



## COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

### PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

CASTLEBAY 07 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.

*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.*

- **Crofting fits with nature, if done properly, is used extensively**
- **Agri environment schemes have been very positive**
  - **e.g. marram grass sea defences – concern about end**

*3. Does crofting support diverse cultures, including the Gaelic language? Please tell us how it does this and whether what you say applies particularly to your local area.*

- **Crofting important for culture, social, community relations**
- **Better to encourage land use, need to retain skills (to work land, understand nature, look after livestock) are retained**

*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?*

- **Crofters subsidise crofting**
- **Croft souming too low for AHW LMC MS therefore forced to look for more crofts or use of**
- **Freight huge cost**



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.

- On the whole, need for other sources of income
- It is agreed that crofting alone does not sustain a viable lifestyle and other sources of income are required.
  - Only 1 crofter in Barra is able to exist solely on crofting.

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?

- Absenteeism not really an issue. Might be cases to be pursued in agreement with township
- Absenteeism is often about jobs/ economics
- Is not really a problem if it is sublet
- Neglect – probably too hard to force someone to assign, but there might be cases where it's evident that no intention to croft
- Viable crofts are used

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?

- Croft collecting should not be allowed

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.

- Affordable housing is essential – need incentives for crofters to release common grazings for this
- For some people getting a croft is their route to suitable housing. This could also free up a council house for others
- Folk in Barra looking for crofts in Barra are not realising when they are going to change hands. These potential crofters should be recognised.
- Incentive to outgoers needed
- Affordable housing a problem – a croft can help. No loan therefore have to decroft.
- Need incentive for crofters to release common grazings for housing and/ or crofts
- The issue was raised of the problem where an existing crofter seeks a share of crofting land for the purpose of building a house. The group felt that this was a matter for township discussion.



**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.**

- Crofts should not be on the open market
- (Non-family) assignment to people who are on a list/ waiting list etc, but the township should have a say
- Commission to direct assignment on basis of recommendation by township (wider group than grazings committee)
- If croft becomes vacant, offered to township to decide who gets it
- The Crofters Commission should have stronger regulatory powers to enforce the prevention of selling off assignments and the selling of sites for private developers.
- Folk often not aware of sale, etc until too late
- Local demand
- Affordability issue
- Should not go to highest
- Should be on rent
- What criteria? – crofting experience
- Keep speculators out
- Could put a burden on a sale
- Could have longer than a sublet
- Grazings Committee should be able to recommend
- Transparent system croft assignments needed

**12. What changes do you think would help to bring this about? For example, should there be changes in the way crofting is regulated? Should there be changes to the Crofters Commission? Should there be changes to existing grant regimes? Please explain why you hold your particular views.**

- Commission should be more active on Barra
- Essential that signatures should be witnessed on assignment form – especially non-family assignments
- Should be more incentive for diversification. ABDS was a good scheme
- Schemes would be better value for money if longer-term e.g. ESA, RSS, ABDS, SFES
- LMCMS AHW – crofts too small to support required L.U. so single croft crofters excluded
- Should be incentives for locally produced food e.g. milk (Iceland is a good example)
- Need decentralisation of public meetings – not practical to go to Uist/ Benbecula



**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.)*

- **Someone doing something with the croft, (e.g. ag/ hort/ diversification etc)**
- **Chance for young people to get land for a house, look at poor common grazing**
- **Need incentives to encourage crofting, not discouragement from bureaucracy**



**14. Are there any other points you wish to make which would be relevant to the Committee's terms of reference?**

- **Need for CC to communicate their role, and to be more informative and helpful**
- **Role of CC – problem with them not knowing their own priorities**
- **CC not helpful, not informative when contacted**
- **CC do not tell crofters what they do – what are their functions?**
- **Suits the CC to be obscure. They are supposed to be for the crofters but they are paid by the government**
- **CC have good leaflets but still not clear what may do**
- **Folk do not have confidence in Commission to do the right thing therefore hanging on to croft**
- **CC should justify their existence**
- **CC not for the crofters – just a big bureaucracy. V little assistance**
- **SEERAD should be clear when acting as Landlord and when acting as representatives of CC**
- **Essential for CC forms, especially Non-Family Assignations, to have signatures witnessed**
- **Paperwork burden with the schemes**
- **Too much regulation and red tape**
- **CES not helpful**
- **No Croft Entrant Scheme worker on Barra (Uist comes?)**
- **People think they are on CC list then find they are not**
- **Clarification needed as to how to get on to CC list**