



NEWS RELEASE

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Federation urges crofters to take care in burning

Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) urges crofters who practice Muirburn to do so with extra care as several fires have gone out of control in difficult conditions recently.

"Burning off the heather in a carefully controlled manner is an essential part of managing hill grazing," Yvonne White, vice-chair of the SCF said. "Burning heather allows it to regenerate providing food and access. If the hill was not burnt then the heather would be waist high and woody, and the habitat would be poorer for all: livestock, wild animals and humans.

"There have been several cases of fires getting out of control lately. In some areas conditions have been difficult with very dry ground and erratic winds. Errors happen, you can misjudge the wind and the situation can change very quickly. I suggest that Common Grazings committees should review their Muirburn plan to make sure it is up-to-date as a new code has been issued."

The new version of the Muirburn Code, which has been enhanced by the contributions of a wide range of stakeholders, provides good practice guidance for burning and cutting of vegetation, and sets out the statutory restrictions that apply. Under cross compliance, recipients of the Basic Payment Scheme have to meet the requirements of Good Agricultural and Environment Conditions (GAECs), some of which relate to the Muirburn Code.

Ms White concluded, "The new Muirburn Code is practical and informative. We need to burn for the reasons I gave, but we just need to be as careful as possible. Following the guidance in the Muirburn Code can go a long way to ensuring a successful burn."

END

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Notes to editors

Some of the developments in the new Muirburn Code are:

- The new Code states that burning should not take place on peatland (land with a peat depth of more than 50cm). This is consistent with current thinking on the importance of our peatlands as a carbon store. Burning on peatland can, however, be carried out as part of a peatland restoration plan approved by SNH. This will normally include measures to raise the water table.
- The introduction of fire-free buffer zones adjacent to water courses and water bodies
- Specific guidance on burning for grazing
- Greater emphasis on the potential role of cutting in addition to, or as a replacement to burning.

The Code is supported by Supplementary Information which provides more detail on a range of topics, including guidance on:

- Muirburn planning
- Ignition patterns and techniques
- Fire control equipment
- Advantages and disadvantages of burning and cutting

If crofters have areas of approved Muirburn in any current agri-environment scheme contract, (SRDP – Rural Priorities or AECS), they must adhere to the revised Muirburn code to meet the scheme requirements. It is unlikely that any of these areas will fall out with the provisions of the revised code. However, if the contract does include burning on areas of peatland, the crofters must not undertake Muirburn on these areas and if they are claiming the Muirburn and Heather cutting capital item, they must reduce their capital claim area accordingly.

- A picture of Yvonne can be found at: <http://www.crofting.org>