

SCF is dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting

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Principle of convergence not fulfilled



Ewe hogs and cast ewes loaded and ready for the off

IT IS recognised that things can change very dramatically in a week in politics and it is the same for the agricultural politics of Scotland.

SCF had to spell out crofters' anger at cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing's announced allocation of the convergence uplift, having welcomed an announcement made by him only two days earlier. The first announcement indicated that Scottish Government was moving far away from the much-criticised proposals the farmers' union had published and would be ensuring "the money goes to where it was originally intended." In fairness, the direction Scottish Government has taken is not what NFUS demanded, thank goodness, but it is not in "the spirit and original premise of convergence" promised by Mr Ewing, a promise which, it is felt, was misleading.

The original intention of external convergence was to ensure a more equal distribution of direct agricultural support between member states. Member states that had direct payments per hectare below 90% of the union average were to close the gap between

their level and this average, with all member states arriving by financial year 2020 at a minimum level representing roughly 75% of the union average.

Scottish Government has clearly disregarded this intention in allocating an over-generous proportion of the money to Region 1, land that already receives 91% of the European average. The rationalisation given by Scottish Government is very weak and demonstrates a lack of political will – or a completely different view of what convergence is about. It looks remarkably like a ruse to give more to those that already have.

It does not, as Mr Ewing claimed, help those who need help most – those who farm on our marginal land. These producers still receive a pitiful amount on Region 3 land.

Following the outcry by crofters to the announcement, and SCF's robust stance taken in the media, the cabinet secretary and officials met with SCF to make an offer. The intentions of the Scottish Government are good, it seems,

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Brexit and crofting – threat or opportunity?

WITH A GENERAL election in December and the Brexit deadline extended to 31st January, everything is still up in the air.

We could leave with a deal on transition arrangements, leave without a deal sooner or later, or have a another referendum after the election delivers a hung parliament. If the prime minister doesn't know what is happening, how are we crofters supposed to know and plan?

But if we stop and think for a moment – the debate has been about the withdrawal agreement. This defines transition arrangements,

ie what happens over the next year or so, which is that basically nothing changes. We then have a short length of time to negotiate long-term trade arrangements between the UK and the EU, probably with different arrangements for Northern Ireland.

These long-term trade agreements are covered by the political declaration, not the withdrawal agreement. The political declaration runs to only 27 pages and to describe it as woolly is to do a disservice to all sheep everywhere. I couldn't find a specific mention of agriculture at all; and about tariffs it just says "The economic partnership

should, through a free trade agreement, ensure no tariffs, fees, charges or quantitative restrictions across all sectors." Note the word "should," not "will".

There is a section on fishing, but only four short paragraphs of aspirations. So even if the withdrawal agreement is passed by parliament eventually, the arguing is just beginning and we are not really any wiser on what happens in 2021.

This matters.

The lamb trade has a substantial export market

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