



‘A Rural Conversation: Together We Can, Together We Will’

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM ref: ANON-787M-MHAY-2

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Individual Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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Yes No

Consultation questions

We are clear in our goal of the creation of a defined and ambitious Rural Economic Strategy. We would welcome your feedback on the following questions to enable us to shape it going forward.

1. The development of relevant Scottish Government mainstream policies should consider the effect upon the Rural Economic Strategy and its consequent policies

- How should policy makers in Government make sure that the economic needs of rural Scotland are taken into account?

This is a bit of a circular question. There needs to be a Rural Economic Strategy, this is acknowledged and agreed. Policy makers in Government will make sure that the economic needs of rural Scotland are taken into account by having a Rural Economic Strategy that is referred to equally with any other sectoral strategies. The sectoral strategies need to integrate and complement each other in their outputs, combining towards meeting the outputs of the National Performance Framework (NPF).

- Should there be an ability to call to account Scottish Government and their Agencies to ensure collaboration and actions to meet the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy?

Of course there must be, if the Rural Economic Strategy is agreed as a route to achieving the NPF. Any actions taken by Scottish Government and its agencies have to be towards meeting the intended national outputs – this requires collaboration, a clear understanding of national outputs and actions designed to meet those outputs. Setting of appropriate indicators, monitoring progress and reporting on actions in meeting national outputs is essential.

2. Create quality job opportunities (that are well paid, flexible, and purposeful) to promote skills and opportunities, but also deal with inequalities in the rural labour market (such as the gender pay gap)

- What employment opportunities do we need to meet the current and future needs of our changing rural economy? Where should these be? (either by location and/or sector)

Many people in rural areas can contribute to the production of food, care for the environment and provision of services for such as tourism, by having the use of land. Having a piece of land gives the base to run small businesses. The consultation noticeably misses discussion about the need to have more people sharing in the rural land resource and having the ability to occupy a piece of land. Crofting shows clear evidence of the benefits to rural communities, in population retention, affiliated service provision, tourism, high nature value landscapes and so on. Crofting is a model of sustainable rural development that would work across Scotland.

Small businesses (micro-medium) are the backbone of rural areas and need the support of Scottish Government. A very successful enterprise network was dismantled in the Highlands and Islands. This appears to have been a backward step and needs to be rectified.

- How do we tackle the inequalities we face in rural Scotland? i.e. challenges faced due to age, gender, socio-economic, educational and ethnic background

Inequalities in rural Scotland need to be tackled the same as in urban Scotland. Gender equality and reduced inequalities are key Sustainable Development Goals within the NPF. This applies nationally.

3. Build on existing work to gather evidence and data to measure the true value of the rural economy and monitor its growth

- Going beyond the economic contribution of rural businesses, what positive examples of social (i.e. community cohesion), cultural (i.e. protection of heritage and traditions) and environmental (i.e. carbon reducing) impacts of rural businesses can you think of?

Crofting fulfils all of the above. And more. Listing all the benefits of crofting to rural communities and to achieving national outputs would take more than space allows so please refer to publications of the SCF and the Crofting Commission.

- What specific outcomes of rural businesses should be measured and why?

Specific outcomes of any Scottish business must tie in with local and national outcomes wanted. They must be measured to ensure that they are contributing towards the local and national outputs, and that they are not hindered and are being actively helped through government policy and action to do so.

4. Encourage future entrepreneurship by ensuring the Scottish Government's rural skills action plan meets the needs of the Rural Economic Strategy

- What skills are required to have a vibrant rural economy?

Appropriate skills; young rural people are often quoted as saying that they need to learn the skills that will enable them to stay in the community. Having a croft or small-holding as a base gives people a chance to stay and to thrive in rural areas. Land-based skills are being lost with older folk but there is ample scope to train young folk and new entrants. Crofting takes a vast range of competencies (see LANTRA crofting competencies framework) and most crofters have off-croft work which needs all skills. Running a small business, or multiple occupations, are skills that need to be taught.

- How do we best ensure that people of all ages, genders, areas, socio-economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds receive appropriate support?

By having a rural skills action plan that meets the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Develop opportunities for the businesses of urban and rural Scotland to share ideas and work together

- How do you think we could do this? (for example through schools or membership organisation groups)

It is not clear what the objectives of the question are. However, the examples are appropriate for the development of the future workforce. Getting students out of school (whether urban or rural, primary and secondary) and onto farms, crofts,

smallholdings, national parks, small businesses and so on is essential to their personal growth and understanding of the country they live in.

