



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

STORNOWAY 04 JUNE 2007

FLIPCHART OUTPUTS FROM GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Eighteen public meetings were held by the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting over the summer of 2007 as a key element of its evidence-gathering activity.

At each meeting, small, informal, group discussions were held and participants invited to discuss questions from the Committee's formal Call for Evidence paper, and to raise any other key issues. The groups then distilled the conclusions of their discussions into a few main points that were written onto flipchart paper, and stuck up on the wall for all at the meeting to read.

The following **text in blue** is transcribed as accurately and fully as proved possible from the hand-written flipcharts (there were some legibility issues), and is presented below following the most appropriate Call for Evidence question. Not all of the questions were addressed by all the meetings.

This material is being collated, analysed, and considered by the Committee as key evidence for its Inquiry, along with the written evidence submitted through the formal Call for Evidence, the results of a household survey, and the discussions of many other meetings.

1. How can crofting contribute to population retention or growth in remote areas? What do you think would help attract new entrants and/or retain people. Would it matter if new people came from outside crofting communities? Please tell us how what you say applies to your area.

- **Promote agricultural activity as “glue” bonding crofting community (social)**
- **Explore setting up of allotments as a stepping-stone on to crofting ladder (+ “glue” effect)**
- **Promote crofting in schools (young people desperately needed)**
- **Create & identify markers for agri-use.**

2. What impact do crofting activities have on the landscape and on nature? Please tell us about these activities and the effect they have in your area.

- **Changing balance of livestock; especially cattle/ sheep**
- **Different areas, even within western isles, have different issues.**
- **Fencing issues – ageing fences,**
- **Derelict crofts – creates problems for rest of township.**
- **Education required for effective take up of schemes – RSS, LMC, etc.**



4. *How important is crofting agriculture to you economically? How important do you think it will be in the future as agricultural subsidies (including Single Farm Payments, Less Favoured Area Support Scheme, agri-environment payments, Land Management Contracts, and CCAGS payments) change? Are there other changes ahead which you think will affect crofting agriculture?*

- **Community benefits from active crofting**
- **Access to schemes for new entrants essential**
- **As grants/subsidies decrease there should be more help to diversify, access to training etc**

5. *Do you think that it is a good thing that crofters generate income from sources other than agriculture? Is this adequately supported? Please tell us about your own experience.*

- **Essential economically – need other income**
- **Essential to diversify and adapt**
- **Employers etc. should be flexible e.g. time off**

6. *Should there be stronger regulation of land use to prevent neglect of crofts or absenteeism? How do you think appropriate use of croft land should be secured?*

- **Yes; much tougher attitude to absentees.**
- **Re-organise croft boundaries where crofts are neglected**
- **Support townships to find the right solutions for their own very local circumstances.**
- **Support for new housing in crofting townships**
- **Impose long term sublets on neglected/ absentee croft – or just make tougher use of existing regulations**
- **Opportunity (esp. in W. Isles) arising from community land ownership.**

7. *Should amalgamation, multiple croft holdings and/or the sub-division of crofts be encouraged? Should there be any limits on these? Do you think this should happen to crofts in your area and why?*

- **Should be a minimum size for sub-division, but would depend on use to be made of it.**
- **Should be restriction on number of holdings tenanted by one individual as it restricts others opportunity.**
- **But actual number could vary, if case could be made and could be shown that it's being well-worked**
- **Grazings committee should be able to police use of grazings effectively to stop one person overusing their share or breaching souming**



8. *How serious are problems of access to affordable housing in the crofting counties? What are the impacts on the demand for crofts and croft land (whether inbye or common grazings)? How helpful are croft house grants, rural home ownership grants, housing association lettings, etc.? What do you think should be done? Please also tell us how what you say applies to your local area.*

- **Severe problem**
- **Affordability gap is widening re crofters grant. £30k+ for bare land. New house cost £100k. Grant @ £22k vs 1980 grant + loan @ £29k, £35k.**
- **Wages low**
- **RHOG - improve**
- **House criteria for more space in rural areas**
- **Create new crofts from common grazings for locals**
- **Best land - moving from production.**
- **Multiple holdings**
- **Crofters commission – apply regulations**

9. *Should crofters be allowed to sell their crofts, or croft land, to the highest bidder? Do you think croft assignments and sales should be regulated and, if so, how? Please tell us how what you say applies to your local area.*

- **Free market out.**
- **Commission to enforce current legislation plus monitor the use (esp following assignation)**
- **Where croft cannot be made use of by assignee/ tenant it should be sub-let**
- **Local authority + grazings committee to have greater input to assignation decisions**

10. *How do you think land reform, and the community ownership of crofting estates in particular, will affect crofting in the future? Does community ownership alter the need for regulation of crofting in any ways? Do crofters need protection from community landlords, as they did from private landlords? Should crofting tenants of community landlords retain the right to buy? Please also tell us how what you say applies to your local area.*

- **This is the critically important question – must be addressed**
- **Community ownership = new landlord**
- **Positive effect if community own all assets**
- **Yes – protection required**
- **Yes - right to buy to be retained**
- **Different areas are in various stages but beware interposed leases of buy-out**
- **Commission lacking teeth**
- **Majority cg – 2/3**



11. *In the light of these issues, how do you imagine crofting in the future – say in 10 or 20 years time? Do you think crofting will be different from now, for example in the balance between agricultural and non-agricultural activities/income? What would you hope crofting to be? Please also tell us how what you say applies to your local area.*

- **A lot more younger people on crofts**
- **Vibrant communities**
- **A light in every croft**

13. *What is it about crofting which is important to you? Please tell us what features of crofting matter most to you and why. (It may help you to think which aspects of crofting you most want to continue.)*

- **Way of life – healthy, outdoor existence**
- **Gives you a sense of purpose**
- **Challenging & rewarding**
- **Sense of community – people feel that they belong to an area**
- **Ties into folklore and cultures**
- **Don't own the land it owns you – sense of belonging**
- **Crofting community = people involved in crofting, maybe not crofter, but help out with work, grazings committee etc.**
- **Ability to pass on land in good heart, and skills to work it.**
- **Passing on to next generation all your own effort, time etc.**