



NEWS RELEASE

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HISTORIC LEGISLATION GREETED WITH SILENCE

The passing of the slated Crofting Reform Bill was greeted with silence by crofters, who warn that there are burning issues that need addressing before the “Shucksmith Inquiry” is launched. A cropped version of the Crofting Reform Etc Bill, which had been widely criticised, passed through its final stage in the Scottish Parliament last week. Whilst an almost audible sigh of relief could be heard in the Scottish Executive, crofters were unmoved by the alleged solemnity of the historic moment and pointed out that this was only the baseline for the reform.

Norman Leask, Chair of the Scottish Crofting Foundation said “We should all be glad to have got to this point, swimming upstream as we were against the limited ambition of the Scottish Executive. Having this Bill passed, albeit in a drastically hacked version, was an achievement given that the original Bill would not have got through at all. We must not lose sight of the many, very important aspects to crofting regulation and support that need urgent resolution. We are very happy to have won the Committee of Inquiry, to be led by Professor Shucksmith. While the Committee carries out its investigation, the Crofters Commission must be directed by Ministers to act in the best interests of crofting using existing legislation. We cannot be complacent and adopt a “well, let’s see what the Shucksmith Committee recommends” attitude. The Commission has existing, and now new, powers with which to address problems that assail crofting: lack of income, absenteeism, neglect and land speculation, and they must use them”. The Crofters Commission were widely criticised in the highly regarded report produced by the Environment and Rural Development Committee, under the convenorship of Sarah Boyack MSP, who is now the minister with responsibility for crofting reform.

Leask again “We want to work with the Crofters Commission. This must start with protecting existing croft land and in returning crofts to working units. Crofters must then be supported with development schemes that are sufficiently funded to deliver. The mission has to be to defend and develop crofting for the long-term future”.

END

<u>Ends</u>	<u>Contact:</u>	Norman Leask, SCF Chairman	Tel. 07957 936831
		Patrick Krause, SCF Chief Executive	Tel. 01599 566387
		Becky Shaw, SCF Programme Manager	Tel. 01408 633131

Notes to editors

Picture can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/contact.shtml>