



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

Glenuig 04 JULY 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.

- **Beneficial**
- **Provides diverse landscape with wide range of flora, fauna etc**
- **Changes have occurred, and will continue to happen**

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 can support cultures – but it is not unique in doing so**
- **Crofting can support tradition – but it is under pressure to modernize even in traditional enterprises**
 - **for example cattle production – box feed!**
- **Crofters can sometimes be under pressure to sell off parts of the croft for financial gain**
- **Positive point for crofting:**
 - **Crofting can support the formation of a community through mutual interest & support**
- **Negative points against crofting supporting culture:**
 - **Time constraints reduce participation on croft**
 - **Income constraints mean outside work (away from croft)**
 - **Lifestyle desires for modern living and facets of modern living reduce participation in crofting**
- **Multiple croft holdings can reduce community participation**
- **People working away from home or away from the croft**



reduce community social cohesion

- **External jobs (eg fish farming/ forestry) are no longer crofting friendly**

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?

- **Crofting isn't paying at the moment.**
 - **But is economical in other ways**
- **Not everybody is benefiting from the subsidies – only people with livestock**
- **Crofting is a unique way of life that needs to be preserved in all its different ways for future generations**

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 vital that crofters generate income from other sources as crofting will not provide a full income**
- **Crofting in the first instance was not intended to provide a full income**
- **Crofting should be developed in a way that attracts people who will actively participate in the croft, its agriculture, the community and the environment**
- **Good crofting land should be used for growing and agriculture. Poor land should be used for diversification**

Is diversification adequately supported?

- **Not adequately supported**
- **Predominance of capital grant funding rather than revenue funding can cause financial problems**
- **Cases of financial hardship could be identified following capital grants**
- **No support for horticultural development**
- **No support for local food growing, processing or marketing**

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/ neglect – difficulty to define**
 - **if croft being worked its acceptable but each case has to be seen as a separate issue –**
- **Croft land should be kept as working land and not allowed to become an open asset stripping for house plots – within reason!**
- **Review existing regulations in consultation with the crofters with a view to tightening up in general – to secure croft land!**



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?*

- **Sub-division – sometimes the only way young crofters can get into crofting**
- **However regulations should be laid down as to how many times a croft can be subdivided to avoid exploitation, and that such sub-division should have units of at least 5 acres to create a viable croft**
- **Crofting structure supported people therefore enabling them to stay in crofting communities**
- **‘Affordable housing’ must be linked to crofting practices**
 - **e.g. working the croft.**

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.*

- **Limit number of plots that can be sold on individual crofts through regulations/ burdens e.g. Croft house plus one.**
- **Housing should not be permitted on locally important arable land.**
- **Purchase of crofts & change of tenancy should be effectively regulated to the full extent of the crofting law**
- **Assistance for housing on crofts has to be better co-ordinated and not require decrofting**
- **mechanism must be found regarding the right to buy so that land cannot then be sold on the open market to the highest bidder!**
- **Affordable housing i.e. Local authority housing should not be allowed in crofting areas. ‘affordable housing’ should mean affordable to locals.**
- **Regulations should be put in place to stop land purchased by community buy-outs then being bought privately by individuals**

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.*

HOPES

- **Increasing role in food prod. (subsistence)**
- **New sheep stock clubs as community approach to sustainability**
- **Definition of ‘absentee’ crofter to be revisited – modern day commuter distances**
- **Start up grants for new entrants returnable if not successful**
- **New entrants up to 60 not 40!**

FEARS

- **Speculation + asset stripping + over development**
- **Breakdown of crofting townships due to dominance of non**



crofters

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.*

- **Access for local young people to crofting needed – government should fund**
- **Croft land, including common grazings apportionments should not be sold to speculators**
- **The Crofters Commission does not listen to the crofter & the grazings committees. Lack of assessors. Should also pay attention to Community Councils on crofting issues**
- **Why do we croft – what is important ?**
 - **Coherence of community**
 - **Character development**
 - **Passing on skills (but young people don't get crofts)**
- **Ref. Crofters Commission – very slow – years go by and issues are not progressed. e.g. Sanna**
- **Section 75 a problem ref. affordable housing**
- **Planning system a problem – Crofters Commission should come before planning**
- **Croft collecting needs to be stopped. Can also lead to a lack of local democracy. Also stops young people coming in.**
- **Support Schemes not very accessible**
 - **SFP very low value locally**
 - **RSS etc. difficult to get into**

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 has supported retention of population, and provided continuity as some crofts are passed down through the generations**
- **Provided security of tenure**
- **Enables tenant to build house**
- **Crofting creates an environment appealing to tourism, which is important in this area**
- **Crofting way of life**
- **Importance of lime subsidy, cropping grant & crofting community development schemes in the past. All helped crofts to be developed, as well as crofting communities.**

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

- **For a young person positive to be a crofter**
 - **be independent**
 - **be young own person**
 - **sense of achievement**



- grow vegetable
- rear animals.
- .But need to get a chance to be a crofter
- Prove that new entrants are wanting to croft not merely to speculate
- De-crofting permission before planning?
- More township control over outline planning + development
- Landlords/ Crofters Commission / (SEERAD) Scottish Exec/ Land Court – central database of info + croft history
- Environmental balance maintained by traditional crofting practises