



NEWS RELEASE

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Crofting Federation welcomes pledge of action plan for Commission governance

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has welcomed the pledge by Scottish Government to put in place an action plan to address the failures highlighted by the governance review of the Crofting Commission.

“The governance review of the Crofting Commission, instigated by Scottish Government at our request, has exposed many weaknesses in basic operating procedures and in how the organisation copes with extraordinary individual behaviours”, said Russell Smith, Chair of the SCF. “The review has made it clear that a robust Commissioner appraisal process is required, to help identify and deliver ongoing training and skills development. We are particularly keen to see a rationalisation of the roles of Commissioners, establishing when they should be delegating to the executive staff or referring to other bodies that have the required expertise. Commissioners should have a strategic and advisory capacity only. It is clear that they got too involved with executive procedures that they did not have the competence or remit for.

“The review team recognises the huge damage done to the reputation of the Commission by the in-fighting,” continued Mr Smith, “and particularly that the vote of no confidence in the convener did not achieve a tangible result, that is, his removal. Frustratingly, the review does not suggest how this will be resolved, though the government’s recent exoneration will open up options.”

Scottish Government ordered the governance review of the Crofting Commission following the crisis of confidence in the organisation due to the inappropriate actions taken on common grazings committees and the subsequent breakdown of relationships within the Commission. The review was conducted by business advisors and accountancy firm Scott-Moncrieff and commenced in November 2016.

Mr Smith continued, “It is alarming that the review team found there to be fundamental inconsistencies and gaps in records of events that led to the breakdown of the organisation. This appears to have handicapped the review to an extent, and is telling in itself.”

Mr Smith concluded, "The list of areas for improvement is long and the minister for crofting, Mr Fergus Ewing, has instructed that an action plan to address them be put in place as a matter of urgency. This will, we hope, sort out some of the fundamental issues that allowed the near collapse of this significant organisation. We are strongly of the opinion that the purpose and role of Commissioners needs to be appraised and a clear boundary to be set between their overseeing strategy and the staff's executive function. This seems critical to the health of the Crofting Commission."

END

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Notes to editors

- Pictures can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>