



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 03/09/2024

Crofting consultation is missing the point

SCF has responded to the crofting consultation that closed yesterday. While the draft proposals for crofting law reform include some minor, long overdue adjustments, they do not substantially address the most pressing problems the current system faces.

It has taken the Scottish Government ten years from the crofting consultation of 2015, to now consult on a Bill that will tackle only a small set of relatively minor issues. Some of the suggestions are to be welcomed, such as the proposal on expanding parties who can report a breach of duties, the changes that strengthen decrofting considerations, impose regulatory sanctions on those who are in breach, and the power to revoke approvals if conditions are not met.

However, the real issues detrimentally affecting crofting and crofters remain largely untouched. SCF Chair Jonathan Hedges said: "This Bill does not contain proposals that address the big issues: high croft prices, very few new crofts, lack of croft housing, low investment in croft businesses or lack of clarity on ownership of natural asset rights. Nor does it provide the levers and resources needed to produce consistently better outcomes for crofters and crofting communities as they adapt to an increasingly unequal economy and deteriorating climate."

The present consultation also includes some proposals that are potentially damaging to crofting and crofting communities. While the introduction of joint tenancies will not significantly address the problem of escalating prices for crofts and croft tenancies, the proposal on introducing standard securities to attract commercial loans could make things even worse, reinforcing market dynamics and further increasing the cost of entry. This means that accessing croft land will become even more difficult for young people.

Further, the proposal suggests that the Crofting Commission should no longer scrutinise individual croft assignments in most cases. Instead, it is suggested that the Commission will only do spot-checks after two years to assess whether those to whom the croft had been assigned are effectively living in the area and working the croft. Meanwhile, no further scrutiny is applied to owner-occupiers as to whether they intend to fulfil their crofting duties. There is a risk that even more crofts will be handed over to absentees with no real intention of being part of the crofting community.

Jonathan Hedges said: "SCF remains committed to working with MSPs and Scottish Government staff to ensure that the useful elements of the planned Bill can pass into law before the end of the current parliamentary session in 2026. However, we are concerned that further reform will simply be kicked into the long grass once the Bill has passed. We cannot wait for another ten years to tackle the bigger crofting issues that this Bill steps around and which become more urgent every day."

Our full consultation response can be found on the SCF website.

END

Notes to editors:- Please contact SCF office for high resolution photos.