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Scottish Crofting Foundation Call For Halt To Decrofting

The Minister for Environment, Michael Russell MSP, has been asked to impose an immediate moratorium on multiple-site decrofting to protect the culture from collapse.

The call from the Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) comes after details came to light of another blatant speculation on croft land on the Isle of Skye.

The tenancy of a croft was taken up by a Mr Brian Swain who was given £3,000 in early 2004 as part of the Highland and Islands Croft Entrant Scheme which is to encourage young people to come into crofting.

The award is subject to the incoming tenant having their croft development plan approved by the Crofters Commission, the government body responsible for the regulation and protection of crofting. The commission has now confirmed that late last year – less than three years after it approved his development plan for the land – it gave Mr Swain permission to decroft three sites on the croft. The sites, and the croft tenancy, are now for sale on the open market and Mr Swain is asking for nearly £200,000 for his lucrative short-term investment.

Patrick Krause, the chief executive of the SCF, said: "This shockingly blatant piece of speculation and the complicity of the Crofters Commission is the legacy of the previous failed regime led by David Green.

"It shows how far the Commission was willing to stoop and it is no surprise that it has fallen in the eyes of crofters. These decroftings were granted at a time when the Crofting Reform Bill was in a state of collapse and the Commission was being told in the strongest possible terms that crofters wanted it to block speculative developments to protect the system."

He added that there is a real fear among crofters that the floodgates would really open on speculation over the next year or more, during the period before the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, led by Prof. Shucksmith, issues its report and further legislation is enacted.

"We are getting cases of this sort of speculation arriving here on a weekly basis at the moment," said Mr Krause. "It is depressing as it is causing division and damage within many communities who are being torn between their traditional values and market values. "Although it would be nice to give the "new" Commission a chance, crofters' previous experience is that the Commission has been unable to put the brakes on uncontrolled and speculative development.

"On the basis of that experience it is simply too big a risk to leave it in charge of regulation over this period before further legislation is put in place which, we hope, will put much stricter regulations on croft land use. That is why the new administration in the Scottish Executive has to impose an immediate moratorium on all whole-croft and multiple decroftings until the legislation is passed."