

Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 Stage two Consultation Scottish Crofting Federation's Members Briefing

Background

The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 Consultation is the second stage consultation setting out the government's vision for a new SRDP.

This consultation and briefing relate to 'Pillar Two' of the current Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) reform. The briefing sets out the issues most relevant to the crofting community and the SCF's current thinking on the reforms.

The total SRDP budget is £1.32 bn over the period 2014-2020. This is a third of the total budget and it plays a vital role in rural development. There are key priority areas set by the EU for rural areas these include:

- Fostering knowledge transfer, co-operation and innovation
- Enhancing competitiveness, promoting innovative technologies and sustainable management of forests
- Promoting food chain organization and risk management
- Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems
- Promoting resource efficiency and transition to a low carbon economy
- Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development

The four objectives for Scotland's Rural Development Programme set out in the consultation document are:

- Protecting and enhancing our natural assets
- Adapting to, and mitigating, climate change
- Sustainable economic growth
- Vibrant and sustainable rural communities

Introduction

The purpose of the briefing is to inform members and to encourage you to submit your own response as well as contributing to the SCF's response. While it would be beneficial for all members to read and respond to the entire consultation we appreciate that not everyone will have the time and ability to do this. We have therefore pulled out the sections which we feel are important for members to respond to.

We have set the briefing out in a similar flow to the consultation to make it as easy as possible to follow the briefing. If you would like to discuss or comment on the briefing, please get in touch with Karen at HQ on 01599 530 005.

Key Issues

Section 4 - Budget allocation

Question 1 – How would you rate your satisfaction with the budget as a whole?

Answer: Quite dissatisfied

Comments:

Forestry – This is a large proportion of the budget allocation. There are concerns that forestry schemes if not appropriately targeted, could lead to the loss of good agricultural land. If looking at forestry as climate change mitigation it would make sense to put more of this budget into peatland management as peatlands sequester far more climate change gasses than trees do;

Agri-Environment – Climate – 15m for peatland restoration – would prefer to see this for peatland maintenance;

New Entrants – would like to see targeting towards crofting also;

Crofters and Smallholders Grants – while this budget has increased by only 60%, the potential number of applicants has increased by over 100%. Concerned that if the proposed extension takes place taking in 73% of smallholdings, the money will be spread too thinly.

Section 6 – Future support for less favoured areas (LFASS)

Question 3 - Should support for farmers operating in constrained area be continued through the SRDP?

Answer: Other

Comments:

Any support available should be more targeted than the current LFASS. A fast conversion to ANC would allow for better targeting of support and so would like to see this conversion as soon as possible.

LFASS must be remodelled in the intervening period to ensure the more fragile areas receive more funding.

Any potential abuse of this scheme could be minimised by using a minimum agricultural use or a suitable minimum stocking density rate, which may help exclude naked acres.

Section 7 – New Entrants Scheme

Question 4 – How would you rate your satisfaction with the proposal for the new entrant's scheme?

Answer: Quite dissatisfied

Comments:

There is no mention of how this scheme could be of benefit to new entrants to crofting. There could be a similar scheme targeted at crofting with a proportion of the allocated budget. If it was to be available it could be used as 'match' funding for CCAGS for capital investments.

Section 8 – Crofting and small farm support scheme

Question 5 – Should a scheme be extended to provide capital support to small farms?

Answer: No

Question 6 – Is a 3 to 50 ha range appropriate for defining a small land holding?

Answer: No

Question 7 – Do you agree with the proposal for grants of £500 to be available to assist the establishment of grazings committees?

Answer: Yes

Question 8 – How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals?

Answer: Very dissatisfied

Comments:

CCAGS should not be opened up to non-crofters. Any expansion would dilute the importance and the uniqueness of crofting to the public and also in the eyes of the Government. The existing scheme should be easier to apply for and so increase uptake.

The scheme should be available to all crofters regardless of size, with no upper or lower limit. Small-holders in the Highlands and Islands should be supported and encouraged to convert to crofting and so would be eligible for the scheme, but also be regulated in the same way that crofters currently are.

Regulated land is vital for protecting land by reducing speculation for development, reducing amalgamation and fragmentation of units and also the retention of people and communities. If the scheme were to be opened crofters would see no financial benefit to being regulated.

With regards to intervention rates we would like to see fixed rates instead of “up to” as this could lead to potential variances between individual cases.

Section 9 – Agri-environment-climate scheme

Question 9 – How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposal?

Answer: Quite satisfied

Comments:

The concept of approving applications on an on-going basis suggests that there would be a level playing field for all applications. Anything that can be done to make agri-environment schemes more widely available will be of benefit, especially if it helps to minimise the cost of the application process. The number of crofting specific options was disappointing however; more specific options or weighting to the benefit of smaller units could ensure a higher uptake by crofters.

Section 10 – Forestry grant scheme

Question 10 – It is proposed to support forestry under 6 main areas, please identify if you agree with these broad areas.

Answer: Tick all

Question 11 – We propose 9 woodland creation options with support through standard costs. Should these be included?

Answer: Tick 3-9

Question 16 – Should agro-forestry be supported?

Answer: Yes

Section 11 – Support for co-operative action

Question 22 – How do you rate your broad satisfaction of the proposals?

Answer: Quite Satisfied

Comments:

We would like to see support for projects on common grazings included under this scheme.