

DRAFT SCOTTISH LAND – USE STRATEGY

CONSULTATION RESPONSE December 2010

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) is pleased to offer this response to the Government's consultation on the above. SCF is the only representative and campaigning organisation for crofters and crofting in Scotland. The crofting counties cover almost half the land-mass of the country, and 25 percent of the agricultural land within that area is under crofting tenure. Much of this land is rough grazing, but there is good arable and grassland in crofting tenure in such areas as Easter Ross, Caithness, Orkney, the south end of Shetland, and the machair lands of the Outer Hebrides and the Argyll Islands. This is a resource of huge food production capacity, but also comprises many of the country's most valued landscapes and habitats, and most of its peat-based soils (and therefore by far its largest soil-carbon store). There are approximately 17,500 crofts and 11,000 crofters.

What would we like to see in a Land Use Strategy?

- Crofting land actively and sustainably used to provide good-quality, healthy food; renewable energy; affordable housing; timber and other forestry products.
- Crofters encouraged to continue, and increase, their production of hardy, healthy store and breeding livestock for the mainstream agriculture industry.
- Crofters rewarded for sustainable management of soil carbon stocks through retaining and, where necessary, reintroducing extensive grazing practices on the hills and moors.
- Fair payment for other non-market goods provided by traditional crofting land management practices, through an accessible and non-discriminatory system of support.¹
- Crofters helped practically through provision of information and capital loans, and a fair and affordable grid connection charge, to develop small-scale renewable energy projects.

¹ Rural Priorities is only open to online application and therefore discriminates against those who are not computer-literate or do not have broadband service.

- Planning policies designed for crofting communities (and a government Planning Advice Note) to protect inbye croft land from speculative housing development, allow development of affordable housing on poorer land, and take account of creation of new and woodland crofts.
- Far stronger action by the regulatory agency to prevent misuse, neglect and absenteeism on croft land. Proactive policies to bring such land back to productive use.
- Policies to enable a productive, extensive livestock industry to continue in the country's remote areas and islands, such as provision of local abattoirs; a continued and enhanced Cattle Improvement Scheme; affordable ferry transport; encouragement for crofters' stock clubs.
- Flexibility within the National Forest Land Scheme to allow the Woodland Crofts concept to make progress.
- Further Land Reform legislation to ensure that the will of communities and of Parliament can be carried through, enabling more communities to take control over their land.
- Stability for the long-term in support schemes – an end to the perennial threats to the schemes unique to crofting – viz. Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme, Croft House Grant Scheme and Cattle Improvement Scheme. SRDP measures that are clearly understandable and easily accessible. An end to payment for inactivity. LFASS targeted to the 'Vulnerable Areas' i.e. the fragile and very fragile less favoured areas.

Our detailed responses to the consultation questions are given in the form attached herewith.