



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Mairi Gougeon gives assurances at Crofting Federation AGM**

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has welcomed the assurances given by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Mairi Gougeon, regarding recognition of crofting's value, continued government support and commitments to reforms to strengthen the future of crofting.

"The Cabinet Secretary gave a very up-beat address to the SCF AGM yesterday", said Donald MacKinnon, chair of the SCF. "She tackled issues of concern to crofters, head-on, and reaffirmed commitments the government has made. A topical issue is the enforcement of duties in order to ensure occupation and use of crofts, and, in doing so, creating further opportunities for new entrants to crofting. As well as increasing the capacity of the Crofting Commission 'Residency and Land Use' team and on-the-ground presence through new development posts in the Western Isles, the government is taking action on its own crofting estates to enforce duties and create opportunities for new entrants. The Cabinet Secretary agreed that there needs to be an appropriate balance found between public interest and private property rights."

Mr MacKinnon continued, "The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged the disappointment felt by many that crofting law reform did not feature in the Programme for Government this year. She reiterated that she is committed to taking the reform through parliament in this session, and, when pressed on the urgency of this, said that engagement with stakeholders on how to take this forward was planned.

"The withdrawal of funding assistance to manage the control of goose populations, especially in the Western Isles, was raised as a matter of great concern", said Mr MacKinnon. "We welcome the Cabinet Secretary's suggestion of a meeting of NatureScot, Environment and Land Reform Minister Mairi McAllan and the SCF to find an appropriate solution to this problem – acknowledging that she has first-hand experience of this in the Uists.

"There is much to do with ensuring the future of crofting laid out in the National Development Plan for Crofting, and government will set up a stakeholder steering group to monitor the implementation of the plan shortly.

"Ms Gougeon acknowledged crofting as a low-impact agricultural system that has great potential in contributing to the government's priorities on climate change, biodiversity and community resilience. We were reminded that Scottish Government does already support crofting with a variety of schemes and that there is great potential for income and employment in areas such as woodland expansion, peatland restoration and the development of local food networks.

"All in all it felt a very positive meeting", Mr MacKinnon concluded. "Ms Gougeon seems to be very proactive and we were left feeling optimistic that action will be taking place on these issues, and the others that were discussed."

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