

National Development Plan for Crofting



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FOLLOWING sustained lobbying by SCF, the Scottish National Party included in their manifesto a pledge to publish a National Development Plan for Crofting. This commitment is being honoured by the Scottish

Government and the Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum is working on a contribution towards informing this plan. The Crofting Stakeholder Forum is a practical action group, formed from the attendees of

the Cross Party Group on Crofting which meets regularly to discuss crofting-related matters. Over the last 18 months, the group has focussed on what the vision is for the future of crofting and welcomed the addition of manifesto commitments to consider both a review of crofting legislation and the publication of a National Development Plan for Crofting in the programme for Scottish Government. The forum initially identified five key priority areas which would deliver this vision. However as a result of the difficulties highlighted during 2016 relating to common grazings, a sixth was added:

- **simplify crofting legislation:** develop the 'bones' of a new act;
- **new entrants:** make crofts available;
- **increase affordable housing:** a meaningful grant and loan scheme;
- **crofting development:** a funded lead body on crofting development;
- **financial incentives:** ensure current and future policies have a positive impact on crofting;
- **common grazings:** ensure that grazings regulations are fit for purpose.

These priorities were presented to the minister and whole-heartedly endorsed.

The forum welcomes the fact that work

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Profound implications for huge areas of crofting land

SCF MEMBERS come to the federation for help with many and varied problems.

An ongoing case causes us deep concern, with worrying implications for croft land, in particular common grazings. Several articles elsewhere in this issue highlight the need for grazings to be managed effectively as a vital resource for crofting communities.

Our members took over a long-abandoned croft about five years ago as new entrants. The land was derelict and three quarters under dense bracken. They have transformed the holding into a good, diversified crofting business that is a shining example of what can be achieved from unpromising beginnings, given a bit of vision, enterprise, determination and hard work.

No only that; they are actively and energetically involved in township affairs, bringing about much-needed

improvements to the common grazings. They have also taken on two neighbouring crofts on sublets and again are bringing neglected land back into productive use.

We would have thought that crofting needs many more such individuals and that they would be given every encouragement, even be used as a case study in a glossy annual report. So it came as quite a shock to hear of the treatment they have received from their local SGRPID office.

It started a year ago when, in all good faith, they questioned the BPS regional allocation of one of their parks as no account had been taken of recent land improvements.

SGRPID responded to this by carrying out an aggressive and nit-picking land inspection, the aim of which appears to have been to undermine and demoralise our members. The methodology of this inspection was suspect as, for

example, a non-existent area of dense bracken and a vertical rock face were deemed ineligible as was an area of 'scrub'. There were a few small trees, but these were not preventing grazing.

Most seriously, the inspecting officers deemed ineligible a Region 3 hill park, on the grounds that no livestock was present and the fencing was not stockproof. In fact the fencing was in process of being renewed at the time. Crucially this hill park formed a large percentage of our members' total claim for 2016, and if ineligible, would invalidate the whole claim.

They were informed verbally of the inspection findings and told that penalties would be invoked. On asking for details in writing they were told that they could expect a letter "hopefully by the end of 2017". They cannot appeal against the

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Message from the chair...

Russell Smith



AFTER A FEW weeks off from SCF meetings in April for lambing, things got back into full swing towards the end of May.

Highland Sheep was a good opportunity to hear your views and to sign up a few new members. There seemed to be optimism about the sheep industry, perhaps buoyed up by the excellent organisation, the good weather and a busy bar.

SCF had a stand at the Royal Highland Show, as always, and members drop in for a chat and a seat in the shade. It also gives us a chance to talk to politicians and get our points of view across.

I was invited to a round-table discussion with Michael Gove, the new UK secretary of state for agriculture. He stressed the importance of provenance and high welfare standards to our beef

and lamb, along with environmental protection and that he didn't want these damaged. He wants to maintain free and frictionless access to our markets without dismantling the protection that our own producers have from imports.

The cynic in me wonders how he can achieve all these, but let's give him the benefit of the doubt for now. In response to my question on crofting he said that crofting was

important to preserve "the human and environmental ecology" and he "did not want to see it eroded". It would be, he said, "unforgiveable if the Highlands and Islands suffered" due to Brexit.

In other meetings, we put forward crofters' concerns at the Hill Farming Summit; explored areas where we could co-operate with NFUS such as on the Farm Advisory Service; met the new Crofting Commissioners (and we will continue to do so regularly); tried to persuade the Scottish Government crofting law team to make the new law work for crofters not for lawyers; talked to the cabinet secretary for rural economy about the benefits of a croft house loan scheme: and, through the cross party group on crofting, got the SG to look at CAGS grants for woodland crofts.

At the SCF council (yes, another meeting in June) we looked at how to improve the way we handle case-work for members – this is a valuable and appreciated service that SCF provides and we want to get better at delivering it.

So to answer the question I was asked at Highland Sheep "what good does going to all these meetings do?" I would say "an awful lot more good than **not** going to the meetings!"

How the election affects crofting

IT IS WIDELY agreed that the embarrassment of the national election weakens the UK's negotiating position in the divorce from the European Union, but it could lead to a softer and more diplomatic approach.

This could have a positive effect in the longer term, especially on negotiating trade agreements, something that will directly affect Scottish agriculture and therefore crofting. What happens over the next two years and beyond can only really be guessed at, though it is sure to be an even more difficult path for Westminster, having such a fragile majority. And of course there is disquiet in Scotland that Northern Ireland votes have been bought with a shed-load of money that could be put to a more universal good.

More concrete is that, following the election, a cabinet reshuffle gave us Michael Gove MP as the new environment secretary, under whose portfolio agriculture resides. Mr Gove is infamous for saying on live TV "people in this country have had enough of experts" in the lead-up to the European referendum. This may have been due in part to deft interviewing but it remains one of his notable comments.

The appointment of Mr Gove to the UK cabinet as environment secretary worries environmentalists. Green party co-leader Caroline Lucas MP is reported to have said it was hard to



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"think of many politicians as ill-equipped for the role of environment secretary as Michael Gove".

It is true that when he was education secretary, Mr Gove tried to remove climate change from the geography curriculum; but it is his assertions that Brexit could allow Britain to scrap "absurd" rules such as the European Commission's Habitats Directive and Clinical Trials Directive that are of more concern for crofters. We have a very strong selling mark based on our environment, landscape, clean air and water and our low-

external-input, hill-reared, grass-fed, high-health produce. Mr Gove's attitude, in saying "If there are regulations which hold any business here back, we now have the potential to amend or even if necessary rescind them," is extremely worrying.

As has been said many a time, "Crofters were the first environmentalists," in that they have cared for the environment on which they depend. Unfortunately, the payment system still does not go nearly far enough in rewarding this.

But, let us be positive and hope that Mr Gove has a better attitude to hill farming and crofting than his predecessor Andrea Leadsom, who is remembered for saying, "It would make so much more sense if those with the big fields do the sheep, and those with the hill farms do the butterflies."

Closer to home, Rod Mackenzie, a well-kent and respected mart auctioneer from Beaulieu, has been appointed convener of the Crofting Commission. This is the last brick in place for the Commission to be up and running and, so far, all is looking well.

It would be a bit crabbit to say the Commission can only improve, as this board does have the genuine feel of being 'strong and stable', to borrow a worn-out strapline, so all good will to them.

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has already started separately on reviewing the legislation. The other priority papers, developed by sub-groups of the forum, have been through a number of iterations, discussed in plenary, and are now integrated in a draft summary paper where key recommendations are presented for consideration of parliament as follows:

- Continue to pursue crofting law reform with a focus on simplifying the legislation.
- Establish one single body with responsibility for crofting development.
- Re-establish a croft house loan scheme.
- Ensure that any future financial support systems are 'croft-proofed'.
- Where required, maintain and improve financial support specifically for crofting.
- Incentivise the early transfer of crofts to new entrants.
- Establish best means to facilitate joint working/collaboration between grazings and communities to make best productive use of assets.

The draft summary paper can be found on the SCF website, or a copy can be posted on request, and we welcome comments from our members to inform amendments.

Profound implications for huge areas of crofting land

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inspection conclusions and resultant penalties until they receive that letter.

Our members have made a formal complaint against the standard of service they have received from the local office. The reviewing officer gave fulsome apologies but has not addressed the substantive case. He stated that the software for calculating penalties has not even been written and could offer no timescale for this information being available. So our members are held in a state of limbo, not knowing their financial position and having to hold back on further development of their crofting business.

This could have been written by Franz Kafka.

Our conclusions

If the latest SGRPID interpretation is that hill ground is ineligible for payment if livestock is not present at the time of inspection and/or such land is not fenced, this has profound implications for huge areas of crofting land, most notably our common grazings.

Furthermore, it seems to us that our members have been singled out for extraordinarily harsh treatment, when we can see all around us crofting land in abandonment and misuse, to which a blind eye is turned. We know that the Scottish Government is under pressure from Europe to tighten up its inspection regime for CAP schemes, but this should not mean that genuine people are used as an easy target to allow civil servants to tick boxes.

That is what we fear has happened in this case. But in fairness, in the vast majority of our dealings with SGRPID staff at all levels, we are treated with courtesy and fairness, contrary to this instance. We hope this is an isolated case.

Crofting Commission governance report



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IN FEBRUARY 2017 the Scottish Government published a review of the governance of the Crofting Commission, carried out for the Scottish Government by Scott-Moncrieff, business advisors and accountants.

Scott-Moncrieff's report drew on the enquiries and investigations they carried out in November and December 2016, which looked into governance, procedures and practices within the Crofting Commission, with particular reference to its handling of controversial cases in the townships of Mangersta, Upper Coll and Bohuntin in 2015 and 2016. Scott-Moncrieff made a number of recommendations about the expectations of commissioners, of senior staff of the Commission, and of the interactions between the two.

Since Scott-Moncrieff's investigations took place, there have been changes in the Crofting Commission as its members completed their term of office. There are now eight new Commissioners appointed or elected with only one of the 2016 Commissioners still serving on the board. The Scottish Government appointed a new convener for the board, Rod MacKenzie, in June 2017. All

of these changes provide a clear opportunity for the new commissioners to consider governance issues afresh. There has also been a recent change in the post of chief executive, with Bill Barron confirmed as a permanent appointment in January 2017 after doing the job on a temporary basis since October 2016.

On publication of the Scott-Moncrieff report, the cabinet secretary for rural economy and connectivity, Fergus Ewing MSP, asked the chief executive of the Commission to prepare an action plan to rectify perceived weaknesses and secure improved performance in key areas of governance. Also, the Commission is now required to submit a policy plan by 17th September 2017 to Scottish Ministers, setting out its policy on how it proposes to exercise its functions.

