



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

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New approach needed to get crofts back into use says Crofting Federation gathering on access to crofts

Following overwhelming response, The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) Young Crofters group hosted a second workshop to find solutions to the difficulties in getting access to crofts, with the main issues centring about the need for regulation and effective law.

"The main issue identified by participants," said the chair of the SCF Donald Mackinnon, "is that unused crofts are not being passed on, or are being sold as house sites for prices outwith the reach of young folk and locals. This has been going on for a long time and, frankly, no one with the power to do anything about this shameful situation seems to care enough to act. This is supposed to be a regulated system of land tenure, but the regulator, the Crofting Commission, seems to be bogged down in a reactive role dealing with administrative procedures. The commission is making efforts to tackle absenteeism but is not even managing to scratch the surface on the issue of neglected crofts that are in breach of crofting law. Crofting desperately needs a regulator that can be proactive. This will only happen if the commission has the resources to do its job properly. The situation is worsening and it is obvious that whatever strategy is being adopted is not working. There has to be a new approach."

The workshop on "Access to Crofts" was so oversubscribed that a second session had to be run – also filled to capacity. The focus was on identifying the issues and then coming up with ideas on how to address them, how to unstick the current situation and get inactive crofts back into use.

Mr MacKinnon continued. "We welcomed the announcement of the new commission posts for crofting development but this should just be the beginning; we want to see development officers in the townships, talking to people, advising, helping to sort real situations. A service where those with unused crofts are facilitated to let go of them was raised again and again in the sessions. It needs to be done in a mediated way so that it can work to everyone's advantage. Managing township development plans is not new, SCF and HIE were doing this years ago but funding ceased. The commission is ideally placed to get this up and running again, it must be adequately resourced and there must be the will to do it.

"The law is deeply flawed," Mr MacKinnon added. "We have to see the promised reform restarted early in the new session following the elections, as a pledge in parties' manifestos. Crofting law reform started in 1998, the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting reported in 2008 and 'The Sump', the list of amendments that are needed to the act, was presented to the Scottish Government in 2014. And yet the law is still not fit for purpose and this regulated system is, by-and-large, unregulated because the regulator does not have adequate resources. As I have said before, this is a model of land tenure that is internationally admired and yet it is stagnating, neglected by the very bodies tasked with keeping it."

"To change this situation will take political commitment", Mr MacKinnon concluded. We will help the Crofting Commission in any way that we can but we will also take this issue to the Scottish Parliament, asking for it to press the government to resource the Crofting Commission so that it can do the job of freeing up crofts, making crofts available, bringing croft prices down. The message is clear – action is required now before it is too late."

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