



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Date: 20/06/2024**

### **Agriculture Bill: A missed opportunity – yet, there's still chances to do better**

**SCF took note of the Scottish parliament's stage 3 debate on the agriculture and rural communities bill which sets out the guiding principles for the future agricultural support system. While the final version of the bill brings some improvements for crofters, there is still along way to go.**

The agriculture and rural communities bill as passed by the Scottish parliament is a missed opportunity to commit to a meaningful transformation towards a fairer agricultural support system. Contrary to the EU policy, to which the government has pledged to stay aligned, the bill omits to introduce an element of redistribution for direct support towards smaller landholdings. Without additional measures implemented through secondary legislation, there is a risk that the unjust status quo will be perpetuated, further spending large sums of public money on subsidising the country's wealthiest private landowners.

Thanks to the lobbying of SCF and like-minded organisations, the government has faced significant pressure from MSPs across the board to better support crofters and small producers. The bill now passed features some improvements. Those include clearer requirements as to what the rural support plan has to include, for example they must explicitly outline any measures that are intended to benefit crofters. Matters to be considered when designing rural support plans include the objective of good food nation plans and the benefits of a diverse and resilient agricultural sector including crofters. Further amendments relate to continuing professional development, and support for compensations for losses or damages caused by rewilding or protected species.

The bill provides policymakers with a large margin of appreciation. Given the repeated reassurances to better support crofters and other small producers during the legislative process, we trust that words will be followed by action. The Scottish government must make use of the powers to progressively reduce and cap support payments above a certain threshold and introduce a mechanism that allocates at least 10 per cent of the direct support budget to small producers in line with the EU common agricultural policy. Further, it must ensure that requirements of the whole farm plan do not impose excessive administrative and financial burdens on crofters and common grazings through sensible derogations and additional funding where needed.

SCF chair Johnathan Hedges said: "We urge the Scottish government to design the rural support plan in a way that enables crofters to contribute more to national food production and local supply chains while working towards the bill's objectives on sustainable and regenerative agriculture. With the right support system in place, crofters can achieve a lot – for rural communities, for food security, for climate and nature."

END