



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 13/01/2022

Crofting Federation says addressing causes of rural depopulation has to come before a visa scheme

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) supports the Scottish Government letter to the UK Government on a proposed visa scheme to encourage in-migration but points out that addressing the causes of rural depopulation has to come first – and is in the power of the Scottish Government to do.

“We support the idea of the proposed visa scheme,” said Patrick Krause, chief executive of the crofters’ federation, “and welcome anything that encourages working people to come to live in Scotland’s rural areas. But we question whether enough is being done to address the things that force our young people to leave, issues that people coming in will face too.

“The list is long, unfortunately, but let’s look at a few examples. Housing is in short supply and the cost of houses is prohibitive. Only those who have substantial capital behind them can compete on the market, so inevitably young folk are excluded. Houses are being bought as holiday or retirement homes; is this the vision for the ‘Highland and Islands, ‘the playground of Scotland’?

“Crofting is the backbone of most remote rural communities”, continued Mr Krause. “This unique regulated system is being destroyed by an open market, compounded by a lack of regulation. Crofts are being bought by individuals, and even remotely-based companies, wishing to exploit them as holiday venues. Young people who want to stay and croft cannot, so leave. Added to this, island crofting is being forced out by wild geese, populations of which are exploding under the government policy to not control them.”

Mr Krause added, “We need help for small businesses, as these are what drive local economies. Yet the enterprise network was dismantled, start-up grants withdrawn, and the infrastructure businesses depend on – transport and internet – are a disgrace to a ‘developed’ country. Employment opportunities are restricted for those trying to stay, let alone for in-coming folk.

“Yes, welcome to families and skilled people who want to come and contribute to our rural communities, but government has to make a much more significant effort to address the long-standing problems first to make it practicable.”

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