



NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT FAILING TO PROVIDE ANSWERS TO TORRIDON PLANNING CONTROVERSY, SAYS SCF

The Scottish Crofting Federation has voiced its concern that the Scottish Government's planning system is undermining crofting law after the Government said it would not intervene in the case of a Wester Ross woman who is trying to build a house on her croft.

In August, Government planners rejected an appeal by Torridon crofter Elaine Holmes against Highland Council's decision to refuse a planning application for a small single-storey house on her croft at Fasag at the head of Loch Torridon. There is no house on the croft at present. Ms Holmes, who is a mother of three, is currently unable to stay in Torridon and lives nearly ten miles away from her croft.

After Government planners rejected the appeal the SCF wrote to the Planning Minister, Derek Mackay, asking him to reconsider the decision. The SCF argued that the planners' justification for refusing the house on 'landscape' grounds went against the advice of the statutory landscape authority, Scottish Natural Heritage. Mr Mackay has now replied to them, saying that he has no intention of taking the matter further.

SCF director Fiona Mandeville said: "Sadly, the Minister's response shows that he and his planning officials are still unable to provide a satisfactory answer as to why the advice of SNH, the locally based expert body on landscape issues, was not properly considered in this case.

"They also failed to address our concerns about the apparent lack of any serious effort by the planning appeal official to quantify the social impact of Ms Holmes' presence in Torridon despite the fact that this is a requirement of the planning process.

"By this decision, the Government has demonstrated, unequivocally, that Scotland's planning system regards the 'dramatic' appearance of the west coast as more important than its people."

Ms Mandeville added that the case also raises concerns about broader attitudes towards crofting among planners. She said: "Crofting law provides a presumption that every crofter has

the right to a single dwelling-house on their croft. Where is regard taken of that in these decisions?

"We are compiling a list of planning appeal decisions which do not properly consider the crofting interest and we would like to hear from anyone with further examples."

END

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