

Alice through the looking-glass model for direct payments

AS MEMBERS will be aware, it is being suggested in the government CAP reform pillar 1 (direct payments) consultation that Scotland will have two regions, 1: rough grazing and 2: the rest – arable, permanent grass and temporary grass, the land with higher production capability. This land, which is capable of higher production and therefore greater market reward, deserves public payments ten times higher than support to rough grazing, it is claimed.

However, to distract from this peculiar looking-glass logic, a more sinister discussion is taking place that is stranger still. It is focussing on what happens to rough grazing, the greater part of Scotland's agricultural land, and sets hill grazers against hill graziers. It is being argued that hill farmers on the greener hills of southern Scotland should get a higher payment than the crofters and farmers on the browner hills of the north – that same perverse logic about production. But furthermore, rather than suggest a small percentage is taken from the grain and intensive grass farmers' ten-fold higher payments, it is declared that an uplift to the

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Doing better – the proposal to dissolve the Crofting Commission

IN DECEMBER last year Brian Pack handed the government an interim report called *Doing Better* which seeks to improve the effectiveness of, and reduce costs in, the government's administration of rural affairs and environment.

At the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) in January, a question was raised on the implications for crofting of Mr Pack's report. Unfortunately Mr Pack has been unable to attend the two subsequent meetings to inform upon the question.

As regards the crofting interest, the *Doing Better* report proposes amalgamating the Crofting Commission (CC) with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Division (SGRPID). This proposal raises a number of issues regarding the analysis on which it is

based and on the understanding of crofting governance that underlies it.

For instance, the *Doing Better* report neither acknowledges the multi-agency nature of crofting governance nor outlines the particular roles and responsibilities of each agency involved. Questions about whether, in the interests of improving the financial administration of rural affairs, it is the functions of the CC that need to be amalgamated – or whether the relevant functions in fact belong to other bodies – are left unasked and unanswered. The facts that 1: the relevant grant and loan awarding functions for crofting already lie within SGRPID rather than within the CC; 2: the responsibility for holding croft boundary information lies with Registers of Scotland (RoS) rather than the CC; and 3: the

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