- Facilitating learning/sharing between urban and rural areas to improve and have a better understanding of the opportunities that are available would be new for Scotland. What would interest you in this approach? Are there any benefits/drawbacks?

As above. It is perhaps more important that urban dwellers get an insight into what takes place in rural areas - that benefits us all. Rural Scotland is often only seen as a recreational place, rather than a working and living place. This goes up to policy-making level – for example the SNH concept of ‘wild land’ and the ‘rewilding’ movement.

6. Create communities of interest (digital, physical) where businesses and people can come together to solve problems, share ideas and understand opportunities

- Is there any place that you can think of in your community where people already do this? Can you please tell us about it?

Crofters share ideas at the fank, the mart, and at SCF meetings.

- What might be the benefits of this approach?

The benefits of this are already there and it is happening.

- What things would your local community need to help people in your local area come together?

Better public transport, better transport links, better broadband, teleconferencing facilities for all public meetings.

7. Help ensure there are the same opportunities and access to services between urban and rural areas

- For people living and working in rural areas there are often big differences compared to urban areas in what services might be available (things like broadband, childcare, transport, community development etc.).. What do you need to enable you to choose to live and work in rural Scotland?

We need there to be no differences compared to urban areas in what services are available (things like broadband, childcare, transport, community development etc.). You have said it.

8. Make sure Government policies, regulations, planning and support mechanisms help local businesses

- What types of policies, regulations, planning and business support need to be strengthened or removed to help a wide variety of small and micro businesses in rural areas?

An effective Rural Economic Strategy would integrate government policies and planning. Often enterprises seem to get held back by over-onerous support application procedures, lack of planning flexibility and, what appears to be, little understanding of what small businesses need in a rural setting. As mentioned above,

rural economies depend on micro-medium businesses. Business support needs to be tailored to the businesses.

- Can you think of any problems in transport, housing, social care and digital infrastructure that prevent economic growth for your industry sector, business or community?

Yes plenty. The problems in transport, housing, social care and digital infrastructure that prevent economic growth for all rural industry, business or community are very well known and have been recorded many, many times in a myriad of circumstances. The Rural Economic Strategy needs to focus on solutions.

For example; affordable housing in rural areas is so rare that young people have to leave. This is partly down to planning policy which is preventing houses being built, especially affordable homes, and no protection of local housing which gets sold on the open market at prices outwith the reach of local people.

Crofting has been addressing this with crofters building houses on crofts. They are helped with the Croft House Grant Scheme which historically has been shown to be the most effective use of public money in provision of rural housing. The loan element of the scheme needs to be reinstated as it is not possible to raise a commercial loan on croft land.

9. Make sure that community resources that contribute to our economy (like tourist attractions) also deliver benefits to their communities.

- Can you think of any examples of resources in your community e.g. that attract visitors and make money but that do not benefit the community?

Land / landscape in general attracts visitors but doesn't necessarily benefit the communities that look after the land as well as it could. Too much land is held by too few with little community benefit.

- Are there examples of attractions in your community that you would like to promote? What could help you do this?

10. Please tell us below if there are any key issues you believe we may have missed

1. There is no discussion or tackling of the land reform issues which are essential to the well-being of rural Scotland.

2. There is mention of previous policy initiatives:

“There are many existing policy drivers and initiatives dating back over 25 years - from ‘People, Prospects and Partnership’ in 1995 to ‘Better Still Naturally’ in 2007. These documents have gone a considerable way towards putting rural issues on the agenda. It is time now to build upon these and consider how we operate, think, and act strategically”.

You haven't captured that context in this consultation, identified what has gone before, what was achieved, what was not achieved and why not – leading to what needs to be done. “Our aim for this document is to mark a sea change within rural

development policy of the recent past.” Have you achieved your aim? Perhaps this is for the Rural Economic Strategy itself?

3. The limited composition of the NCRA we have drawn attention to before, there being no-one from north of Perth on it. This has not been compensated for by the spread, or rather lack of spread of the conversation venues – not one in Shetland, and only one in central Highland to cover the whole Highland economic region.

4. The remit of the NCRA is “to provide evidence based advice on the implications of Scotland leaving the EU and to recommend future actions that could sustain a vibrant and flourishing rural economy”. The consultation itself doesn’t frame any questions in the context of Brexit.