Governance of the Crofting Commission – Action Plan by the Chief Executive and the existing Crofting Commission Policy Plan 2015, and its update when completed, can be found on the Crofting Commission website or a hard copy may be requested from the Commission.

THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

New hands on the helm

JUST after the last issue of *The Crofter* went to press, the new Crofting Commission board came into being.

Three commissioners are appointed by Scottish Ministers. They are complimented by the election of a further six commissioners.

Malcolm Mathieson is an accountant by profession and partner in a hill farm in Lochaber.

James Scott lives on the outskirts of Inverness and runs a business focussing on training and assessing skills in rural businesses.

David Campbell has been reappointed. David lives near Evanton and represents the interest of landlords of crofts.

Their appointments will be for three years.

Elected commissioners

Rod Mackenzie is convener. Read more about Rod in his article below.

Billy Neilson was born into a farming family and has been a crofter in Taynuilt, Argyll for

many years. He was previously a development officer for the Croft Entrant Scheme and, as an assessor to the Commission, sat on the reference group, steering the 2010 Act through parliament and as an invitee to the Crofting Cross Party Group.

Mairi Mackenzie was born and brought up in Inverbroom near Ullapool and now runs crofts at Loggie, Lochbroom.

Iain MacIver has been involved in crofting on the Isle of Lewis all his life, both as an active crofter and factor to the Stornoway Trust.

Andy Holt has been a crofter on the island of Papa Stour, Shetland for the last 44 years.

Cyril Annal has been a crofter and farmer in South Ronaldsay, Orkney for the last 50 years, as well as having served as a local authority councillor and community councillor. Cyril was also an assessor to the Crofting Commission for seven years.

These six elected commissioners will sit on the Crofting Commission board for the next five years.



Malcolm Mathieson



James Scott



David Campbell



Rod Mackenzie



Billy Neilson



Mairi Mackenzie



Iain MacIver



Andy Holt



Cyril Annal

A time of great opportunity for the Commission



ON 19 June, Fergus Ewing announced the appointment of the new convener of the Crofting Commission, following the elections to the board on 17 March.

The minister's choice was Rod Mackenzie, the commissioner elected from the East Highlands constituency. Mr Mackenzie is an active crofter, rearing mainly suckler cows and sheep on his croft at Beaully. He has a lifetime of involvement in crofting and farming, and as company secretary for the past 12 years for the Black Isle Show, he is in contact with people from all walks of life. He will also be well known to many as an

auctioneer for over 20 years, based at Inverness, Huntly, Dingwall and Thurso and a frequent visitor to Shetland, working for the Shetland Livestock Marketing Group.

Here, taking on his new role at the helm of the Commission board, Rod shares his thoughts with *The Crofter*.

If a layperson asked crofters 80 years ago what the value of their crofts was to them, the answer was most likely, "It feeds the family with staple foodstuffs like potatoes, mutton, milk, oatmeal, etc", not to mention the sale of some sheep and calves to supplement a job or trade.

If the same question was asked of crofters today, there would be a much wider range of responses; probably no two responses would be the same. One thing that has not changed, by and large, is that the croft where crofting families are brought up is regarded as the home and base, as it has been for generations and will continue to be. The Crofting Act of 1886 and subsequent acts were passed to protect crofters and their families and still do this to the present day.

Society and the culture of rural living have changed markedly over the past 80 years, with crofting

and crofters sometimes struggling to keep pace. Therein lies one of the challenges for the Crofting Commission. There are many changing issues that will inevitably shape our lives in the very near future – such as Brexit, land reform, global warming, carbon footprint to name just a few; challenges we have limited control over.

The Crofting Commission is there to regulate and promote crofting in these modern and changing times and I am privileged to have been appointed convener at a time of great opportunity for the Commission. We have a very strong board of commissioners who each bring with them a different set of very useful skills, coupled with a wealth of experience, all based on practical knowledge gained from each one's unique situation within the crofting counties.

Although there are six elected commissioners, each from a different area, we refer to ourselves as "the commissioner FROM our area working FOR the Crofting Commission", to emphasise unity and that we work together for the good of crofting as a whole.

At our most recent board meeting we agreed that the Commission

should be engaging more directly with crofters. Therefore, we will have a formal presence at the Black Isle Show in August, with at least two of the commissioners in attendance all day, along with several key members of staff, to answer any questions that you may have. In addition, commissioners will be present at other shows this summer, as and when they can manage. We also hope to re-establish crofting roadshows around the crofting counties and hope to hold these in community halls or centres in the winter months.

Another area of high importance to us is re-connecting with our 80-plus network of crofting assessors who provide us with local knowledge and a vital link with crofting communities. We recently set up a commissioner-led working group to make progress on this and plans are moving swiftly forward.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank past commissioners for their valuable contribution and thank the new group of commissioners for their loyalty, enthusiasm and commitment.

*Rod Mackenzie
Convener, Crofting Commission*

THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

Crofting Law Conference 2017 – Isle of Lewis

WHAT better setting to hold the annual Crofting Law Conference 2017 than the stunning grounds of Lews Castle in Stornoway.

The day was opened with a warm Gaelic welcome from Iain Maciver of the Stornoway Trust, followed by an introduction from the vice-chairman of the Crofting Law Group, Duncan MacPhee.



Iain Maciver addresses Crofting Law Conference 2017

Although not there in person, Fergus Ewing MSP, cabinet minister with responsibility for crofting, delivered a video address identifying the main theme for the conference – crofting law reform. He referred to crofters as the stewards of our landscapes and unique habitats and promised a commitment to change in this parliamentary session.

When creating new law he pondered which approach should be taken: should we tidy up existing law; use a clean sheet approach or change some existing legislation. He also said that in creating new law there must first be consensus in what the outcome of crofting should be.

Patrick Krause, chief executive of the Scottish Crofting Federation, was able to tell us what crofters wanted. His overview was that they do need a new act but not necessarily a clean sheet; ultimately crofters do not want existing rights taken away. Quick to give the solicitors in the room a reality check was Russell Smith, chair of SCF. He said that in actual fact crofting law is very low in the priorities of an average crofter but recognised what they did want: the ability to assign, the right to buy and the ability to decroft a house site. Smith finished by commenting: 'Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater', suggesting that he too was opposed to a clean sheet approach.

Duncan MacPhee startled solicitors by sharing his recent experience of securing a mortgage not



Patrick Krause addresses Crofting Law Conference 2017

over just a croft house but a whole croft. MacPhee had seemingly gone where no other solicitor had gone before, causing much discussion.

The 71 conference delegates were split into three workshops by the crofting law bill team: Michael O'Neill, Graeme Beale and Adam Briggs. The general feedback post-session was that the uniqueness of crofting must be appreciated when creating the bill, and that barriers arising from crofting were both cultural and legal.

Those present were reminded that 'it was a year like no other' for the Crofting Commission, before the introduction of chief executive Bill Barron. He said that the Commission's failure to act as a corporate body in the past was caused by deep splits within the board, but the new commissioners' commitment to work together was unshakeable. He explained that individual commissioners will not take individual regulatory decisions and he was enthusiastic to learn from mistakes of last year.

Barron recognised the need for radical change in the law after asking two crofters why crofting wasn't working as it should. A crofter in South Uist told him, "Crofting doesn't work like it should because there are not enough jobs here." Another crofter in Shetland said "Crofting doesn't work like it should because there are too

many jobs here". The 1886 system was designed for the crofter's way of life then and not today.

The issue of entry to crofts was addressed and the Commission aims to improve the situation. He insisted that the Commission will go through any proposed new legislation to ensure it not only supports rights and responsibilities but opportunity too. Mr Barron hopes that the Commission can be trusted to look after crofters again.

Brian Inkster was next up with "Trouble on the scattald", scattald being the word for common grazing in Shetland. It was suggested that his blogging activity runs in correlation with how badly

the Commission is behaving; since he has been blogging less one can only assume that things are well with the new Commission.

Janette Sutherland highlighted the importance of utilising common grazings, advising that they make up 6% of the ground in Scotland, and maintained that they should be considered at the start of key policy changes. Janette promoted the use of management plans, encouraging people to find out what is on the land in order to generate predictions and maximise common grazing viability.

David Findlay, solicitor for the Commission, then discussed the prospect of a new grazings regulations template, advising that a consultation recently carried out by the Commission would be fed into the template.

It was then for crofters to share their views. Calum Maclean from Upper Coll said that the effects of the Commission's actions from 2016 were still felt by individuals, shareholders and the common grazing. Derek Scanlan from Mangersta thought it absurd that common grazings were not allowed to buy non-fixed items to assist them on the land.

Donald MacSween from Ness said that problems arose from crofters where crofts were neglected. Donald MacKinnon, a young crofter and SCF board member, suggested that unused grazing shares could be used by young people as



Workshop at Crofting Law Conference 2017

an avenue into crofting until they obtain a tenancy.

Renewable energy was then touched on and how important it was to make sure that crofting communities were benefiting from any schemes but also understanding them. All crofters present held that common grazings were a massive resource and that new legislation should reflect this.

Iain Maciver spoke from a landlord's perspective. He said: "People have lost sight of the concept of common grazings: shareholders think that they own the land, and the landlords think that the land has nothing to do with them."

To conclude the day advocate Robert Sutherland discussed some recent case law, overall illustrating just how inconsistent current legislation is with how crofters work.

*Vicki Folan,
Trainee solicitor, Inksters*

The Commission's failure to act as a corporate body in the past was caused by deep splits within the board, but the new commissioners' commitment to work together was unshakeable.

THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

Go ask the crofters – looking

SCOTTISH Ministers announced their intention to create a Committee of Inquiry on Crofting (ColoC) in September 2006, the largest, most comprehensive investigation into crofting since the Taylor Committee reported in 1954. The ColoC worked for a year from May 2007 to the release of the final report in May 2008.

Professor Mark Shucksmith led eight committee members, the majority of them either crofters themselves or very closely involved in crofting issues. The committee engaged with more than 2,000 crofters in local workshops and also undertook the most comprehensive survey of crofting opinion ever undertaken, covering 1,000 people.

“We gathered mountains of evidence,” said Shucksmith.

In his introduction to the final report Shucksmith said, referring to the public interest in crofting, “Fifty-four years ago the Taylor Committee argued that crofting was worth preserving for its own intrinsic quality. We believe, on the basis of all the evidence that we have heard, that the potential contribution of crofting is even more important, nationally and internationally, than was realised half a century ago. The national interest today demands much more from the countryside than the post-war imperative of expanding food production. Scotland requires a well-populated countryside which sustains a diverse and innovative economy, attracts visitors, cares for natural habitats, biodiversity and carbon stocks, and sustains distinctive cultures. Crofting has had success in relation to these objectives, and – given the right support – has the potential to contribute much more.”

