



NEWS RELEASE

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WILL THE PROPOSED CROFTING REFORMS BE ENOUGH ASK THE SCF

The Scottish Crofting Foundation has welcomed the Scottish Government's response to the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, but asks 'will it be enough?'

SCF Chairman Neil MacLeod said "there is a lot of good in the proposals put forward especially the intentions to encourage more new entrants, to give crofters more involvement in decision making and to reform governance and regulation. We have won some victories such as the retention of a reformed commission, the commitment to create a register and the dismissal of the residency burden, but the proposals are a bit thin in the area of making crofting more viable. We all know that regulation needs sorting out but effective regulation alone is not going to halt the decline unless it is backed up with real support measures. There have been no clear decisions yet on support such as the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme, the levelling of Single Farm Payment, directing public goods payment to activity and support to home building, but these are all under review. It is yet to be seen therefore whether the proposals for crofting reform will be backed up enough by genuine support and fair payment for the goods crofters provide".

On Wednesday the Minister for Crofting Michael Russell MSP delivered the official government response to the 'Shucksmith Report', the findings of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting. The proposals include shaking up the Crofters Commission, introducing more democracy, creating a full register of crofts, reviewing croft housing and agricultural support and placing crofting development under the responsibility of HIE.

Mr MacLeod continued "there will be concern over crofting development coming under HIE but there is a certain logic provided HIE create a specialised unit, along the lines of the Community Land Unit, with staff experienced in crofting to take this on. And it will need ring-fenced, realistic funding of course."

The proposals also include the controversial winding up of the Cattle Improvement Scheme.

Mr MacLeod again "The government have pledged that they will support the retention of stock on the hills but doing away with the bull scheme does not give the right message. The minister has assured us that there will be measures introduced to the SRDP to support cattle improvement but crofters are not getting into the SRDP. There needs to be a stand-alone cattle scheme that is non-competitive."

Mr MacLeod concluded "we are committed to helping reform happen as the current situation is unsustainable – if we do nothing crofting will be lost. There is much in the government's response that can be acted on now and it is essential that improvements are made quickly. We will be consulting our members and working very closely with the government to help bring

about change, but change that is acceptable and will see new life breathed into crofting. The bottom line is that crofting has to pay. We are actively developing new markets but we can not rely on market forces alone – crofting delivers many public goods that the market does not reward. The Government has made it clear that it recognises the benefits crofting brings to Scotland and that it wants to bring about fundamental changes to ensure its survival. Some of those changes have to include ensuring that crofting is financially viable. As we have said before, crofters have rights and responsibilities but a crofter’s first responsibility is to provide a livelihood for the family.”

END

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Notes to editors

| Pictures can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/index.php/home>