

Crofting must get support for disadvantage



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SCF HAS warned Scottish Government that crofting is seriously threatened by the drastic cuts to Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS), which must be reimbursed somehow.

Scottish Government has had the option for many years to switch from LFASS to the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) scheme, which SCF advocated as it would have maintained support to those who really need it. Scottish Government chose to opt out of this scheme, with the support of the farming industry lobby.

Having made the decision, knowing the consequences, Scottish Government has had several years to prepare for this and yet it has resulted in a reduction of LFA support to 80% of 2018 rates for 2019 and then potentially to cut it

to a mere 40% for 2020. Cabinet secretary for rural economy Fergus Ewing has consistently said that further proposed cuts would be unacceptable and that he will find a way to maintain them. However, this is still a real cut which could have been avoided if we had transferred to the ANC scheme as other countries have. Any further reduction will be ruinous for crofters and farmers in the disadvantaged areas.

Following several meetings with government officials and the cabinet secretary, SCF has received an assurance from Mr Ewing that the less favoured area support will not drop below 80% of the 2018 rate and those crofters on the minimum payment of £385 will retain this. It is not clear where the extra money will come from and how it will be delivered, so we will continue to monitor the situation.

Sea eagles move up the political agenda

THE CROSS-PARTY Group on Crofting met recently in the Scottish Parliament, chaired by Alasdair Allan MSP and administered by SCF.

This group is always very well attended, with over thirty representatives of organisations and individuals regularly attending. It is a very potent forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the Scottish Government to act. At the recent meeting several important issues were raised, with the main topical presentation by SNH on the conflict between crofting and wildlife – focusing mainly on sea eagles. The release of these large predators into the wild has increasingly become a problem,

resulting sometimes in devastating losses to crofters all along the western seaboard.

SCF is closely involved in trying to address the sea eagle issue through local and national management groups, and we were pleased to see the recent publication of the updated sea eagle management plan by SNH.

We particularly welcome the fact that SNH has quite unequivocally stated that healthy sheep and lambs are taken by these very large raptors. This has been long overdue and is the first time that SNH and, by implication, RSPB, who also sit on the national stakeholders' group, have so publicly acknowledged this without reservations. It is something that crofters have known for the

best part of 20 years.

Sea eagles, also known as white-tailed eagles, were indigenous to the UK but were hunted and ultimately wiped out early in the twentieth century. They were reintroduced to the west coast of Scotland in 1975 by RSPB and SNH (then known as the Nature Conservancy Council). Some would argue that the environment they were released into is not the same as that of the nineteenth century, with their food source, mainly inshore fish and small mammals, much scarcer.

Over ten years 82 Norwegian juvenile birds were released on Rum, with the first birds

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Land for new croft entrants

A KEY DRIVER of land reform in Scotland has been to increase the number of people who occupy, own, manage and have a say in Scotland's land.

Two recent news items have again raised the issue of access to land for croft new entrants.

Last month HIE announced that they intend to sell the Orbest estate in Skye, which they have owned since 1997. This was a worthy project that had the intention of

creating new crofts. The legislation at the time did not allow for this so a few smallholdings now exist on the estate, which may be converted into crofts. The bulk of the estate is managed as one farm and some woodland. Is this an opportunity to create new crofts and woodland crofts?

The other news release of interest came from Scottish Government, announcing that 6,400 hectares of land have been contributed by public bodies to

create new start-up farms. Both HIE and Highland Council have lent land that is earmarked for future development, so it will only be let on short lease which doesn't encourage investment in the land. But it is a start. However, there is no mention of whether there has been consideration of the creation of new crofts.

SCF has called on the Scottish Government to create 10,000 new

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