Crofting has the potential to contribute much more.

The Committee of Inquiry set out a vision for crofting:

“Our vision is of growing, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable crofting communities which enjoy the capacity and the power to develop their own strategic plans and to pursue these with vigour, subject to legitimate national interests. Crofters will be flexible and adaptable to change, building on their heritage to seize new opportunities, but essentially forward-looking.

“There will be more crofting and more, active, resident crofters. The crofting communities of the future will continue to work the land, be rewarded for contributing valuable public goods (environmental and cultural) and producing quality food, although for most people most of their incomes will tend to come from non-agricultural activities.”

“Crofting will be effectively regulated in the interests of communities and the crofting system. These regulations will be simple and comprehensible. Government and others will support and enable innovation, enterprise, inclusion and the institutional capacity for community action to ensure crofting can make its full contribution to society’s goals. But ultimately it is crofters themselves who have both the privilege of crofting and the responsibility for the future of crofting.”

The Committee of Inquiry listened to crofters and those working with crofters, analysed what they heard and made recommendations which were presented to the Scottish Government. The Government responded and used the ColoC recommendations as the basis of a new crofting reform bill. Notably, Scottish Government chose to not take up all the recommendations. The bill passed through the Scottish Parliament to become the Crofters (Scotland) Act 2010.

It is widely felt that the 2010 Act has not significantly helped crofting, the most notable improvement probably being that there is a map-based Crofting Register being populated. Poor drafting of the act resulted in the need for an emergency amending act in 2013 and the compilation of over 120 flaws in the Crofting Law Group’s *Crofting Law Sump*.

We know what the ColoC’s recommendations were and the Scottish Government response to them; but it is difficult to ascertain what crofters, and those working with them, said to the ColoC without analysing the mountains of evidence.

However, we can get a flavour from the Key Messages in the final report. The following offers a summary.

Sustaining and enhancing the population

A burning issue in most areas was the external demand for housing, and the consequences of this in terms of high prices offered for assignments of whole crofts or house sites on good croft land; the lack of affordable housing or affordable crofts for young local people; and the associated social and cultural changes. In the public attitude survey, 88% reported housing as unaffordable in their area. Studies and official evaluations have consistently shown that the Crofters Building Grants and Loans Scheme (CBGLS) was the single most effective means of support for maintaining the population of crofting communities.

The survey provided strong evidence that crofters today see the need to assist new entrants and the succession of younger crofters as top priorities for thriving crofting communities. A strong demand for crofts should be helpful



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to the sustainability of crofting communities, contributing to increases in population, bringing in new ideas, energy and a commitment to manage the land well. It is also apparent that attracting population itself contributes to the prosperity of rural economies. Yet there appear to be few mechanisms through which potential croft entrants can find a croft. Anyone who does obtain a croft then has a number of other obstacles to negotiate.

Economic development

Crofting’s future depends on the wider strength

THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

again at the Shucksmith Report



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Land and environment

The relationship with the land is at the heart of crofting. Environmental conditions in the crofting counties are nationally significant in terms of species, habitats and landscapes. A much higher percentage of their area, compared to other parts of Scotland, is designated under UK and EU environmental legislation. Crofting areas also contain large reserves of carbon, making the management of these areas important to moderating the risk of climate change and to safeguarding landscape and biodiversity.

The predominant agricultural use of crofting counties' land is for livestock, particularly sheep production. We note that since 2001 there has



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been a drop in number of beef cows and ewes in the crofting area and that this decline is higher than elsewhere. Sheep production in the crofting counties is an important part of the Scottish sheep industry because it supplies a significant proportion of store or fattening lambs and high-health-status breeding stock to lowland farms. Major changes in livestock numbers within the crofting counties are therefore transmitted into the wider Scottish and UK agricultural economy.

A key issue is how to focus existing support arrangements more effectively to nurture crofting practices that protect the land and secure environmental and cultural objectives.

It is vital that current changes in agricultural and rural policy do not result in loss of the landscape and environmental benefits of crofting, as these would be very expensive to restore.

Cultural diversity

People in the crofting counties said that crofting matters to them because of its custodianship of the land for future generations; its associated way of life; and because it engenders a strong sense of community. Maintaining and passing on skills and traditions including, in some areas, supporting Gaelic and dialect, were seen as important parts of this, adding to the perceived

The elements which crofters wish to see regulated more effectively include: that crofts should be worked; that crofters should be resident; and that sales, assignments and decrofting applications should be regulated in the wider crofting interest. Widespread complaints about neglect in many areas reflect a perception that currently these conditions of residing on the croft and working the land are not being enforced.

environmental benefits of crofting.

Crofting contributes to culture by maintaining populations in remote areas but its contribution to cultural diversity within Scotland seems to be fragile and some people said that cultural benefits are being eroded by changing crofting practices, especially the decline in use of the common grazings.

Many people said that a satisfactory balance is not being struck between individual interests

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of rural economies to which it contributes. Crofting is not solely agriculture, and it has long been recognised that future crofting prosperity also depends on non-agricultural activities. A strength of crofting communities has been their ability to adapt to changing opportunities – based on occupational pluralism, security of tenure and sheer determination. A key issue is how to support and strengthen this flexibility and capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, so that crofting communities themselves can grasp new opportunities as they arise.

Crofters today see the need to assist new entrants and the succession of younger crofters as top priorities for thriving crofting communities.



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THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

Go ask the crofters – looking again at the Shucksmith Report

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and those of crofting. Regulation has sustained crofting by balancing the interests of the individual against those of the wider community, now and in the future.

To secure the public interest in crofting and therefore its wider benefits, there must be effective governance arrangements linked to stronger, but simpler, regulation – understandable, enforceable and clearly directed to agreed policy goals. Unless there is a better balance struck than at present, giving wider interests, especially those of future generations, precedence over individual gains, crofting will ultimately disappear, and its potential contribution to sustainable rural development will be lost.

Governance of crofting

Crucial issues for the governance of crofting are transparency, source of legitimacy, accountability and the balance of central and local interests. Centralised arrangements, together with a lack of clear functional boundaries between the key institutions, particularly between the Crofters Commission and the Scottish Government, cloud the lines of public accountability for the effective governance of crofting. Recurring themes in the evidence were that the Commission should

be more accountable; have greater area representation; should enforce regulations more effectively; should be better aligned with other relevant partners; and should have closer communication with local people and grazings committees.

Having considered the evidence, it is the committee's view that governance arrangements need to change so that there is clear functional separation between bodies, including separation of regulation and development responsibilities, and that arrangements should devolve power and responsibility towards communities, within an appropriate national structure. From what people said at both the summer 2007 and the winter 2008 public meetings, and from other evidence, there is strong support for such a move.

Regulation and enforcement

New legislation is needed to replace, simplify and clarify the accumulated laws which set the framework for crofting today. People want a system that is sensitive to local circumstances and can both be understood and enforced: the committee was told consistently that the right balance was not being struck between individual gain and the wider crofting interest. An accurate and current Register of Crofts is a prerequisite for effective regulation of crofting.



Mark Shucksmith with Norman MacDonald (left) and Jane Brown

Cross-party group on crofting

WE HAVE HAD a cross-party group on crofting in the Scottish Parliament, of which SCF is the secretariat, for nigh on 20 years.

It is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the government to act. The current group was registered at the beginning of this parliamentary session a year ago and we held our AGM at the last meeting on 28th June.

MSP members of the group are Rhoda Grant (co-convenor); Kate Forbes (co-convenor); Tavish Scott (co-convenor); John Finnie; Edward Mountain; Donald Cameron; Maree Todd; Gail Ross; Angus MacDonald; Liam MacArthur; Richard Lochhead and David Stewart. Ministers cannot be members of cross party groups but we have several who keep abreast of the group's work and attend on occasion for specific issues.

The group is attended on a regular basis by representatives of over 30 organisations, and individuals with an interest in crofting. Over the past year the following topics have been on the agenda:

- Crofting administration (standing item);
- Crofting legislation reform (standing item);
- Crofting development (standing item);
- Crofting support: update on CAP



- payments and SRDP schemes (standing item);
- Regulation of common grazings: the position taken by the Crofting Commission;
- Report back on the SG Crofting Stakeholder Forum;
- The Future of Crofting: reflections on the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting;
- Wild geese management;
- Communication: broadband and mobile network;

- Position of convener of Crofting Commission;
- Young crofters;
- Grazing at the Edge: common grazings;
- Crofting's place in Europe;
- Deer and Lyme's disease;
- Deer management;
- Woodland crofts.

Plus two meetings with the minister for crofting Mr Fergus Ewing.

THE FUTURE OF CROFTING

A clear path for crofting

Donald Cameron MSP comments

WE'VE DEBATED the road ahead for crofting for many years, yet there's a sense that not much progress is being made.

There has been a lot of unease and uncertainty in the crofting community recently and it is primarily the job of the Scottish Government to set a clear path for crofting so it continues to be an important part of rural life in Scotland. So far that vision has been lacking.

There are many endemic issues to be addressed – creating the right conditions that allow more young people to engage and work in crofting; the need to improve rural infrastructure to support crofting businesses; and the need for more affordable housing in rural Scotland to support new entrants and crofters.

There are also significant long-term issues such as the way forward following the Brexit vote, and the growing demand to simplify crofting legislation, not to mention the recent controversies in relation to the Commission and its governance.

The Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Crofting allows a wide variety of stakeholders to hear about these issues and other matters first hand from those on the ground, as well as from representatives of the Commission,

the Scottish Government, and SCF among many others. For example, at the last meeting of the group we had an excellent presentation about woodland crofts.

From attending these meetings and having met with many crofters and SCF representatives since I was elected last May, it is clear to me that there are three key objectives that must be achieved in order to support crofting.

Firstly, given recent events, we need to ensure that vital CAP payments are made to crofters on time. It is incredible that the SNP have failed to ensure 100% transfer of payments on time for the second year in a row. This only pours misery and stress onto crofters who don't get paid on time, and I will continue to hold the SNP to account on this failing so that it doesn't happen again.

Secondly, we need to simplify the legislation that underpins crofting. Having practised crofting law as an advocate, I have said on several occasions that crofting law currently benefits lawyers not crofters. I will continue to play my part, scrutinising existing crofting law with the aim of making it compatible with today's needs. I am very tempted to start again – the "clean slate" approach, rather than simply tinkering and amending existing legislation.

Finally, the Scottish Government needs to set out its vision for crofting. Although the SNP committed to



look at the SCF's "Five Actions for Crofting" at the last election, we have seen little action since then. What does the SNP Government believe crofting is for in 2017?

I am sure of this: only when we have a clear vision for crofting in the 21st century, can we initiate the right policies and create the appropriate legal framework.

