



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON CROFTING

PROGRAMME OF EVIDENCE-GATHERING PUBLIC MEETINGS

KIRKWALL 17 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.

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.

- **Crofting – population retention/ growth, attracting new entrants**

Historically/ background

- **Amalgamation of crofts/ larger farms**
- **Difficult for young folk to get on the property ladder**
- **In Orkney crofts usually owner-occupied, no real crofting community**
- **Problems of subsidy system (smallholders not tenants)**

Summary

- **Crofting has contributed in the past – can do again in the future if issues are dealt with – needs radical action**
- **Need easier access to land, making affordable land available to those who will croft (remove market forces)**
- **Visible governance/ enforcement (potential for local officer to advise)**

Cross-cutting issues

- **Communication – passing information to the right people**
- **Links with housing/ other infrastructure (must work in partnership)**



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?*

- **One important thing that effects agriculture is the price of sheep and cattle**
- **There is something to be made from agriculture but there is an imbalance between cost and production**
- **Crofting can help with a sustainable future – by supporting people**
- **Needs to be made more financially rewarding to encourage young people to stay**
- **Food production important for the future**
- **Better transport links – boats suitable for local conditions**
- **Transport too expensive (LFASS could help)**

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 need control over sea as well as land – e.g. not allowed to catch local mackerel**
 - **North Ronaldsay used to have 16 lobster boats – now one**
 - **Community quota needed**
- **Local economy need sensible local control**
- **Essential to have other sources of income**
 - **Crofters and farmers all need external income to household**
- **Energy could be generated locally if planning permission was given for small individual windmills etc**
- **Means testing of CCAGS for owner/occupier needs to be removed**
- **Crofts bought as lifestyle choice can bring in new skills**
- **How support local young but how?**

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 a problem especially if have multiple crofts and especially on small islands where people needed – young people with children**
- **Regulation should be enforced to put tenants into absentee crofts including owner/occupied crofts – give new folk a chance**



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.*

- **Planning needs to open up**
- **Makes sites expensive**
- **Planning more flexible in Isles**
- **Real problem is lack of income for mortgage so rental needed**
- **Not such an open rental opportunity as before**
- **Expectations have changed re quality of housing**
- **Housing association cannot build on spec.**
- **No CHBG applications from Orkney recently**
- **Crofting can help access to house sites and p.p.**
- **Multiple service agencies – bureaucratic burden**
- **Crofting not purely agricultural needs**
- **Agriculturally can make more money by doing nothing**
- **Land use – why wanted? - products can be accessed cheaper from elsewhere**
- **To survive, places need people**
- **Need young people but no encouragement**
- **Agriculture is key in Orkney**
- **Government needs to address support schemes and Fair Trade**
- **Meanwhile problem to continue and survive**

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.*

- **Better grants; amount; less red tape; type – need help with fencing, re-seed & build**
- **Stronger support for agriculture**
- **Loss of skills**
- **Getting into crofting takes a lot of money**
- **Anyone given a grant towards housebuilding should have more restrictions on the resale – shouldn't exploit this benefit**
- **Need support for diversification**
- **Flexibility needs to be built into crofting e.g. new crofts, subdivision**
- **State Aid is restriction on options for support**
- **Niche markets very useful – difficult to sustain**
 - **“Orkney Gold” has been a success**
- **On-line selling useful. Freedom to live where want to**
- **EU not been bad – but problem how applied in UK**
 - **Brussels supports rural and peripheral**
 - **Crofters Comm should report to Brussels to get some action!**



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’ is not key factor - community is important thing - is small farm system, with crofts
- Less regulation of tenure would free up opportunities – but to get young folk in would also need decent young entrant scheme
- Crofting rents need to be sensible – would help issues of neglected/ absenteeism (not really problems in Orkney)
- Crofting is not of same importance in Orkney as in other parts of the Highlands & Islands. Rural economic development and vibrant community critical
- One of the main benefits of croft tenancy was grants, but not open to many owner/ occupiers and recent changes make less useful anyway. Need grant schemes relevant to scale and available for diversified enterprise
- Need to involve landowners more, to give them interest in what’s going on

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

- QUANGOs have great power – but providing local employment.
- Problem – people who do understand the land being in position to control e.g. sheep not to graze at all/ sheep to graze every 3rd year but now all sheep sold etc