



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

POOLEWE 26 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.

- **Cost of croft (assignment) too high for local (indigenous) crofters. But does contribute to overall population growth**
 - **contributes to population retention**
 - **Land more easily available for housing**
- **Availability of crofts = attract**
- **Low cost of finance**
 - **less paperwork = retain**
 - **New people = OK if coming in for right reasons**
= some communities wouldn't be there at all

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.

- **Lack of stock on hills leads to overgrown bracken and heather**
 - **Regeneration of birch**
 - **Our lambs keep the foxes + sea eagles going**
 - **Without them they would starve**
 - **Livestock part of food chain**
- **Re seeding of crofts keep them looking**
 - **Good far better than a croft full of rushes and dead grass**
 - **When crofts are cultivated it encourages birds and small animals**



- Less ticks on cultivated land
- Aesthetically pleasing
- When houses are build on good crofting land the land is unavailable for agricultural purposes
- Crofting practices encourage tourism

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.*

- Strong culture through language, communal working, history, music, tradition
- Divided more today. probably less than 5% speaking Gaelic today
- Strong culture working together – helping each other has
- Positive impact on sustaining healthy 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?*

Vital !

- Main economic activity – few alternatives – important to Community as a whole – visitors, tourism
- main source of income
- Payments: vital! – payments influence what is economically kept on croft
- Subsidy change? : - must retain support for crofting – reduced support will impact on viability of crofts including CCAGS, livestock premium
- Landscape changes may come as a result of focus of the support schemes
 - less £ for ‘crofting’ activity
 - Animals off limits if £ support reduced or removed.
- Crofters Commission should ‘promote’ crofting as well as regulate crofting
- Need to encourage ‘young’ crofters into crofting – those that want to croft and raise family
- Whatever changes are ahead there must be incentives to sustain crofting and way of life.

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.*

income from other sources?

- Crucial./ essential
- Depends on size and quality
- Not if ‘house farming’ - no arable croft left



adequately support?

- Need to encourage more young people into crofting & train in traditional skills.
- Support to find other employment for crofters & those coming in
- Agencies/ LA don't understand the value of p/t employment
 - only looking to award large contract
- e.g. people leaving crofting & area. Would come back if can get crofts.

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?*

Q6a

Yes there should be stronger regulation - crofts are being lost to wrong people

- 1 people buy their crofts and then sell them off as plots for silly amounts of money.
 - Value leads to decrofting west coast
 - Case of croft land being bought from factor and then being sold for speculative use.
 - Killing off a way of life especially
- 2 for young people impact on schools shops business etc.
 - Killing off a sense of community
 - People need to be sensitive to crofting way of life
- 3 people not adhering to the plans indicated to crofters commission

Q6b

- Probation period for 5 years and if misused a hefty financial penalty.
- Crofters commission taking more notice of grazing committees and local people.
- Decisions being taken by grazings committees and locally
- Good crofting land is of a premium and should not be built on - parts of common grazings could be used for affordable housing.
- Planners should be responsible for cattle grids, fences, to keep stock out of villages.
- Look at the planning and way it is set up
- Change crofting Act to stronger planning regulations

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 would enable economies of scale - this could enable 1 crofter to provide infrastructure for smaller holdings – however unofficial arrangements can work well in achieving the same
- In this area crofts are small anyway so sub-division could cause problems
- Subdivision could be used as a mechanism for encouraging absentees to free up potentially active croft land (absentee



keeps part – remainder allocated to new entrant).

- Both subdivision/amalgamation could support active management.

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.

how serious is problem of access to affordable housing?

V. serious

- V. little is affordable (open mkt/ speculators)
- What affordable housing is built, locals are not able to access (others get it)
- Scottish Water/ SEPA resr's.

impacts on crofting?

- Young folk cannot settle in area/ return
- Multiple house sites per croft (- loss of croft in-bye)

how helpful grants/ schemes

- V. helpful.
- CBGLS – favoured over grant only (chqs).
- CHGS - forces decrofting/ higher costs.
- RHOGS – more useful if own plot
- HSCHT land bank – reluctance due to personal uncertainties

solutions:

- Community input to Scott. Water plans.
- Bring back loan for crofter housing scheme
- Grazing committees, community councils + planning dept. Work together to address local housing need for keyworkers
- Making land available from common grazings (affordable)
- Prioritise locals on housing lists.
- Broaden eligibility to CBGLS/ CHGS to include key workers

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.

- Complex issue: concern about failings of right to buy + sell, but would not want rights removed
- Present system is failing through ineffective regulation
- Grave concern about existing examples of decrofting for multiple house sites and high prices
- Needs to be more enforcement in owner occupiers in particular
- Need greater monitoring of new crofts, particularly those with a non-family assignment
- Crofting 'burdens' need enforcing to dampen market



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.

- Regulation still required to protect crofter rights.
- Community landlord does not mean less need for regulation. (Need to protect crofter rights where minority in crofting community)
- Crofters in Community owned crofts should still be able to buy – Crofters Commission to regulate sales and protect ‘crofting activity’
- Crofters Commission & Planning authority to work closely together:
 - housing allocations, new crofts, forest crofts

Area Specifics

- Absentee crofters
- Losing croft land to housing

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.

1. Will move away from livestock
 - More crops eg veg
2. Need to encourage young crofters & enable them to get into crofting
 - le provide affordable housing to encourage them to stay
3. Need to utilise hill ground
4. Tourism benefits from animals
5. Generally tourism declining in this area –

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.

- Crofters Commission out of touch
 - Needs to be more accountable communicative + more consistent
- Changes needed to grants
 - Means tests should apply to tenants as well as owner occupiers
 - Grants for non agricultural as well as agricultural
 - Need to be more flexible control of market + follow up of new crofters to ensure active use of 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.)*

- Crofting should involve active land management & not be “glorified gardening”.
- The traditional element is important not just in terms of activities but also skills – these should be passed on.
- Concern about loss of collective crofting activities
 - Perception that “individualism” encouraged over community/ joint activities – desire to see community cohesion/ activities with mutual benefit encouraged.
- Pride in keeping the ground “good”.

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

- Public purse to contribute more towards roadside fencing costs for livestock Not just for deer!!
- Must value local produce more - benefit local community & more sustainable development.
- De-regulate grants Prior notification adds costs as can’t take advantage of opportunities as arise.
- More appropriate regulation (by SEPA, ERAD, etc.....) & costs regimes for crofters.
- Too much legislation/ regulation – seems to be fighting against crofting
- Absenteeism might be better tackled by greater involvement of townships.
- General support for restrictions on the building of houses on in-bye land.
- Services/ infrastructure particularly water (2014!) An issue – stifles development
- Support / funding mechanisms need to be more flexible and fit for purpose
- Absenteeism less a problem if land being used – only a problem if land is neglected.