Crofting Connections



THE CROFTING Connections project, which has been working with schools, bringing crofting into the classroom and students on to the croft, started life as a pilot called Planting to Plate in 2007 as part of the Highland Year of Culture.

The last funding phase of Crofting Connections, under the management of Soil Association Scotland and in partnership with SCF, ended in March this year. Since then we have presented the project proposal to many funders but have been unsuccessful in getting further funding. It is with reluctance therefore that we will have to accept that Crofting Connections is over as a funded, active project, for now.

The intention will be to develop a new project building on the work Crofting Connections has done when the funding and political landscape is more conducive. Meanwhile the education materials developed for the project will still be available to schools on the Crofting Connections website.

Our thanks go to the funders and supporting organisations, to project staff Pam Rodway, Brid McKibben and Karen MacRae, to the members of the steering committee, to participating schools and to the students who have taken such a keen and active interest in crofting. They are the legacy of the project.



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SAC Agricultural & Conservation Consultants combine local knowledge with extensive experience and are supported by our team of renowned specialists. We can assist crofters with business advice on a range of topics to improve profitability including:



- Agricultural and rural business advice
- Enterprise planning
- Comprehensive assistance with IACS, LMO, RP, CHGS and CCAGS (agricultural buildings, hard standings, drainage, grassland improvement, handling equipment, fences and access tracks are examples of eligible expenditure under CCAGS)
- Completion of Assignations, Decrofting and Sublet applications
- GPS croft maps for Crofting Commission or SGRPID
- Operational Needs Assessment to support planning applications
- Livestock record keeping and pre-inspection checks
- Grassland and crop advice including soil analysis, fertiliser and reseeds
- Livestock feed analysis, rationing and animal health planning
- Horticultural advice
- Agri-environment advice
- Forestry scheme implementation and management
- Diversification opportunities
- Marketing advice
- Renewable energy feasibility studies including wood fuel heating systems

Leading the way in Agriculture and Rural Research, Education and Consulting

Community-led housing in south Skye

Andy Neison reports on an innovative initiative

THE SLEAT peninsula at the southern end of Skye has a population of around 900 and some of the highest house prices in the West Highlands.

A desirable place to live and home to the Sabhal Mor Ostaig campus of the UHI, many people feel that Sleat is becoming a victim of its own success. A general shortage of all types of housing, and in particular affordable housing, has pushed up land and house prices to the extent that local businesses, employers and community projects are unable to recruit or retain staff.

Social housing is a welcome and important part of the solution, but does not meet the needs or expectations of everyone, and with public sector budgets under pressure, provision is unable to keep pace with demand. Community-led housing is a growing movement which seeks to empower local people to engage with, influence and be part of a more bespoke solution.

Community-led housing can take many different forms and legal structures, but common principles are:

The community is integrally involved throughout the process in key decisions – like what is provided, where, and for whom. They don't necessarily have to initiate the conversation, or build homes themselves.



© Martin Benson

There is a presumption that the community will take a long-term formal role in the ownership, stewardship or management of the homes.

The benefits of the scheme to the local area and/or specified community group are clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.

In June, residents of Sleat organised an event to explore local interest in a community housing initiative, and what form that might

take. Speakers gave presentations on innovative projects including a self-build housing co-operative in Aviemore, supported housing for older people in Applecross and a self-build 'tiny house' project for under £30,000.

Key to taking forward community-led housing is access to development land at an affordable price. With high construction and site servicing costs, subsidising housing through the land value

is often the best way of enabling affordability.

Sleat is fortunate in having a number of socially-conscious landowners, and also a lot of land under crofting tenure. The group formed to take forward ideas for projects in Sleat will be starting a dialogue with landowners and managers to explore the potential for developing a community-led project that addresses the district's specific needs.

Crofting Law by Derek Flynn and Keith Graham

CO-AUTHORS Messrs Flynn and Graham are to be congratulated on producing this invaluable reference to crofting law.

Adherents may recall the previous work by co-authors Flynn and MacCuish – likely to be found within easy reach of most practising lawyers, lay caseworkers (Citizens Advice Bureau and the like), Crofting Commissioners and businesslike land-managers (landlords and/or their factors). This edition is yet another handy, up-to-date reference to quote from when faced by the ordinary and not-so-ordinary day-to-day deeper crofting legal questions. SCF caseworkers certainly have their copies to hand.

As members of a panel of practising caseworkers, my colleagues and I find, on occasion, the rendering of authoritative information far too difficult to come by without the benefit of a concise source of reference such as this single volume. A caseworker's role is not to try and interpret the law, but to appropriately state it simply as it is written. Precedents are set by the courts, whilst interpretation of law is the bailiwick of the legal profession.

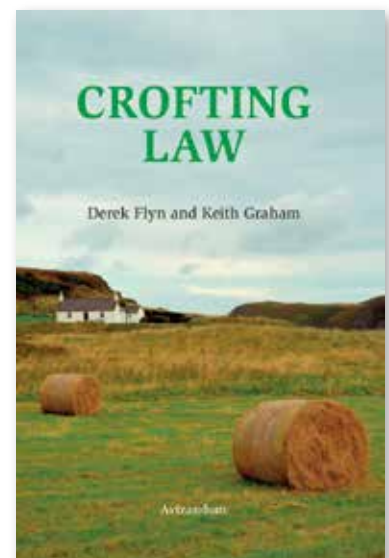
The caseworker deals with a myriad of questions, mostly of a pragmatic, administrative nature, such as boundary problems, neighbour disputes, use of common grazings, sub-letting,

purposeful use etc. The need to occasionally touch lightly on the law is integral to that role to avoid giving information at odds with the proper and lawful resolution of a client's case.

What I like most about this book is its easy style commentary to each section of text. Hardly a leisure read, but one that can hold the enquirer's interest at that critical moment when needing to ponder over a subject's niggling crofting problem – accessible and with a minimum of baffling legal jargon. This quality goes a long way toward that light-bulb moment of finding what one has been seeking.

The publisher's price of £125.00 a copy is not so attractive to the ordinary person's pocket. In justification however, one could well expect to pay this sort of money for such a specialised and somewhat limited print run; chiefly of interest to legal faculty and other practitioners mentioned above. That is by no means to minimise its undoubted value to those of us involved in this work.

To the discerning reader (lay or otherwise) crofting law is one of the most complex subjects, and in my opinion this book is a must-have tool in the busy office and is a considerable help to the sharp-end practitioner wherever and whoever that might be.



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John Bannister
Scottish Crofting Federation



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Innovation in low-intensity systems

One of the things I'm involved with just now is a EU-funded project looking at innovation in High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems, writes Gwyn Jones of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP).

THE HNV Link network involves ten case study areas across Europe – we're calling them Learning Areas (LA) – and I'm involved with the UK LA, which covers the commons of Dartmoor National Park and the farms which use them.

We start from a common vision for HNV farming: to make it more socially and economically viable and sustainable without losing the nature value (or any of the other public goods they also provide).

For each area, we look at the challenges, documenting relevant innovations which have emerged in the LAs or their member states and finally listing the 'innovation gaps' – clear weaknesses in how things are at present for which there is no obvious answer.

To try to organise our thoughts, we're looking at innovation in:

- techniques and technologies;
- products and markets;
- social structures and institutions (stressing the civil society);
- regulations and support (actions by government).

Soon our assessments and accounts of innovation will be on the project website and we'll be looking at ways of disseminating good practice and awareness of the innovation gaps, both between the project areas and within the respective member states.

It's been a real pleasure to learn more about Dartmoor with my colleague John Waldon, the local farming community and others interested in the future of common grazing on the moors. One thing which has struck me very hard is the gap caused by the emasculation and eventual extinction of national advisory services in England.

The honour and pleasure of doing some IACS work in Stornoway this year again reminded me that, despite its many weaknesses, a national and subsidised advisory service is something to be treasured.

Yes, Dartmoor's specialness has meant that a local hill farm project has emerged (always on the verge of losing funding), but even at best, its one-to-many model of knowledge transfer is great, but far removed from the one-to-one relationship-building at the heart of the best advisory services.

One heart-breaking IACS client in Lewis told me he was at breaking point – he didn't know how to move on. I confess to feeling very inadequate, but to adapt the words of the apostle, how can they be helped if no-one hears and how can they be heard without an adviser?

In the Thatcherite 1980s, civil servants in

Edinburgh and Scottish Agricultural College senior managers found a fudge which saved advisory provision in Scotland when it was being privatised out of existence down south.

SRUC certainly has weaknesses – provision is very uneven between offices, with some hardly venturing into their crofting areas.

Money often seems to be sent where the deficits are, not where the needs are greatest. The number of potential clients per advisor is vastly greater in crofting areas than in the lowlands, and the more crofting the less advisory provision per crofter. Costs rise inexorably, threatening the essence of a service which is not only accessible and relevant, but affordable.

Did you read SRUC's recent strategy consultation? Did you understand it? Did it describe your challenges and what you need from an advisory service? If not, did you respond? Don't you need support? It's as much your public money as anyone else's.

Crofters – learn from England's folly and don't let familiarity breed contempt! Get engaged to make SRUC into the service you need and deserve.

Gwyn Jones
gwyn@efncp.org

<http://www.hnmlink.eu/> is supported by the European Commission H2020 programme. Opinions in this article are the author's alone.

SALSA – small farms, small food businesses, sustainable food and nutrition security



CROFTS ARE known for the role they play in rural areas – providing a secure base for the development of small businesses, maintaining the population in remote rural areas, and supporting a range of unique habitats for wildlife. As sources of agricultural produce, crofts also play an important role in food security, promoting production quality, supporting local markets and skilled agricultural producers.

Little is known, however, about the current contribution of crofts and other small farms to the availability of nutritious and safe food, food access and control (including affordability), food utilisation, and food stability, as well as its potential

for the future.

These topics are investigated in SALSA, a research project funded by the European Commission. Seventeen partners across Europe and Africa, using a novel multi-method approach in 30 regions in Europe and Africa utilising the latest satellite technologies, combined with interview data to tell the story behind the food system. SALSA is examining the policies and markets that impact on the organisation of small farmers and their food chains. SALSA will provide tools to guide decision-makers in enhancing the contribution of small farms and food businesses to food and nutrition security.

Researchers are currently

interviewing crofters and small farmers, and others connected with the food system at a regional level, for example food businesses, farmers' organisations and regulators, at two Scottish regions: Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Arran and Cumbrae, Argyll and Bute, and Perth and Kinross and Stirling.

Dr Lee-Ann Sutherland, a social scientist based at SALSA partner James Hutton Institute's Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences group in Aberdeen, emphasises: "We need the support of crofters and small farmers and those they work with to raise the profile of crofting within the agrifood sector."

