getting the message out about ‘enlightened’ land use is necessary to make land owners/farmers aware of what opportunities are available to them. Most people with a direct income from the land recognise the importance of multiple land uses but there is still a long way to go to reconnect people with the land and to understand agri-systems. Incentivising public goods at the right scale is needed.
- There was recognition that the pot of money for supporting land development is decreasing. Concern over what will fill the gap and how? A key area to work on will be addressing the need for innovative approaches to fulfil public benefits whilst stimulating economic growth. Alan Laidlaw provided a novel example from Yorkshire where an NHS scheme funded farmers who were providing health benefits to the public.
- The effect of “indigenous” community members and “migrant” members was also mentioned as the majority of people have found it is the “migrant” community members who may be less willing to support initiatives such as windfarms rather than the “indigenous” community.
- There is a need to increase communication with land managers to encourage them to think more about what they are doing and why it is highly valued rather than to have multiple land services as a ‘tick-box’
- Penalties for land owners/producers was discussed as a cause for low uptake of organic status or innovative practices. Maintenance schemes need to be

more flexible to allow farmers to change their practices to respond to the changes on farm rather than being penalised.

- It was noted that researchers need access to quality credible data on which to base research as often data are 2-3years out of date or are unreliable. Without these data it is hard to clearly identify win-win examples or actions which could be applied to other areas.

Alex Fergusson MSP brought the meeting to a close, summarising the wide range of topics discussed, stating it was a fascinating meeting, highlighting the role and responsibility of rural Scotland to come up with the answers for the whole of Scotland. He acknowledged that this is a massive task, but an incredibly important one that needs to be achieved.

Actions

1. SR to upload the presentations, agenda and minutes onto the Rural Policy Centre's website on Monday and circulate link.
2. JA/SS/SR to organise the speakers for the next four meetings and circulate details on the website and by email.
3. All attendees are invited to send ideas for meetings 3, 4 & 5 to JA/SR before 26th October.

6. AOB

No formal items of AOB were raised.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Topic: Rural Housing

Date: *Tuesday* December 4th 2012, 5:45pm-7:30/8pm.

Timings and speakers will be confirmed shortly.