



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **CROFTING, COMMONS AND COMMUNITIES**

Delegates from the Scottish Crofting Federation were in the north of England last week to attend a major meeting discussing the formation of a UK and Ireland wide Foundation For Common Land.

At the meeting held at Melmerby in Cumbria were graziers from throughout the UK and Ireland who work common land, and members of representative groups that support them. A series of short presentations at the outset of the meeting showed that in some areas, such as the Highlands and Islands, there is a strong local representative system already in place, while in other parts of the country representative groups are less developed or do not exist at all.

The proposed Foundation for Common Land will weave together existing and emerging groups into a national commoners network or 'observatory'.

Among the benefits that its promoters anticipate is that the Foundation will form a comprehensive forum for consultation, enabling effective discussion and efficient input to debate. It is also intended to act to influence research, spread good practice and share understanding of how different land tenure systems work.

Norman Leask, who attended the meeting with other members of the SCF, said: "This clearly has the potential to be an exciting development for crofters if the Foundation for Common Land is able to create a united voice with which graziers on common land can speak to the UK and European Governments on issues of common interest.

"This would be important for crofters because, although the SCF has formed good working relationships with Scottish politicians and with key officials in the Scottish Government, this has proved more difficult with the UK Government. Having access to the UK Government is important for us – not least in that the UK is the European Member State and the UK Government is therefore the key to enabling crofters and other common land holders having a voice in Europe."

Andrew Humphries, who hails from Cumbria and is the Chair of the Foundation for Common Land, was one of the driving forces behind the network. He outlined his reasoning for

proposing it, saying "Commons are no anachronism but are increasingly recognised as key resources for a range of public goods and of significant importance economically in the production of quality livestock. Through better communication and understanding, a collaborative approach should benefit all parties involved."

He has proposed a 'Commons Charter' which highlights the economic, social and environmental benefits of common land holding systems, their historical importance and the need to share knowledge about common systems with the general public.

Norman Leask added that the meeting had exemplified the importance of the crofting system in maintaining small scale agriculture in the Highlands and Islands – and the strong communities that exist in the area because of it.

He said: "Time and again, English delegates told us about the struggles they have to retain the integrity of their holdings and their communities in the face of a system of land tenure that is still in key respects feudal. With legislation currently going through the Scottish Parliament, it is vital that politicians understand that strengthening the crofting system is a vital part of ensuring the integrity of Highlands and Islands communities."

END

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#### **Notes to editors**

- Pictures can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>