Visit the project website and sign up for updates: www.salsa.uevora.pt/en/stay-informed/

*For more information or if you would like to participate, please contact:
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Researchers urge agricultural industry to challenge barriers to women farmers

WOMEN play a major role in Scottish agriculture, participating in the full range of farming and crofting activities, research has found.

However, barriers remain to their entry into the industry, their career progression, and promotion to leadership roles. Women's important contribution to Scotland's agricultural economy should be recognised, say researchers from Newcastle University and the James Hutton Institute.

This new report is the first to look into gender issues in Scottish agriculture, and identifies the challenges for and potential tools to improve women's participation in farming and leadership of the sector.

Over 1300 women who live and work on farms were surveyed, with 30 interviews and nine focus groups conducted with men and women across Scotland.

Professor Sally Shortall, who led the Scottish Government commissioned research, said: "The evidence is clear, showing that farming businesses rely heavily on women's contributions. But it's difficult for them to progress and the potential of new entrants is curtailed. The industry is missing out on the talents of young women

in particular".

Crofting appears to be somewhat more egalitarian than farming. During interviews and focus groups with men and women crofters on Skye, they suggested that crofting has always been more equal because the croft depended on off-croft work. Sometimes men would migrate for work for several months and during this time women were responsible for all the decision-making. 81% of online respondents indicated a role in major and day to day decisions. However, 43% of crofting respondents stated they would like a bigger decision-making role. The research also found that women are more strongly represented in the leadership of crofting organisations than in farming organisations generally within Scotland – the Scottish Crofting Federation has two women in a group of nine board members.

The research findings highlight that the cultural practice of passing on land holdings intact to one son is the single biggest barrier to women's entry into agriculture, and perpetuates the understanding of farming and crofting as a male occupation. In crofting, the same pattern emerges. It is boys who generally inherit the croft tenancy

from their fathers. Opening up discourses about farm succession and offering access to formal advice could help to enable women to be treated equally on inheritance.

The researchers recommend that only having one named tenant on a croft should be revisited. In an instance of divorce, women can lose access to the family home on the croft. Explicitly considering gender implications of proposed legislative changes ('gender-proofing') would be useful.

The researchers also recommend introducing mechanisms to enable progression from young farmers' groups to more senior roles, the establishment of a talent bank of suitably-qualified women for farming positions, as well as mechanisms to identify women mentors to support both male and female farm apprentices, and quotas in agricultural organisation's leadership elections. In an online questionnaire, 18% of respondents identified "not welcome by existing male leaders" as a barrier to their participation in leadership of farming organisations.

Dr Lee-Ann Sutherland explains: "Women represent a considerable untapped resource for farming organisations – 35% of participants indicated an interest in becoming

involved in farming organisation leadership. The Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs is providing important foundational experience for women – they are by far the most common organisation in which survey participants gained leadership experience." It is suggested that the SCF's Young Crofters group will play a key role in promoting women for roles in agricultural leadership in the future.

The report was funded by the Scottish Government and will be available online here: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/06/2742>.

Professor Sally Shortall, project leader, is the Duke of Northumberland Chair of Rural Economy at Newcastle University's Centre for Rural Economy. The report is co-authored by Prof Shortall, in conjunction with Dr Lee-Ann Sutherland, Dr Annie McKee, and Dr Jonathan Hopkins from the Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences group at the James Hutton Institute.

For further information, please contact Dr Lee-Ann Sutherland by email: lee-ann.sutherland@hutton.ac.uk or telephone: 01224 395285, or Prof Sally Shortall by email: Sally.Shortall@newcastle.ac.uk.

Supporting people in Scottish agriculture and crofting

Mags Grainger from RSABI explains the help this charity can offer.

IN TIMES OF need, RSABI can supply non-financial practical support as well as grants.

Last year we supported over 850 people from the industry and issued grants in excess of £550,000. We have recently changed our criteria for financial assistance. Grants are available to help alleviate family hardship. For example, this could be to purchase essential household items and manage household expenses.

We will consider all applications for assistance. For businesses we can help access the ILMP (Integrated Land Management Plan) for those who need to look at the viability of their business. We will also consider applications for annual grants for those unable to work due to ill-health or retirement. Anyone in need or hardship can apply for financial assistance. We have no upper income limits and will look at household income and expenditure and savings to determine the best way to help.

Our helpline is open from 7am to 11pm every day. Whether it's housing or health, business issues or benefits or you need someone to talk to – we are here to help. We want all members

of farming and crofting communities, working or unable to work, to be able to access the support they need, when they need it.

Beneficiary feedback

Adam has been in agriculture all his life. He contacted RSABI as he was suffering from stress. He had got into a situation where he had more money going out than coming in, causing significant pressure on himself and his family. To alleviate the immediate pressure RSABI issued Tesco vouchers to allow the family to manage their essential needs without resorting to high-cost pay-day loans. CAB is supporting Adam by rescheduling his debt via the debt arrangement scheme. "RSABI pointed me in the right direction" said Adam. The help and support I have received from RSABI has made such a big difference to me and my family. Knowing there is someone there to talk to has helped my stress levels too." What would Adam say to others struggling to make ends meet? "Talk to RSABI, don't ignore it. RSABI can help."

Mrs M is a widow in her late 70s. Her late husband was in agriculture all his life. She first heard about RSABI when she read about our



Help for Heating grant in the local newspaper. She struggles on a low income. RSABI has been able to help by taking her on as an annual beneficiary and this money helps her run her car and helps to buy heating oil. She admits she found it difficult to ask for help but feels the support given to her by RSABI makes a big difference to her and she would say to people: "Please don't be frightened to ask for help, RSABI staff are all so helpful and the help I get makes life easier."

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog – Skye hit by drought!



Tomatoes

CROFTING horticulture has many challenges, notably climate, soil type and exposure.

Here in the north of Skye on an east-facing peninsula we are lucky enough to enjoy relative shelter and very good soil. In northwest Scotland you don't expect to be short of water, but that has been the situation faced by growers here again this year. I suppose it's quite reassuring, in times of climate instability, that there still seems to be a pattern of dry conditions in the spring and early summer.

The public water supply has been so depleted that the local reservoir has been topped up daily by tanker. In these circumstances we have to conserve water as much as possible and only use tap water very sparingly on crops to be consumed raw such as salads and strawberries. For everything else we have been pumping water from a burn and collecting such rainwater as we



Polycrub

can from roofs. Even a light rainfall produces a surprising runoff.

Our thirstiest crop is tomatoes and the picture shows a method we're trying out to make the most of water and liquid feeds. The plants are in bottomless containers (yes, they're recycled sheep lick tubs) plunged into the soil and filled with home-produced compost topped up with a commercial organic compost. This allows both water and feed to be targeted to where it's needed with no waste, and so far the tomatoes are thriving on it.

Growing at the edge; a Shetland solution

I have worked with polytunnels for nearly thirty years in some very exposed places and have found that, when carefully sited and tightly covered, they will withstand most conditions. However, there are undoubtedly places where something more robust is called for.



Saving water

A number of years ago, in Shetland, I was shown a polytunnel that a crofter had constructed using fish farm feed pipe as the framework. Lengths of the strong, black alkathene pipe had been washed up on his croft apparently damaged, but he could see a use for them. The idea was adopted commercially by Nortenergy, a community company in the north Shetland mainland, and marketed as the Polycrub. These structures are still based on recycled fish farm pipe but with timber purlins and twin-walled polycarbonate cladding.

Polycrubs are proving very successful in the Western Isles as well as in Shetland and are well worth considering for sites of extreme exposure, as are the well-known Keder houses. Both of these are eligible for CAGS support. Use it before we lose it!

donald@crofting.org

Bracken – a health hazard?

PTERIDIUM *aquilinum*, a bountiful plant with a bad reputation. It consumes productive ground, is no use to no-one, and is poisonous.

The approach taken at the University of Aberdeen was to improve our understanding of the plant so that it can either be better controlled or better utilised. Bracken is poisonous to livestock, and can cause thiamine deficiency in monogastric animals, acute haemorrhagic disease in weaned calves, and progressive degeneration of the retina in sheep (bright blindness).

However, bracken was extensively used as bedding for livestock, and still is in parts of the UK. How can these two apparently opposing groups of facts be correct? The answer is very simple, and is supported by published studies from around the globe.

Make sure grazing livestock have enough alternative feedstuffs, and they will not choose to eat bracken. So, if you have enough winter feed, why not control bracken by cutting and harvesting and using it for winter bedding which can then be

recycled in the spring as a highly valuable fertiliser?

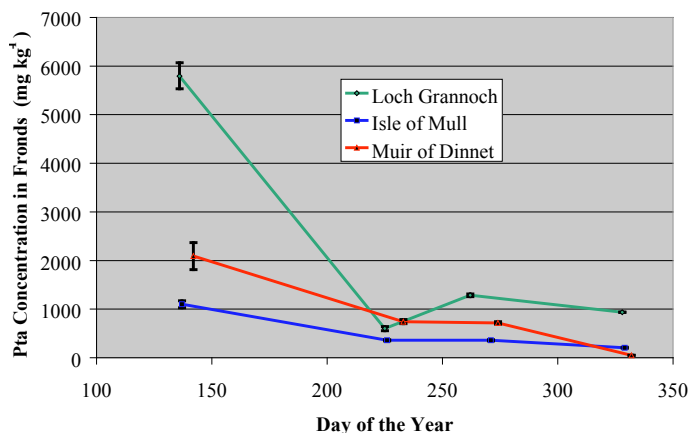
The second direct health concern with bracken is that it is carcinogenic, with the principle component identified as Ptaquiloside in the early 1980s. Ptaquiloside is extremely water-soluble but transforms rapidly into a harmless form under most soil conditions, and high rainfall is associated with lower ptaquiloside content in soils. The highest concentration of ptaquiloside in the fronds is in the early growth, the croziers, and reduces as the plant ages. If people are cutting bracken for control, from mid-July to August, or harvesting bulk at the end of the season, exposure to ptaquilosides will be very low. The presence of ptaquiloside in spores of bracken ferns remains to be demonstrated, so the main message is, if cutting or strimming bracken around the croft at the beginning of the season for some reason (it is not the optimum time), wear simple protective clothing.

Bracken is a successful plant because it is resilient, and the plant toxins it produces and accumulates are part of a fantastic

defence mechanism against insect and mammal predators. Phenol content deters insects, and tannins decrease both consumption and digestive efficiency. In fact, bracken has all the design components of a good mulch; insects and herbivores don't like it, it degrades slowly, and it leaches considerable positive nutrients into the soil. As stated

before, using bracken as a mulch increased seed crop potato yields by increasing soil temperatures and reducing leaching of soil nutrients.

