



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTERS CALL ON THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT TO DEBATE THE BULL SCHEME ISSUE

The Scottish Crofting Foundation are calling on the Scottish Parliament to hold a debate on the proposed closure of the Crofting Cattle Quality Improvement Scheme that has caused outrage in the crofting communities.

Norman Leask, parliamentary spokesman for the SCF, said "The announced end of the bull scheme has been met with dismay and anger by crofters across the crofting counties. The Scottish Government doesn't seem to appreciate the importance of this scheme in maintaining cattle health and quality. Our request to the government for a clear explanation and proposals for an alternative have fallen very short of what we would expect. Consequently we have spoken to MSPs and there is cross-party support for our call on the Scottish Parliament to hold a debate on the issue and so force the government to be more open in its reasoning and intentions."

The crofting livestock improvement schemes have been under attack by successive Scottish Governments since 2003, with the closure of the ram scheme and the winding down of the bull scheme.

Mr Leask again "The claim is that the schemes are not 'State Aid compliant'. This is just nonsense. There is no viable alternative in the private sector and it will cause market failure. Our understanding is that this is valid justification with the European Commission to run the schemes. In fact we were told by an EC official that they had no interest in the schemes until a Scottish Executive official contacted them.

The subsequent consequences of the closure of the ram scheme has been that consistency of quality is just not as it was and huge numbers of sheep are disappearing. This will happen to cattle too. The thing that really beggars belief is that everyone is aware of the loss of livestock from the hills and the unfolding disaster for the environment, the Scottish livestock trade and most importantly the retention of communities in the remote rural areas. Yet the government response to this is to take away one of the most effective and essential supports to livestock maintenance and improvement. This will lead to an increase in crofters coming out of livestock, you may be certain of that."

END

Contact: Neil MacLeod, Chairman	01851 702673 / 07785942222
Norman Leask, Parliamentary Spokesman	01595 693714 / 07957 936831
Patrick Krause, Chief Executive	01599 566 365 / 07739 941199

Notes to editors

Pictures can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/index.php/home>