



NEWS RELEASE

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Payments transition an opportunity to get things right for Crofting says Federation

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has emphasised in its response to the government 'Stability and Simplicity' consultation that change is urgently needed in the agricultural and rural development payments regime in order to get a fair deal for crofters.

"Certainty is more important than stability," said Russell Smith, Chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF). Why emphasise stability when we can take the opportunity to improve the system? Many of the issues raised in this consultation are relevant whether there is a transition period or not, but are imperative due to the uncertainties about the UK withdrawal. The opportunity to consider how agriculture and rural development are currently supported in Scotland and how they will be in future, is a very useful exercise. It is an opportunity to rebalance how the system works for public good, to target resources to where they most benefit sustainable food production, environmental maintenance and the wellbeing of rural communities."

Mr Smith went on, "The current system urgently needs revision. It was announced only this week that the New Entrants Capital Grants Scheme has been extremely successful – yet is to be discontinued. New entrants are the life-blood of crofting and farming and we want to see the reinstatement of a Crofting New Entrants Scheme, a workable arrangement to tackle land abandonment by getting unused crofts working again under new entrants.

"Another area that urgently needs alteration is how crofters are paid on rough grazing," Mr Smith continued. "When introduced, the Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme was declared to be the 'top-up' mechanism for producers on rough grazing, which includes many crofters, who get an appallingly low payment on Region 3 land. Yet it appears to favour large farms by paying on extra hogs retained only for the grant. This has been raised many times and yet this consultation says nothing about the scheme at all."

Mr Smith added, "The Less Favoured Area Support Scheme has also been used to pay higher rates to farmers on better quality land within the designated areas. This is clearly not the intention of the scheme, but, despite having been criticised by bodies such as the European Commission, this mechanism has continued and will continue, in the name of 'stability'.

“The problem with this approach,” concluded Mr Smith, “is that inequitable and poor public-value aspects of the current regime remain in place in the name of ‘stability’, as we have seen in the past where there have been opportunities for change. We need change with a redistribution of funding towards areas that provide better value for public spend, a key feature of the Agricultural Champions’ recommendations, and which we have emphasised in our response.”

END

Contact:

Russell Smith, SCF Chair	01863 766 144 / 07899 896 001
Yvonne White, SCF Vice-Chair	01470 532 729 / 07545 459 929
Patrick Krause, SCF Chief Executive	07739 941 199
SCF Office	01599 530 005

Notes to editors

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