Jamie Robertson
Livestock Management Systems Ltd
Pioneer House
79 Waterloo Quay
Aberdeen



Mean Ptaquiloside Concentrations (+ S.D.) in Frond Dry Matter according to Date, Loch Grannoch, Isle of Mull and Muir of Dinnet, n = 2. (Donnelly, 2003)

ON THE CROFT

Livestock health and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

Dr Philip Skuce of Moredun Research Institute explains

GRAZING ruminants are responsible for approximately 50% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with agriculture in Scotland.

Reducing the emissions intensity (the amount of GHG emitted per unit of meat or milk produced) of ruminants is, therefore, central to reducing agricultural emissions in Scotland, a key requirement for Scottish Government to meet internationally-agreed GHG reduction targets.

Endemic, production-limiting diseases are a significant constraint on efficient and sustainable livestock production in Scotland and around the world. Dealing effectively with endemic livestock diseases represents an opportunity to reduce emissions from the livestock sector, often without compromising productivity or farm economics. Earlier in the year, researchers at Moredun, in collaboration with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), were tasked by Scottish Government to deliver a rapid evidence assessment of the potential contribution that could be made towards reducing the intensity of GHG emissions from Scottish animal agriculture by eradicating or controlling livestock diseases, focusing on the

main livestock species – cattle and sheep.

The assessment provided a comparative analysis of available evidence for control or eradication of twelve of the major livestock diseases in Scotland in terms of GHG abatement potential, cost-effectiveness and feasibility. This was based on qualitative analysis of published and grey literature and expert opinion on disease prevalence, impacts on productivity and current control options. The assessment was further underpinned by quantifying the impacts of selected diseases on emissions and production using established GHG modelling methods.

Overall, the evidence suggests that reductions in GHG emissions intensity could be achieved through the implementation of cost-effective control measures that impact on the parameters that emissions intensity is particularly sensitive to, ie (a) milk yield and cow fertility rates (dairy systems), (b) cow/ewe fertility and abortion rates, calf/lamb mortality and growth rates (beef and sheep systems) and feed conversion ratios (all systems).

GHG emissions savings were identified for all twelve diseases evaluated, but some diseases proved more tractable than others in terms of availability of practical diagnostic and control options. In subsequent discussions with

key livestock industry stakeholders, it was felt that selecting one major disease to attempt to eradicate would be difficult, given the nature of some of these diseases, the heterogeneity in the livestock sector, different livestock species involved etc.

Rather, it was felt that more could be achieved at a national level through an accumulation of marginal gains by encouraging farmers to investigate specific livestock health issues on their farms and to implement best practice towards their control, eg improved diagnosis, monitoring and biosecurity.

This could be incentivised, for example, by Scottish Government through a national health planning scheme, involving improved engagement with veterinary services. Discussions are ongoing with industry stakeholders and Scottish Government policy teams on how best to progress. Some of the knowledge gaps identified in the GHG report are being addressed in the new Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme 2016-2012.

The summary GHG report is available at: http://www.climatexchange.org.uk/files/7414/6054/5380/Livestock_Health_and_GHG.pdf

Laoigh agus bleoghann

'SGANN gum faic thu crodh-bainne sa Ghàidhealtachd an-diugh idir ged a bhiodh mart-taighe aig gach croit gu o chionn beagan bhliadhnaichean air ais.

Gu dearbh bhiodh e fìor a ràdh gur e am bainne agus na rinneadh bhuaith a thaobh ìm, gruth is càis a bha mar bhunait air a' chlàr-bhidhe ann an dachaighean sna sgìrean croitearachd.

Bha mi fhìn a' dèanamh beagan rannsachaidh an uiridh air dòighean obrach agus gnàthachadh mun cuairt air bleoghann agus làimhseachadh laoigh. Thòisich mi le òrain anns a bheil crodh ga ainmeachadh agus tha gu leòr dhiubh sin ri lorg – tha na ceudan dhiubh ann! Thug mi sùil air na clàraidhean a rinn Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba a tha nis air loidhne fo sgèith Tobar an Dualchais, agus bhruidhinn mi ri seann chroitearan cuideachd.

Ged a tha na h-òrain tric tlachdmhor binn, tha e doirbh dèanamh a-mach dè dìreach a bha tachairt aig an eadrach. Cluinidh sinn mar eisimpleir cho dòigheil 's a bha agh no mart – ann an *Ho Hi Ho Leiginn* "Chan iarr i buarach a chur



mu casan" no bho *Crodh Chaillein* "Gun tugadh Crodh Chaillein dhomh bainn' air an raon, gun chuman gun bhuarach, gun luaircean, gun

laogh". Ach càit an robh na laogh nuair a bha crodh gam bleoghann a-muigh? Tha iad daonnan gan ainmeachadh, ach càit an robh iad?

Tha criomagan de dh'fhiosrachadh a' dol air ais gu deireadh na 19mh linn ann an seanchas bho chroitearan air *Tobar an Dualchais* agus bha feadhainn ag innse mar a bha buaile ann airson crodh agus buaile eile airson nan laogh. Tha e coltach gun robh e cumanta gum biodh na laoigh gan leigeil a-staigh còmhla ris na mairt agus gum biodh iad a' deòghal am mathraichean fhad 's a bha na boireannaich gam bleoghann.

Nas fhaig air an latha an-diugh, chuala mi mòran ag innse nan robh mart ga bleoghann, gum biodh an laogh air a thoirt bhuaiphe agus a' faighinn bainne bho chuinneig – mar a tha tachairt sna tuathanasan bainne. Ach chunna mi fhìn croitearan (beagan bhliadhnaichean air ais!) a' cumail laogh air mart ach gan cumail bho chèile tron oidhche, bleoghann a' mhairt sa mhadainn, agus leigeil leotha bhith còmhla tron latha. 'S ann ainneamh a bhios daoine ri cleachdannan mar seo an-diugh. Ach tha mi fhìn ga dhèanamh. Tha mi ri bleoghann ach mura bheil sin freagarrach, a' fàgail mart is laogh còmhla – bleoghann gun mo chuingealachadh.

le Gabhan Mac a' Phearsain

ON THE CROFT

Grant boost for croft woodlands

Eleanor Garty, North Scotland woodland creation manager for The Woodland Trust outlines new opportunities in woodland grants.

THIS SPRING, woodland creation in much of the crofting area received a welcome boost, with increased Forestry Grant Scheme payments for native woodland planting and deer fencing.

In Highland region, the planting grant for native woodland in target areas went up from £3,200 to £3,600 per hectare (including five years of maintenance payments). In the islands, most of Argyll and Highland and parts of Grampian a new 'high cost' deer fencing rate was introduced at £9.60 per metre, up £2.80 per metre on the previous rate.

The Croft Woodlands Project is helping crofters, common grazings and smallholders in the crofting counties to access Forestry Grant Scheme funding. The project can fund up to 90% of the cost of having a professional agent prepare and submit a grant application. Free advice and support is available from three regional project officers, covering Argyll and Lochaber, the Western Isles and Highlands and the Northern Isles. The project has also partnered with local advisors for additional help on Orkney and Shetland.

Both the Croft Woodlands Project and the

Forestry Grant Scheme will run until 2020. With free help and attractive grant rates on offer – and with the uncertainties of Brexit ahead – now is surely the time to plant a woodland. Given the right choice of species, you can be sure that it will be a strong and stable asset for the future...

To find out whether your croft, common grazings or smallholding is eligible for the new grant rates, or for any other query about woodland planting or management, get in touch with one of the advisers:

- Argyll & Lochaber: Iona Hyde t. 0343 770 5460 m. 07840 699427
- Highland & Northern Isles: Donnie Chisholm t. 0343 770 5847 m. 07502 014387
- Western Isles: Viv Halcrow t. 0343 770 5856 m. 07876 217034

Email crofting@woodlandtrust.org.uk

The Croft Woodlands Project is a partnership between the Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Crofting Federation, Point and Sandwick Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and Shetland Amenity Trust. The project is generously supported by Point and Sandwick Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

To find out more about how we can help you plant trees, visit woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant



© Claire Nicolson

Fences can be replaced under CAGS

THE OLD Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) used to allow the replacement of fences but this was removed and only new fences could be applied for.

Following sustained lobbying by SCF over many years, the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) guidance now makes clear that support **can** be provided for replacement fences where the fences are in a dilapidated state and are no longer fit for purpose. This is a very positive change.





WOODLAND
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Trees for the crofting community

Trees provide important shelter for your livestock, crops and buildings and a valuable source of woodfuel for you.

Free advice and support to help the crofting community plant trees and manage woodland is available.

Get in touch with your local croft woodlands advisor and find out how useful trees are.

ON THE CROFT

New grazing regulations

THE CROFTING Commission will soon be launching a new grazing regulations template.

The proposed regulation template is not as detailed as those issued previously, as many requirements stipulated within the previous regulations were not provided for within the Crofting Act.

There is some confusion around this process of adopting new regulations in many committees and this article tackles some common questions and explains the process of adopting a new set of regulations, or making amendments to your current regulations.

Do we need to adopt the new regulations?

There is no compulsion to adopt new regulations if your current regulations are working well for your common grazing requirements. However, it's good practice to review your regulations regularly, as old regulations may not fit with the current legislation or how your common grazing operates today.

When should we adopt the new regulations?

If you decide to adopt new regulations, you should pick a time that suits the working of your committee. At the start of a new term in office would be a logical time to embark on this exercise, unless there were pressing reasons to update your regulations immediately.

Process

Call a committee meeting to review new regulations and discuss possible amendments.

Get the majority consent of the committee on the new regulations and any local amendments. It is advised to consult widely with shareholders at this stage.

Any proposed revised regulations should be sent to the Crofting Commission for review.

Prior to confirming, making or amending regulations, the Crofting Commission must consult with the owner of the relevant grazings.

The Commission will check your proposed new regulations or any proposed amendments to ensure compliance with the Crofting Act and, if required, contact the committee to discuss any matters of concern or items that require clarification.

When the Commission approves any new regulations, they will be formally adopted and the committee issued with the newly agreed regulations. A copy will also be sent to the owner of the common grazings.

Regulations should be viewed as being a living document that can be reviewed at any time, to ensure compliance with any changes to legislation or local conditions. The purpose of the regulations is to enable grazings committees and shareholders to strengthen shared management practices and develop the management of common grazing land in an appropriate and sustainable manner.

Janette Sutherland
SAC Portree



The group viewing a mulched brash road in Dalchork Forest



A whole tree mulcher in action on afforested bog



Lunch in the marquee

Peatland restoration in Caithness and Sutherland

FORESTRY Commission Scotland (FCS), in partnership with the Flows to the Future (FTTF) Project, held a successful demonstration day in early June, showcasing various methods to restore damaged blanket bogs in Dalchork Forest.

