

Tiree Stakeholder Group
25 July 2007
Note of meeting

There are 290 crofts on Tiree, with about 9/10 of the island under crofting. Crofts on Tiree are larger than elsewhere (an average croft is 50 acres plus common grazings) and account for a significant proportion of household income. The land is better quality as are the stock. There are about 1500 cows and 6000 sheep on the island. Most people hold more than one croft to make units viable. Many crofters are full time with the wife contributing additional family income from paid employment.

The public sector is a large source of employment. Twenty eight percent of the population is over 65 and 35% of the houses on the island are holiday homes.

It was stated that agriculture was the largest economic sector on the island, outstripping tourism and the public sector.

It was said that agri environmental payments tend to be taken up if they fit in with existing activities. Most people would consider minor changes to their practice, but not significant changes.

To date the number of animals have reduced slightly due to the change in payments, but will continue to drop as they are not being replaced. In Argyll and Bute as a whole, sheep numbers have dropped by 14%.

It was noted that winter feed is becoming more expensive due the land being put into biofuel production. It was said that prices have gone up from £200 per tonne last year to £300 per tonne this year and this will result in reduction in stocking densities so that less food has to be bought in.

It was said that most crofts are passed on to a family member. Only about 6 crofts have become available to rent over the last 20 years, 2 or 3 of these being in the last 5 years. There is a high demand from family members.

Several factors were said to be affecting the confidence in the landlord tenant system: the death of the previous Duke of Argyll (who owns most of the island), community buyouts elsewhere, and uncertainty over the reform bill. This has lead to an increase in crofters exercising their right to buy. About one third of crofters have bought their crofts, the majority in the last 5 years.

There is no appetite for community ownership. Friction in the community was remarked on with a large number of people who only live on the island for part of the year *or come and live there for a short time*, but who exert a lot of influence.

House prices have escalated with an example given of a recent sales reaching over £300,000 for a three bedroom cottage. Houses are generally sold for second homes/holiday homes. There are some low cost homes which cost £80,000 but even these were said to be too expensive for local people. Incomes on Tiree were said to be lower than in the rest of Argyll with 59% of households on less than £20,000 per year. The Crofters Building Grant Scheme was felt to be inadequate. The building costs, £1000 per square metre (30% more than on the

mainland), make building a house too expensive for most. Additionally most young people are not aware of the processes and hoops involved in acquiring land, planning permission, grants etc. If sites were available with no issues attached to them, more people might be interested in building a house. BUT they still need a job and/or some land.

It was felt that the role of the Crofters Commission is to bring crofting land into active use and that there is a fair amount of under utilised land on Tiree. Agri-environment schemes were said to have encouraged under utilisation of land and previous grants such as liming, draining and reseeded have been withdrawn. The same number of cattle were said to now require 500 acres whereas they previously required 200 acres. Also many crofters are above retirement age which impacts on levels of activity. The length of time that the Crofters Commission takes in processing assignments was said to also lead to land being left unworked. Examples were given where the commission took several years to process an assignment.

Increased regulation was supported by the group with forced subletting if a tenant is absent. The group were happy to have an organisation to regulate crofting but felt that the Commission did not listen to the people on the ground.

In terms of devolution of powers to the local level, the group felt that the island level was too small and there was concern over 'who is the local community' and that it would prompt a rush to purchase. The principal was supported and it was thought that it could be devolved to the Argyll or Argyll islands levels.

It was also felt that a good quality outgoers scheme was needed to secure the future of crofting.