



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

BROADFORD, 25 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.

- **New croft entrant scheme across the board**
- **Encourage more release / or create new crofts but sort out existing mess first**
- **Re-use abandoned townships**
- **Crofting life contributes to tourism – creates jobs – keeps people – attracts visitors**

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.

- **A balance of stock on the crofts to benefit land**
- **Stop selling arable land for houses/ development**
- **Provide infrastructure. Especially abattoir**
- **Control non-native plant species**
- **Control red deer**



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 supports Gaelic more than Gaelic supports crofting
- Crofting has supported Gaelic by 'rooting' generations of crofters throughout the crofting counties
 - being eroded by 'market' in crofts
- Crofting does support diverse cultures (once you have secured a croft) if individuals engage/ get involved with the crofting community

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?

- Point made re aquaculture – importance of crofting in wider sphere – fishing, alternative land use etc
- CAP had made greater impact on crofting than any legislation
 - new SFP no incentive to croft – just keep collecting the cheque
 - no SFP for new entrants = immediate disadvantage
 - no support mechanism for young crofters entering crofting today.
- Returns from agriculture now lower than since the lifetime of group members. 46 years ago, sale of one lamb = 1 weeks wages
- How did people manage before subsidies?
- Discussion about possibility of tying into new enthusiasm for local food production and sustainable food production initiatives around local food retailing hampered by red tape – no local slaughterhouse on Skye
- Historically, crofts were never intended to be self sustaining, & this is still the case
- There are many non-quantifiable measures – potential to produce healthy produce
- Culture – dying language = dying economy
- Important not to run crofting down – we do now have a vibrant economy with young people wanting to come back
- More power should be given to grazings committees to enable freeing of house sites on common grazings
- Fish-farming – an interesting potential for diversification + wind farming
- Livestock improvement scheme + CCAGS vitally important to crofting
 - other schemes very complex and often inappropriate to crofting
- Lots of paperwork for very little return



FUTURE?

- Crofting set to disappear under housing - townships are disappearing under housing which is unaffordable to local people
- JERSEY MODEL – 2 different property markets – one for local people, one for others

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.

- It is essential that Crofters generate income from sources other than agriculture
 - THIS IS NOT ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED
- More holistic approach to support provision of public goods (landscape, environment, agriculture, social aspects)
- To reduce transport costs to benefit all business
- Raising awareness of opportunities on a township basis ... training, education, etc...
- Broadband

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?

- Legislation exists but should be both strengthened and enforced – this will require a collective approach between CC, Land Court + local authority & involve planners. greater input from crofting townships – esp. re assignments
- With the ‘rights’ of crofters should come a more formal responsibility to not “neglect” land & keep in good condition. Neglect to be clearly defined + backed up by enforcement.
- Decrofting for house sites should be limited to 1 per tenant – this would enable/ facilitate crofts being passed on to young crofters while enabling parents/ older generation to stay on land. Also would enable assignments to be sold for realistic/ reasonable value rather than inflated values related to potential for house sites.

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?

Amalgamation

Pros

- viable – agriculture
- Better use of land

Cons

- Township mix - concentration 1 person
- Possible to end up 1 big landowner

Sub-Division

Pros

- Family

Cons

- Crofts are too small



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.*

- **Average incomes of ‘locals’ not able to meet costs = not able to croft or build**
- **Young people not able to get crofts: need to enforce regs.**
- **Encourage community confidence**

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.*

Should crofters be allowed to sell to the highest bidder?

- **“NO”**

Should assignments/ sales be regulated?

- **“YES”**
- **How?**
 - **all non-family assignments/ transfers through crofting regulatory body***
 - **moratorium on decrofting for multiple house sites pending review of tenancy/ owner occupancy (a dated concept)**
 - **valued in line with income potential of croft (excl. House)**
 - **tighter planning policies to protect crofting land/ communities**

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.*

- **Some models of community land ownership – Stornoway Trust, Glendale**
- **Where individual rights are given greater sway, it can be a recipe for disaster**
- **Where community powers are greater, matters tend to be resolved more easily**
- **No examples of 2003 land buyouts in Skye – no appetite for it here.**
- **NTS experience in Plockton fairly amicable. Have now arranged land for affordable housing – a long process, but grazings comm.. feel there is now pressure for them to provide further land.**
- **JMT – recent application for a house plot – JMT offered plot at £70,000.**
- **Community ownership puts pressure on Trust to release equity (house plots)**



- **Community ownership requires to have some external regulation which must be the same regulations as apply to private landlords.**

Do crofters need protection from community landowners?

- **Yes – because community and private interests may conflict esp. if estate is not wholly a crofting one.**

Should crofting tenants of c. landowners be allowed right to buy?

- **Yes - same legislation must apply to crofters, owner occupiers, sub tenants, everyone.**
- **Crofting land use what is the point of producing 5 year plans if these are not regulated/ checked up on?**
- **- up till now, Commission has had no teeth, only landowners have the right to disown crofters of tenancies.**
- **Under new Act re land misuse & neglect, it may be possible to regulate land use & crofting tenancies better in the future**

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.*

- **Active crofting townships with good collective structures – backed up by solid infrastructure, support mechanisms & services which enable growth/ sustainable communities. e.g. water/ sewage/ slaughterhouses/ producers assoc.**
- **Crofting land being maintained “in good heart” – good environmental + agricultural condition. even if not actively worked**
- **Crofting would have a good mixed/ diversified base with both agricultural + not-agri uses**
- **A strategic approach would be taken regarding the use of “poor” agric land for a range of development purposes/ or forestry etc**

A second Group's flipchart:

- **Affordable houses + services.**
- **Employment. (economy)**
- **Create employment – township basis**
- **Agriculture – food production**
- **Technology is broadband**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Changes**
 - **flexible crofting regs.**

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.*

- **CC – should be completely restructures, + 50% of membership should be elected from crofting township**
- **Valuation of crofts – since 1976 act + right to buy, there is no possibility to cap escalating costs of assignation**
- **Far higher owner-occupation in Skye because of mkt forces**



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.)

- **Community of crofters**
- **Heritage / culture of land and environment**
- **(managed = asset)**
- **Organic, healthy, retains population**
- **Strong local food economy**

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

- **SORT OUT THE 'DE-CROFTING COMMISSION'**
- **Loan finance for crofter housing to negate need to decroft**
- **Moratorium on decrofting and croft sales**
- **Crofters commission have not done enough to stop speculation. More regulation to keep crofts in active use**
- **ABOLISH THE CROFTER RIGHT TO BUY**
- **Need to end speculation**
- **Burden crofts for minimum of 10 years to put off speculators**
- **GRAZINGS SHARES SHOULD BE TIED TO THE CROFT**
- **Need to keep crofts viable**

Another Group's comments:

- **Active crofting is being limited by lack of skill among incoming tenants**
- **Investment required in communal agricultural facilities e.g. cattle crusher etc**
- **Huge amount of paperwork + regulations are a stumbling block**
- **Range of issues exist around crofting townships now having a significant number of "non-crofting" residents who are not sympathetic to active crofting & its implications – sheep shit + cattle grids!!**
- **Need to promote crofting as an attractive option to young people from within the community**