This event brought together over 20 people representing crofting, sporting, forestry, consultancy, conservation and regulatory interests in the region. It began in the FCS office in Lairg where FTTF peatland advisory officer Gearóid Murphy gave an overview of the ecosystem services provided by bogs, different methods used to restore damaged bogs, and the funding available to land managers to carry out this work on their ground.

Neil McInnes, environment manager for North Highland forest district, explained how changing policies have resulted in a shift in the management of restorable blanket bog in the north highlands, from replanting the peatlands with trees to felling and restoring them.

The group then jumped in a minibus for a tour of Dalchork Forest, led by Neil. Parts of the forest were planted on deep peat from the 1960s onwards. These crops, mainly Lodgepole pine, are often in check, heavily affected by tree health issues and subject to early wind-throw.

Where areas have been identified as a priority for restoration, FCS has utilised a variety of techniques to remove trees and to raise the bog's water table to a more natural level. Once this has been achieved, plants such as cotton grasses and the peat-forming *Sphagnum* moss can colonise the peat surface. This benefits downstream water quality and wildlife, as well as allowing carbon to be locking up in the growing peat, a plus in the fight against climate change.

Restoration techniques on show included bunding, drain blocking, mulching of smaller trees and flipping the tree stumps to give a smoother peatland surface. This part of the event generated much discussion, including the best techniques to use in each situation and how long it would take for a restored site to be colonised by bog vegetation.

Contractor Garry MacKay of John Mackay & Son explained how these methods are implemented using low-ground-pressure vehicles. Whole tree mulching was demonstrated using a modified excavator.

For more information on funding for moorland management and peatland restoration on your land please contact Gearóid on 07766 500364 or gearoid.murphy@rspb.org.uk.



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Smallholding Scotland

Inspired by SCF, a group of Scottish smallholders has set up a new organisation to represent and support their community. Rosemary Champion explains.

SMALLHOLDING SCOTLAND, a membership organisation promoting the sustainable and purposeful use of small land-holdings, has recently achieved the status of Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. The ten trustees who currently make up the board come from all over Scotland.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in smallholding but full membership (£20/year) is only available to residents of Scotland. Details of how to join are on the Join Us page of the website.

One of the first priorities of the organisation

is to secure funding to establish a web-based information hub. Angus-based trustee and secretary Arnot Tippet said, "Many smallholders come to land management as a second career and without formal training, and although they may have many skills, it is often difficult to access all the information needed to establish a successful smallholding. Smallholding Scotland aims to fill that gap with our information hub."

The organisation also aims to provide a voice for smallholders in national forums and to represent the sector to the Scottish Government, where one has been lacking until now. "While Brexit is a big issue nationally, there are other issues of importance to smallholders too – access to good, local abattoir facilities, for example, and access to suitable grant funding to improve smallholdings," said trustee and co-chair, Cath Livingstone from Galashiels. "Smallholders already make

a real contribution to the rural economy; but with appropriate support, improvements can be made to further support biodiversity and local food production."

The trustees hope to build strong links with crofters and SCF, recognizing that while there are differences between the two groups, there are many areas of common interest, including difficulties in accessing land, access to markets, diseconomies of scale, training and support for new entrants.

www.smallholding.scot



Serving up tasty seaweetables

Duncan Smallman introduces an innovative business.

IN MARCH 2016 I started running seashore foraging trips with a focus on seaweed, on the smallest permanently inhabited Scottish island, Easdale; and Slate Islands Seaweed started trading.

I start the trips by introducing myself and a brief background to Slate Islands Seaweed. I have had a life-long obsession or fascination with seaweed as I was born in Japan and we brought back a culture of eating nori (the seaweed used to wrap sushi) and wakame (used in miso soup), whenever I could get some. Growing up eating imported seaweed, it wasn't until I was living and working on the west coast of Scotland that it clicked, "Yes, we have a lot of edible seaweed!"

I studied marine biology, so I have an interest in all things to do with the sea and seaweed falls within that, though initially because it was a fascinating habitat. In 2013 I went and spoke with Loch Fyne Oysters who were interested in edible seaweed (specifically dabberlocks) and I started looking into which species would be best to harvest to meet a potential growing demand.

Then in 2014 I worked on a shore-based seaweed cultivation project based at Otter Ferry SeaFish, to look at sustainably producing edible seaweed (ranching it from wild stocks) in large tanks for the Edinburgh-based company, Mara Seaweed. The project came to an end in 2015 after mixed success.

I loved this work, as I love working with seaweed, but there did not seem to be any seaweed-related vacancies. So I decided to start my own company, because I know that the Scottish coast has such a capacity for seaweed, with over 20 recognised edible species. There is potential to develop sustainable harvesting or even aquaculture and it could add another string to the rural economic bow.

My whole ethos is on education, on developing sustainable harvesting and in the long run to work



Duncan showing the children some interesting finds

towards ecologically sensitive aquaculture. At the moment I am focused on the foraging tours side, taking people out to show them how wonderful our seashores are, to collect some seaweed then cook with it, demonstrating all the different flavours, such as the bacon-like taste of fried dulse and giving some simple recipe ideas (like using sea spaghetti or oarweed instead of pasta). I continue to work at developing sustainable harvesting and have started to supply restaurants with fresh seaweed.

And I do undertake some consultancy work, though I'm always happy to talk about seaweed, and help those who have an interest in working with seaweed in their area; there is still certainly room for all.

Slate Islands Seaweed Ltd
www.slateislandsseaweed.com
 email: kelpie@slateislandsseaweed.com
 tel: 01852300314 t
 twitter and instagram: @seaweedonaslate
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Sea spaghetti with bacon served on slate



View from south corner of Easdale

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Call the Advice line for help and advice on crofting and smallholding.

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Advice service for crofters and small farms

THE FARM Advisory Service includes grant support, a full programme of events, a subscription service for crofts and small farms, and a range of articles and publications, all designed to provide **integrated advice** for crofters and farmers. Some aspects of the service are free whilst more tailored advice is provided at a discount, delivered by SAC Consulting.

Advice line

The advice line operates Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm. It covers a wide variety of topics including cross compliance (eg sheep tagging rules, safe distances for spreading fertiliser, storage of draff); biodiversity and conservation (eg improving habitats, controlling pests); business efficiency measures (eg liming grassland, feeding livestock) and many other technical issues.

The advice line is free to use. Advisers will either answer your query at the time or ask an adviser to call you back. The number is 0300 323 0161.

Croft and small farm advisory service

Another feature of the new FAS is the croft and small farm advisory service. This will provide discounted cost subscription and consultancy services for crofters and farming businesses (under 30 Ha) across Scotland. The croft and small farm subscription follows on from the

popular SAC crofters' subscription, and provides two hours of advice from SAC advisers plus other discounts and benefits.

Events and discussion groups

On-farm meetings are great ways to see what others are doing, catch up and learn new information and techniques. Many events took place over winter, along with evening meetings to keep crofters up to date with schemes and technical info. Discussion groups are also planned to help crofters and farmers get together to tackle problems, develop skills and learn from the experience of others.

New entrants

This year, Caithness and Skye areas have meetings specifically for new entrants to crofting or farming. Aimed at anyone thinking of starting in crofting or farming, or younger members of an existing business, these workshops will cover a variety of topics for starting up, including other support that the Scottish Government has available to new entrants.

Website www.fas.scot

The website is growing into a source of data and information, tools and apps, all designed to be relevant to modern farming and crofting enterprises. At its centre is a calendar of events that will detail all of the events from the FAS and others.

The website also hosts the entry point for grant applications for Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMP); specialist advice; mentoring for new entrants; and carbon audits. Application forms can now be downloaded from the website which provide access to up to £2,200 grant assistance for ILMP and £500 for carbon audits.

*Siobhan Macdonald
SAC Consulting, Portree*



TRAINING

Making room for ruminants in Moray



MORAY HAS recently hosted several SCF training courses, including three fantastic practical lambing courses with Mel Irvine at Drummuir Estate; and by time of publication three goat-keeping for meat days with Brian and Julie Cameron at Elchie's Farm, Craigellachie – providing training for 68 people.

SCF's local course director in Moray, Lynne Laing, said "Demand for these courses is astonishing. We've had to hold extra courses in order to meet it." Patrick Krause, SCF chief executive commented, "It's really promising to be holding courses in such a new crofting area. The uncertainties of Brexit mean everyone involved in land management feels concerned, but the resilience of crofting is well known and our courses contribute to ensuring the future of small-scale food production."

Goat-keeping tutor Brian Cameron said, "Having spoken to many people, it is absolutely clear that courses like these provide a vital rung on the ladder to crofting; and to adding diversity in existing farming businesses."

Mel Irvine, lambing tutor, added, "It's a great way for everyone to learn new skills – from the course and also from each other. We even had several live births on the day, enabling participants to really see what lambing is all about!"

"Small ruminants are an essential part of a crofting system. Their grazing style is perfect for keeping weeds down the organic way. Sheep and goats produce meat, wool, angora hair, milk, horn and skins. They're becoming increasingly popular, as their milk is proven to have many health benefits and supply is outstripping demand!" said Lucy Beattie, one of the project's training managers and a farmer herself.

More courses will be coming all over the Highlands and Islands and Moray over the next two years, covering a wide range of agricultural subjects. Training manager Tina Hartley urged all crofters and smallholders to get in touch to share their views on what future training they'd like, to help with the project's plans. "Places get booked up incredibly quickly for every course – there is so much demand!" said training administrator Donna Williamson.

Keep up to date with what is available so you don't miss out on any courses you'd like to take part in by visiting www.crofting.org/training/62 or find us on Facebook @SkillsBoostSCF or Twitter @SCFTraining.

SCF Training is funded by Scottish Government, SRDP, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage, with limited free places from MacRobert Trust.



Funding is being made available through the SRDP Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund, which is jointly funded by the Scottish Government and the European Union.



A popular and successful scything course was held at SCF member Duncan MacColl's croft at Strathkanaird, Ullapool.

MEMBERS PAGES



At the SCF's well-attended AGM on 16 March in Inverness, delegates heard Crofting Commission chief executive Bill Barron outline the work and priorities of the commission and its new board of commissioners. A wide-ranging question and answer followed, with members raising concerns on issues such as management of common grazings, neglect of crofts and the role of new commissioners. Bill recognised the challenges facing the commission but presented a positive outlook with tighter procedures combined with training and support for commissioners.

Company secretary

The SCF company secretary will be vacating his position at the AGM in 2018.

Any person, whether member or not, can apply for this voluntary post. There will be a hand-over period in the lead-up to the change.

Applications should be made to the chief executive at HQ. As yet, no closing date has been fixed but the position will become available not later than June 2018.

Details of the role can be obtained from the present company secretary, John Bannister, through SCF HQ, or by email to johnbannister@crofting.org. He will be pleased to discuss this with you.

giftaid it

You will have found an insert with this edition of *The Crofter* asking you to consider Gift Aiding your subscription, if you don't already.

