

Implications for crofting on exit from Europe

THE LOSS of faith in our Crofting Commission has been occupying many crofters' minds and hearts for several months now, and we cover it in this edition. But, of course, the result of the European referendum has taken us all by surprise and tends to cast a shadow over any other issues.

Within days of the vote, the SCF was granted a meeting with the cabinet secretary for rural economy and connectivity, Fergus Ewing, under whose remit crofting now sits. Mr Ewing does not have answers to how the impending divorce will affect crofting, but was able to give us reassurance that the Scottish Government's commitment to crofting stands firm.

As would be expected, reflecting the national vote, not all crofters are unhappy about the

EU divorce. Red-tape is perceived (not always justifiably) as coming from Brussels. It hasn't helped that the UK and Scottish governments have used the "it's Brussels" excuse to pass off legislation of UK or Scottish origin – or EU legislation that has been 'gold plated' by our officials.

Also, many crofters are close to fishing, a sector wanting out of the EU. This is understandable. It is said that our fishing policies are the product of an uncaring Margaret Thatcher's negotiations to secure a rebate from the EU.

A wider UK perception, and subsequent disquiet, seems to be that many of the UK's woes, such as the widening inequality in wealth and well-being, are due to being in the EU, when they can clearly be attributed to our own UK

government policies.

For crofting, my worry is that many of the croft-friendly policies we enjoy originated in Brussels. For example, remember that the proposals that were issued by the European Commission at the start of the CAP negotiations for this phase were very strongly oriented towards the small producer and environmental protection. These were watered down or actively obstructed by an NFU-steered UK Government. Scottish Government figures show an overall increase in CAP payments to the north and west, but it could have been so much better.

Many of the infrastructure and social projects we see in remote areas, such as community projects, causeways and lifeline ferries are EU

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The crisis of confidence in the Crofting Commission

THE GRAZINGS calamity has escalated to a crisis of no confidence in the Crofting Commission, which is not to most on-lookers' surprise.

The crofting law blog used the analogy of the tale of The Emperor's New Clothes, where the Commission is confidently stumbling on with complete lack of self-awareness whilst on-lookers gape in disbelief. All, that is, save NFUS which has publically stated support of the actions taken by the Commission. Political manoeuvrings, at the expense of crofting, perhaps? What must their membership think of this?

A recent letter to the press from an eminent lawyer, Donald Rennie, honorary president of the European Council for Rural Law, states emphatically that the imposition of grazings constables by the Crofting Commission upon shareholders whose committee has been removed by the Commission is clearly illegal. He points out that the Commission is wasting yet more public money taking this to

the Scottish Land Court. They have already thrown so much money at this now, what is a bit more?

The Cross Party Group on Crofting re-formed this month, with the crisis of confidence in the commission top of the agenda. Thirty-seven people attended, including nine MSPs. Curiously, the convener of the Commission did not attend to face the inevitable questions. The commissioner from the Western Isles was left to squirm in his place, but was adept at evasion and got out unscathed. It meant we learnt little.

SCF has sent a letter to the cabinet secretary outlining what is required in a procedural review of the way in which the Crofting Commission has dealt with the three common grazings it has removed. Such a review can avoid the same thing occurring again.

The Commission has backed off from Mangersta common grazings, with apologies. It is widely felt that if Mangersta had not stood up to the Commission they would have been bulldozed.



It shows that the campaigning we have all been doing is having an effect, so we must keep at it to protect common grazings – and therefore crofting.

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