

Welcome to Crofter

100

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT!

To commemorate the achievement of 100 issues of this unique publication, we invited two previous editors to offer their thoughts. We start here with Jim Hunter, followed by John Toal on page 3. Both throw down challenges to the SCF and the agencies we work with.

In addition to reflecting on our origins we are, as always, looking ahead – at energy generation and conservation; the importance of

genetics in breeding cattle; opportunities for young crofters and new entrants; the shape of the new CAP; croft registration; crofters and computers; and the rest.

We have a tribute to one of crofting's best-known characters, the late Allan MacRae of Assynt. We also remember Ivan MacDonald from Uist, a talented young crofter full of promise. Both are sadly lost to us and we salute them.

In addition you will find all the usual features inside *Crofter 100*.

Will the new SRDP be more crofting friendly?

SCF RESPONDED TO the recent SRDP consultation by saying that crofting, whilst widely recognised as very important in Scottish rural development, was supported by the current SRDP quite appallingly.

There has been a lot of work carried out by crofting interests to try to identify why and to suggest ways of reversing this in the new SRDP. The result of these deliberations is the suggestion of a Crofting Support Scheme (CSS), which has widespread support.

But having seen crofting fare so poorly in the current SRDP, it would not be unfair to predict that the CSS would not satisfy all requirements (in measures and money) to keep crofters crofting; and crofters would therefore be likely to need to apply to wider SRDP measures also. In this scenario there have been concerns about duplication, but that is perhaps a bit of a red herring; if the appropriate measure exists within the CSS there would be no need for the crofter to seek support elsewhere, surely?

The suggestion that the CSS should extend to other small-holdings in the crofting counties that deliver the same desired outcomes is understood. However, there are valid reasons why this should not be the case. Crofting is a regulated system of tenure – regulated by specific legislation related only to crofting. It imposes burdens upon crofts

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Still lots for a crofters union to be doing

WHEN PUTTING TOGETHER the first issue of *The Crofter*, a title borrowed from a Highland Land League publication of the 1880s, I wouldn't have bet much money on there being a hundredth issue.

In the course of the late night or early morning sessions that were a feature of my regular visits to the Lewis home of the late Angus Macleod, the Scottish Crofters Union's founding father, one of our recurring topics was how long the then new organisation, in which Angus had invested so much entirely unpaid effort, might last.

The Land League, Angus would say, had been founded in 1883 and had done a great job in winning crofters the security of tenure and other basic rights embodied in the Crofters Act of 1886. But by the early 1890s the Land League was falling apart. As for the Federation of Crofters Unions, set up in the early 1960s to successfully oppose

Crofters Commission plans for wholesale croft amalgamations, it too achieved its key objective – but then, just like the Land League before it, began to fade away.

What both these organisations lacked, or so Angus concluded years before the SCU got off the ground, was a subscription base sufficient to support paid staff. Volunteers were all very well, but you couldn't rely on them. Worse, you couldn't give them orders. But once you had employees working for you forty hours a week – though at the end of forty hours, in Angus's opinion, you'd barely started – well, then you might just have a fighting chance of having set up something that would stay the course.

And so it's proved. There have been a couple of name changes (which I regret) along the way. But crofters still have an organisation with the capacity to argue crofting's case in a

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