



NEWS RELEASE

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Crofting Federation calls for moratorium on sporting rates demands

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) calls on local authorities to halt inappropriate demands for payment of rates from crofters on sporting rights which they do not have and to declare a moratorium until this has been sorted out.

“The Federation has received many communications from members who are very anxious over a demand they have received for payment, sometimes of very large amounts of money, for rates on sporting rights they do not hold”, said SCF Chair, Russell Smith. “The great majority of crofters are tenants and do not hold the sporting rights of the land they rent. Local authorities in the Highlands and Islands should know this. There will be a tiny number of owner-occupiers who do hold sporting rights, who will be liable for rates but who can apply for Small Business Rate Relief, but most do not hold rights.

“Apparently the Valuation Board were charged with rating sporting rights and the first thing they did was to write to all occupiers of land asking if they hold the sporting rights. The information on the occupier of land was provided by Scottish Government, SNH and Forest Enterprise. As far as we know the Crofting Commission was not consulted.

“Many crofters either did not receive this request, did not understand what it was or thought it was for the landowner”, Mr Smith continued. “Whatever the reason, if the crofter did not refute it, the Assessor set a sporting rateable value which was passed to the Local Authority who then issued a demand for payment.

“Crofters faced with a demand for payment of rates for sporting rights need to be aware that a response to the demand is still legally due even if they do not hold the rights. In most cases this is by 1st March 2018. If no action is taken by the crofter then recovery could be put in the hands of a Sheriff Officer. The Sheriff Officer will add their charges to the amount to be recovered”, Mr Smith added.

“Crofters who do not hold sporting rights should contact their Assessor to let them know that they do not and must contact their Local Authority without delay, and certainly before 1st March”, Mr Smith emphasised. The Local Authority will advise on what the course of action will be. A hold on the demand for payment may be granted in individual cases whilst this is sorted

out, but the SCF is asking all Local Authorities to put a moratorium on the demands with immediate effect. There are very few crofters who hold sporting rights and it seems very shoddy to have issued these threatening letters wholesale instead of taking the time and trouble to identify who in fact holds these sporting rights – and is therefore liable for paying the rates.”

END

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Notes to editors

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