

Post-Brexit agricultural support could yet be a boost for crofting



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AN ATTEMPT at redistributing Scotland's agricultural support could at last be on the cards.

Several major strategy documents on Scottish agricultural policy have been released in the past months, all of them pointing to the crofting areas being unique and needing bespoke support. Reviews of Scottish agriculture undertaken in the last five years or so have not set the heather on fire. But perhaps *A Future Strategy for Scottish Agriculture*, the final report delivered by the agriculture champions,

and the Scottish Government consultation document *Stability and Simplicity* offer more hope.

The recent study carried out for the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Support Group, *Post-Brexit Implications for Agriculture and Associated Land Use in the Highlands and Islands*, found that unless significant steps are taken to support crofting and hill farming in the Highlands and Islands, this unique agriculture, with all its associated benefits, could be lost.

The champions acknowledge that

Scotland has huge areas of less-favoured permanent grassland and rough grazing, where high-nature-value farming is both traditional and common. They recommend that future policies must address the specific needs of this type of farming, including the fact that low profitability threatens its very survival.

This is indeed the case for crofters and ties in with the report to the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Support Group. Scottish Government could pay heed to this,

its consultation document making it clear that the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) will continue to decline. Not to introduce Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) is a missed opportunity, an opportunity to move meaningful support to where it was intended. The prospect of LFASS being reduced to only 20% in 2020 is completely unacceptable, so more detail is imperative on how Scottish Government intends to make up the shortfall and to

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Crofting law reform update

THE SCOTTISH CROFTING Federation has supported the two-phase approach to crofting law reform, as outlined by the cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing.

No one would deny that crofting law is complex. It is in need of reform and this is, thankfully, under way. SCF is firm in its belief that reform needs to be done in a measured, methodical way, especially because of its complexity. Rushing forward into a wholesale writing of new law would create the likelihood of crofting law not getting changed in this parliamentary life, or indeed for a very long time, bearing in mind how long it has taken to get to this point.

Fergus Ewing, the cabinet secretary in charge of the reform of crofting legislation, gave evidence to the

Scottish Parliament Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recently. In answer to why he was "tinkering around the edges" or taking a "piecemeal approach" Mr Ewing was clear that Scottish Government is taking "a strategic approach to deal with things in stages that are likely to be efficacious". SCF believes this to be the correct way forward and that it is by no means piecemeal. It is actually tackling the most comprehensive reform, and doing it in two phases to ensure that it happens.

The first phase will deal with the most urgent and pragmatic amendments which will make a real difference to crofters. Identification of these issues, and how to deal with them, is already well under way by stakeholders.

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