



**\*\*EMBARGOED TUESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2007 AT 00:01\*\***

### **Crofters concerned over community numbers in Western Isles**

Crofters in the Western Isles have indicated that there may not be enough people in the community to maintain crofting, according to a survey published today (Tuesday 14 December) by the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting.

The Survey of Rural Development and Crofting, which was commissioned by the Inquiry to help formulate its vision for the future of crofting, was conducted in crofting communities across Scotland and interviewed people on a range of crofting-related issues.

The majority of total respondents (70%), which includes crofters and non-crofters, believe there are enough people in their area to maintain the crofting community. However, 35% of crofters in the Western Isles are concerned about community numbers. In addition, concerns over housing, croft sales and tenancies are relatively greater in the Western Isles compared to the national average and most regions.

Significantly more respondents in the Western Isles (77%) than the national average (64%) feel there should be restrictions on the sale or transfer of crofts and disagree to a greater extent than most other areas that crofts should be sold to the highest bidder. They expressed support for additional regulation around the sale of crofts, price of crofts and transfer of croft tenancies. In addition, Western Isles' respondents are among the greatest responses in favour of only selling croft tenancies to members of the local community.

To help crofting communities, more respondents in the Western Isles than anywhere else support additional funds for building homes (59%). In addition, they expressed stronger support for reduced regulation around shared or community ownership of the land and limits on croft size. This may be because community owned crofting estate is more likely in the Western Isles than anywhere else.

While the survey revealed significant regional variations on certain issues, there were some aspects that all crofting communities have the same opinion. For example, 96% of respondents identified young crofters as the most important

aspect of a thriving crofting community and highlighted children not taking on family crofts as one of the biggest threats to crofting's future.

Encouraging young people to enter crofting was highlighted as the highest ranked issue requiring increased funding, with 72% of respondents ranking this area. The survey also shows a clear concern over affordability of housing with 88% disagreeing that housing is affordable in their area for young people.

Professor Shucksmith added: "From the outset we have aimed to ensure the Inquiry listened to the views of a wide variety of people and organisations. The survey was developed to gather the views of more people living in crofting communities and to learn about the significance of crofting to these people.

"We were particularly keen to gather the views of non-crofters and were surprised to find that there is very little distinction between the perspectives of crofters and non-crofters, suggesting that issues and challenges are similar within specific communities, even though there are differences between areas. The regional variations will have to be taken into consideration when developing our recommendations.

"Over 2,000 people have now contributed to this current debate and it is clear there are a number of key issues that concern people living in crofting communities in Scotland. These issues will be priority areas for the Inquiry to address and ensure we develop a vision which meets the needs of all of Scotland's crofting communities."

The Survey of Rural Development and Crofting is available to view and download on the Inquiry's website at [www.croftinginquiry.org](http://www.croftinginquiry.org) from 00.01hrs on Tuesday 18 December.

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**Notes to editors:**

- The Survey of Rural Development and Crofting was undertaken using a door-to-door, interviewer administered questionnaire. A total of 1,047 interviews were conducted, of which 587 were crofters.
- The research explores areas of concern among crofters and non-crofters in current and potential crofting communities across Scotland. It examines its significance for sustainable rural development and the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of that development.
- The Committee of Inquiry on Crofting was set up to identify a vision for the future of crofting, particularly in relation to sustaining and enhancing the population; improving economic vitality; safeguarding landscape and biodiversity and sustaining cultural diversity.
- The Committee will share its recommendations with crofting communities and others with an interest in rural Scotland early next year. Details of this further engagement have to be finalised, but is likely to involve a series of

public meetings. The final report will be presented to Scottish Ministers in spring 2008.

- Journalists may obtain an advance copy of the survey findings, subject to the embargo, from the contacts below.

**Issued by Barkers on behalf of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting**

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