

Call for new crofts and new crofters

IN ITS Crofting Policy Proposal the SCF calls for the creation of 10,000 new crofts.

Some have remarked on the ambitiousness of this proposal; and some have even called it over-ambitious. Put it in context though – there are nearly 18,000 existing crofts so the proposal is to increase the number by 55%, just over half.

SCF is asking for this over the term of two governments. This is not unrealistic and is deliberately challenging the government to look beyond this term of office. SCF has also proposed that one quarter of land in Scotland should be under crofting tenure by 2030.

It is important to have a long-term ambition. The rolling out of crofting tenure across Scotland as the appropriate model of land management and food production for Scotland is something SCF has promoted for years.

A fair question was asked by a crofters commissioner in the last issue of *The Crofter*. How can SCF, having the stated ambition to create 10,000 new crofts, criticise the creation of new crofts on Skye?

When creating new crofts it is essential to listen to and take into account the views of the existing community – in this case a crofting community. Furthermore it should be essential that clear criteria

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Clear consequences of livestock decline

DO ANY of the following sound familiar? A decline in the number of active crofters; absenteeism and abandonment of crofts; increasing numbers of red deer; housing development on crofts; loss of skills and traditional practices and lack of experienced labour; lack of help for new entrants; nearest slaughterhouse in Dingwall; crofts and housing inaccessible; increasing average age of crofters; increased bureaucracy, regulatory burden, cross-compliance and paperwork?

In the opinion of crofters in the parishes of Sleat and Strath in Skye, surveyed for the Scottish Natural Heritage report *An Analysis of the Impact on the Natural Heritage of the Decline in Hill Farming in Scotland*, these are some of the causes and effects of livestock reduction in their

area. As well as the Skye parishes, the report studied the parishes of Lairg, Kincardine and Creich in Sutherland and an area of the Borders.

Much of the report's content will come as no surprise. The decline in hill livestock in Scotland continued between 2004 and 2009 with the steepest decline in the north and west. The loss of a hefted sheep flock from a hill is very hard indeed to reverse and sheep from other hefts take over the vacated ground, eventually making gathering difficult or impossible.

A general degradation of habitats, spread of bracken and increased fire risk are predicted, especially in the Skye parishes. As well as the natural heritage effects, the report highlights the well-known socio-economic outcomes – de-population, the closure of schools and shops and the disintegration

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A future for crofting support?

It's nine months now since the much-anticipated Pack report was released. On page 4 David Smith analyses how the debate surrounding future support to agriculture has developed and offers some opinion on its future direction.