

SCF is the only organisation solely dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting

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Crofting faces existential threats



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IT IS NO exaggeration to say that there has never been a time when the future of crofting has been so vulnerable.

The number and gravity of threats make a volatile combination. The last year saw momentous and unexpected changes take place that shift the ground we stand on.

Let us focus on the two most important changes – Brexit and crofting law.

Post-Brexit agriculture

It is unknown what agricultural support system will be put in place to replace the CAP,

but one thing certain is that the budget will be reduced – by how much will depend on how the renationalised budget is divided and by whom.

It seems the UK Government is renegeing on promises made in the EU referendum campaign of more powers from Brussels being devolved. Furthermore, Ruth Davidson, leader of the Scottish Tory party, has passed on the message that Westminster may deny Scotland power to decide on the financial support given to farmers and crofters, despite agriculture being currently

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STOP PRESS
Fergus Ewing, minister for crofting, having heard crofters' concerns at our annual gathering in Applecross, requests a further meeting with SCF members soon to discuss the Scottish referendum.

The SCF gathering in Applecross focuses on crofting's place in Europe.
See pages 14 to 17 for full coverage.

Crofting Commission governance

THE GOVERNANCE review of the Crofting Commission, instigated by Scottish Government at the request of the Scottish Crofting Federation, has exposed many weaknesses in basic operating procedures and in how the organisation copes with extraordinary individual behaviours.

The review has made it clear that a robust commissioner appraisal process is required, to help identify and deliver ongoing training and skills development. We are particularly keen to see a rationalisation of the roles of

commissioners, establishing when they should be delegating to the executive staff or referring to other bodies that have the required expertise.

Commissioners should have a strategic and advisory capacity only. It is clear that they got too involved with executive procedures that they did not have the competence or remit for.

The review team recognised the huge damage done to the reputation of the Commission by the in-fighting, and particularly that the vote of no confidence in the convener did not achieve

a tangible result – his removal. Frustratingly, the review did not suggest how this will be resolved, though the government's recent exoneration of any wrong-doing in the events that led up to the convener crisis opens up options.

The list of areas for improvement is long. Minister for crofting Fergus Ewing has instructed that an action plan to address them be put in place as a matter of urgency. This will, we hope, sort out some of the fundamental issues that allowed the near collapse of this significant organisation.

We are strongly of the opinion that the purpose and role of commissioners needs to be appraised and a clear boundary set between their overseeing strategy and the staff's executive function. This seems critical to the health of the Crofting Commission.

The reappointment of David Campbell and the appointment of James Scott and Malcolm Mathieson as commissioners of the Crofting Commission is welcomed. At the time of writing the elections of commissioners has not taken place but we welcome those who get the posts.

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