Written Submission from Nick Durie

I write with concern and alarm at the apparent watering down of the land reform bill following apparent lobbying by vested and landed interests.

The previous draft of the bill committed the government to ending the tax exemptions for overseas tax haven registered companies and charitable trusts, and ending the practice of Primogeniture.

The current draft of the bill has removed these commitments. This is not in the public interest.

As the Committee will be fully aware, land owners, and Scotland’s radically undynamic aristocracy generally, register their enormous property holdings as tax exempt charitable trusts or companies created in tax havens for the purposes of tax cheating. These estates would otherwise be subject to millions of pounds in tax, and rightly so given the vast sway they hold over Scotland, holding huge chunks of our country in uneconomic and environmentally catastrophic deer and grouse shooting estates.

The Committee will be aware that this form of land use generates the lowest levels of local employment of almost any known industry, leaving parts of our fertile country with the lowest levels of economic activity anywhere in the Northern hemisphere. This is also an entirely modern condition, as much of these depopulated wastelands were once thriving communities. It is not the job of the state to facilitate failed land use and the caprices of the landed by ensuring their financial affairs remain opaque and that they are not subject to tax.

Secondly the role the Norman feudal policy of Primogeniture plays in ensuring that estates remain massive (and therefore out of the market for businesses and individuals who would make fit use of the land) is well understood, and noisome.

Why has the bill been watered down in these key ways? To surrender to the entitled and illegitimate voices of the landed, who have presided over both vast and deliberate underemployment and globally significant ecocide for generations would be a tragedy and a travesty of the idea of reform.