

Submission from **Scottish Land & Estates**

On behalf of the Scottish Land and Estates (SLE), I am writing to express my concern in relation to the Stage 2 debate which resulted in a majority vote to end the uniform business rates and hand control over the setting of the poundage rate, reliefs and any local supplements/levies to local authorities.

SLE members provide a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits which are vital to the success and survival of communities throughout rural Scotland. They play a critical role in ensuring sustainable, healthy and empowered rural communities, providing housing, employment and a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits.

This reform would have a significant impact across Scotland and therefore, must be carefully considered. We have concerns that having inconsistency in rates across Scotland could be unduly burdensome and onerous for businesses. This could have a negative effect, particularly on rural employment and investment.

We appreciate the logic and benefit of local authorities being able to spend the money they collect. However, we are concerned that the negative consequences of the subsequent impact would have to be carefully weighed against the benefits.

Our key ask for rates and the rates system is that they should be clear, accessible and consistent. Inconsistency would create confusion, and we have serious concerns about the resourcing and administration of such a change given current local government budgetary pressures.

Furthermore, this reform would have an impact on other elements of the rates system, and this would also have to be analysed. For example, there would need to be thorough consideration of how this proposal would affect appeals etc.

We would also like to see a full consultation and an impact assessment on this policy change before it is progress in legislation, to better understand for what will mean for ratepayers, for existing reliefs, and for local councils themselves.