



## COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

### PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

OBAN 05 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.

*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?*

*Economic importance:*

- **Crofting can make an important economic contribution to both the individual and the community**
- **In some areas crofting can make a significant financial contribution to a household**
- **Commercial and economic terms**

*Impact of subsidy changes:*

- **The focus of subsidy measurements should be outcome/output based rather than prescription based**
- **Subsidy/ grant schemes have to be crofter-friendly and accessible – there should be some focus on social, cultural, environmental and community aspects**
- **Crofting subsidy/ grants should be focussed on crofting and not be scaled-down agricultural grants**

*Other important changes*

- **As markets change every piece of agricultural land may need to be retained for agriculture**
- **Land for agriculture should not be used for housing**
- **Productive agricultural land should be both used and retained for the future**
- **Demand for home-produced food is rising. Knowledge of food source, organic products, Fairtrade, is increasing in importance and can contribute**



- **People desiring the crofting lifestyle may cause the demand for crofts to increase**

**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.*

- **Crofters have to have other sources of income incl. sale of house plots with restrictions**
- **Property letting/ tourism – time and area dependent**
- **Environmental diversification – producing biomass – regenerating woodland**
- **LMC measures**
- **Full-time/ part-time jobs – limited opportunities in area**

**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?*

- **A strong local economy appears to reduce absenteeism and neglect**
- **Neglected crofts may be a bigger problem than absenteeism**
- **Multiple croft holding is detrimental to crofting and the crofting community and can negatively affect population stability**
- **No need for stronger regulation. The Crofters Commission should apply the current regulations to encourage appropriate use of the land**
- **We have regulation but we lack incentives to encourage appropriate crofting behaviours.**

**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?*

- **Size of crofts important factor**
- **Actively work crofts**
- **Planned approach (guide) appropriate to subdivision/ amalgamation appropriate – cattle, crofting, agricultural, crofting**
- **Set criteria**
- **Young people into rural community (keep community fresh)**
- **Creating rural business – animals, other business, houses**
- **What powers do Crofting Commission have at present and future?**



**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.*

- **Problem of access to affordable housing is very serious**
- **Importance of housing grant in helping provide house – make affordable to locals – tiers**
- **Don't differentiate for grants between owner-occupiers and tenants**
- **Where possible housing on poorer land**
- **Within reason and depending on size of croft (if very small, is it really viable holding?) Could put housing on inbye**
- **Decrofting shouldn't be automatic on planning. Planners should look harder at land use**
- **Crofting shouldn't be only solution to affordable housing**

**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.*

- **Crofters should not be allowed to sell crofts to highest bidder**
- **Should be regulated and set regulations**
- **Models (ethical) for market value sales**
- **Crofters see croft as an asset**
- **Build within the community**
- **Different views on right to buy**
- **Would it depress?**
- **What would happen if right to buy removed?**
- **Problem with land going out of crofting**
  - **Crofts being subdivided to create house plots with large gardens and accessing grants to do so**
  - **Grant use not policed House prices being driven up**
- **Opportunities to create crofting townships by dividing large crofts lost in creation of housing developments**

**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.*

- **No individual right-to-buy on community owned areas**
- **Still need level of protection from community landlord as from private landlord**
- **Should be first options for locals in assignation of tenancy with community-owned estate – issue about what value this should be**



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

- **Consideration should be given to re-establishing crofting by the renovation of unused buildings/ land in rural areas – a potential source of affordable housing**
- **1886 Act is the anchor of crofting – it needs to be revisited and strengthened but is in danger of being weakened**