SCF can claim £15.75 on one individual membership subscription. This is a considerable sum that would make a huge difference to the work that we can do on your behalf.

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For example, an individual member must currently be paying £15.75 a year in tax (25% of subscription). If you are not sure if this applies to you please get in touch for more information.

It's easy and it doesn't cost you anything other than five minutes of your time.

The Rogart crofters' bus

THE SCOTTISH Crofters Union was founded in 1985 and, two years later, crofters Alistair MacIver from Rogart, Robin Ross from Ardgay, Gregor MacKay from Edderton and Jimmy McGillivray from the North of Scotland College of Agriculture organised the first Rogart crofters' bus to the Royal Highland Show at Ingliston, just west of Edinburgh. The trip instantly became an annual fixture – a highlight of the year – with Alex Campbell, Eiden, Rogart taking command, ably assisted by Jim (son of Jimmy) McGillivray from Embo.

This year was no exception, for on Friday 23rd of June 2017, the Rogart crofters' bus – an Andrews coach driven as usual by Lachie Corbett – set off once again, led, of course, by Alex. Departing at 4.30am and returning at 11.00pm, the whole event ran as smoothly as ever. The show was fantastic and it was a tired but happy, relaxed and fulfilled party that wended its way back north.



Left to right: Alex Campbell, Deborah Richardson, Lachie Corbett



The party of crofters in front of the bus

MEMBERS PAGES

Young crofters membership rate now extended to aged 40 and under



AT THE RECENT SCF board meeting it was agreed that the young crofter rate of £31.50 would be extended to those aged 40 and under.

If you know a “young crofter” who is not a member please pass on this news. The future of crofting is dependent on young crofters and as the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting, now is the time for young crofters to join.

If you are already a member paying your subscription by Direct Debit and are aged 40 years and under please get in touch with hq@crofting.org or call 01599 530005.



Young crofters at Glencanisp

SCF Young Crofters

An update from SCF board member and young crofter Donald MacKinnon

BACK IN THE spring SCF Young Crofters were asked to take part in a workshop as part of the consultation on crofting law reform in preparation for the new crofting bill.

The workshop was held at Great Glen house in Inverness at the beginning of April and managed to attract representation from Lewis, Uist, Wester Ross and Lochalsh. The event was a unique opportunity for us to tell the policy makers exactly what we think future priorities should be, not just in terms of legislation but also around the wider issues affecting young people in crofting today.

On legislation, the focus was on the use of crofts, linking into access to land. The issues discussed included absenteeism, neglect, creation of new crofts and the price of crofts.

The workshop also made us think about the opportunities and strengths of crofting, and it was not difficult for us to come up with lots of suggestions. The legislation, although acknowledged not to be perfect, did emerge as one of the strengths of crofting.

Moving away from legislation, interesting discussion developed around agricultural support.

It was also noted that certain types of support lead to a lack of innovation in some crafting businesses and that perhaps a new subsidy system could make for a more level playing field between existing businesses and new entrants. Other issues raised included the need for more jobs in crafting communities along with easier access to affordable housing, highlighting the importance of the Croft House Grant Scheme.

The workshop was well worth attending. We hope that the government officials present will take our views on board and ensure that this latest piece of crofting legislation works for both crofters and crofting.

Representatives from the group continue to attend the Cross Party Group on Crofting in Holyrood whenever possible, sometimes joining in remotely via video link. In addition to the group's representation on the SCF board, Pàdraig Morrison a young crofter from Grimsay, will soon be joining the SCF council.

A discount of 50% for all new SCF members under 40 has also been negotiated with the SCF board, which should hopefully increase the number of young members. SCFYC is always looking for more input from members. If you want to get involved please contact Donald MacKinnon at donaldarnol@crofting.org.



Young crofters, I-r Robin Haig, Ryan MacLean, Donald MacKinnon, Pàdruig Morrison, Clara Hayes, Farquar Macrae



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Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA

If anybody would like to meet with Alasdair Allan,
Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Western Isles,
he can be contacted using the following details:

*Ma tha duine sam bith ag iarraidh coinneachadh ri
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MEMBERS PAGES

Representing SCF members

SCF IS THE only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting.

A lot of work goes on behind the scenes by SCF staff and officials to ensure the interests of crofters are being represented. Some of the meetings at which SCF has participated in over the last quarter include:

MSPs; Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing; Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Crofting; regular meetings with SG and agency officials; Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholders Group; SG Crofting Stakeholder Forum; Crofting Commission Common Grazings Regulations Stakeholder Group; Farming Advice Service Steering Group; SRDP Monitoring Committee; Leader Advisory Group; Croft House Grant Scheme review; National Rural Mental Health Forum; Crofting Connections Steering Group; Woodland Crofts Partnership Steering Group; Scottish Churches Rural Group; Community Land Scotland Conference; Hill Farming Summit; National Goose Management Review Group and the Crofting Law Group Conference.

We also had very well-attended stands at Highland Sheep 2017 and at the Royal Highland Show.

Agricultural policy post-Brexit talks have taken place with industry representatives, Scottish Government and agency officials, Nourish Scotland (of which we are a member); SRUC and Scottish Wildlife Trust. SCF is a member of Food Coalition Scotland, a group of organisations working on the Scottish food policy bill and of the UK Food Group, working on UK food and

farming policy. We are represented in Europe on the European Coordination Via Campesina and the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism.

It is essential that the voice of crofters is heard in these policy meetings. It is all too easy for crofting to be bypassed, for policy to be formed that is not "croft-proofed". No one else does or

can represent crofters as SCF does – being the organisation set up and run by and only representing crofters.

SCF is keen to hear from members on the effects of CAP payments, other SGRPID issues and Commission matters so that we can pass on your concerns to the relevant government agencies or stakeholder groups.



Coming soon to a surgery near you

WE HELD the first in what we hope will be a series of local SCF drop-in surgeries around the crofting counties on Tuesday 11th July in Ullapool.

The event was publicised beforehand in local papers and on Facebook as well as in our e-newsletter and was hosted by the Ullapool-based SCF Training Skills Boost team: Lucy Beattie and Tina Hartley, who were joined by SCF chief executive Patrick Krause, Sutherland-based director Brendan O'Hanrahan and our membership administrator Sandra Lindsay.

We had set aside the afternoon for casework appointments, in the manner of an MSP's or councillor's surgery, but nobody got in touch to take advantage of these slots. This suggests either that no crofters in NW Ross-shire or SW Sutherland have any burning issues to discuss at the minute, or perhaps more likely, they were taking advantage of the good weather for croft work.

However, the morning open session was a success – particularly helped by the fact that the newly-minted elected commissioner for Skye, Wester Ross, W Sutherland and Lochalsh, Mairi Mackenzie from Loggie, Lochbroom, came along for several hours, which we very much appreciated. Two new members were signed up, one taking

advantage of our new reduced rate for those under 41. We had crofters from Elphin, Ardcharnich and Ardair in Wester Ross as well as Knockan in NW Sutherland come in to meet SCF folk and Mairi and discuss a very wide range of current and past issues affecting crofting and crofters.

Current concerns included the

continuing difficulties caused by delayed payments, issues with BPS three-region system, the Croft House Grant Scheme and self-builds, proposed changes to cattle movement tracking and what might be proposed by the government team working on crofting law reform. And... of course... Brexit; though like everybody else, we had no answers on this issue, only that SCF is lobbying for the support system to be retained or even reinforced for crofters, in view of the possible impact of lost markets. There was also a fair amount of time talking about local characters from crofting who are sadly no longer with us and the swapping of stories about how crofting and shepherding used to be in places now bereft of stock like Isle Martin and Loch Droma.

All in all, everybody who attended found it a very useful opportunity to catch up with people, to hear what SCF has been up to recently and what may be on the near horizon for us all.



Left to right: New member Helen O'Keefe, Patrick Krause, Brendan O'Hanrahan, Ardair crofter Derek Boa, Mairi Mackenzie, Crofting Commissioner

MEMBERS PAGES



Members' contact details

IN AN EFFORT to reduce costs, it would be helpful to be able to contact members by email where appropriate rather than by post.

In addition to reducing costs

we can also quickly and easily communicate policy updates, notice of local meetings and send you the monthly e-newsletter.

Just email your contact details to hq@crofting.org.



© Martin Benson – Islay



© Martin Benson – Tiree



© Martin Benson – Lewis



Scottish Crofting Federation

Photo Competition

Crofting – the landscape,
the people, the animals

Our popular notecards, sold on the Scottish Crofting Enterprise website, are running out.

The new cards will feature images that reflect the crofting way of life.

To enter, simply send your photographs in digital format to hq@crofting.org along with the title of entry; name; brief description and age (if under 16).

Photographs must be high-resolution. If you're unsure what this means, high resolution images typically have a file size of at least a megabyte.

**The prize will be a canvas print
of your photograph.**

The closing date for entries is 31st October 2017.
Full entry details, including terms and conditions,
can be found at

www.crofting.org

or call HQ on 01599 530005

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Patrick Krause, Jim MacPherson, Roseanna Cunningham (cabinet secretary for environment, climate change and land reform) and Russell Smith at the Royal Highland Show



Entertainment for young and old at the NSA Highland Sheep event

NSA Highland Sheep 2017

SCF training manager Lucy Beattie reports

THIS YEAR Messrs Clarke at Kinnahaird hosted the one-day NSA Highland Sheep event.

The SCF tent was well pitched within easy reach of the main sheep ring and the fine weather meant that we had many visitors to the stall, ranging from young crofters (Ben Wyvis and Strathpeffer primary schools) to long-standing members. We were delighted to receive a visit from Mairi MacKenzie, one of the new commissioners.

SCF council member Alec Campbell, Eiden, Rogart gave unstinting support at an early hour, even coming to the fore with feed bags to tie to the guy ropes of the tent lest there should be a trip hazard! May I take this opportunity to thank him for all his help and good humour. SCF chair Russell Smith was on hand to field a number of questions, supported by Tina, Lucy and Donna, who were able to provide crofting training info and signed up six new members on the day.

We were very fortunate to be joined by long-standing member Bridie Pursey, who ran wool demos and let people have a go at using a spinning wheel.

There were so many folks to talk to with a wealth of information on a variety of subjects, but one message that came across loud and clear is that crofting ground is essential to the survival of store sheep production. Crofters must be recognised for this vital role and SCF will continue to support crofters and lobby for a fairer deal on LFASS and other schemes that will support marginal hill and upland production systems post-Brexit.



New member Malcolm Buchanan and his son Fionnlagh from Bhaltois, Isle of Lewis


Scottish Crofting Federation
 rooted in our communities

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