Written submission from Alistair Macdonald

As you know, the historical wrong done to these small landholding tenants is that they were excluded from the original crofting counties (at the behest of the then landlord). The recent legislation, which was in part due to you, extended the areas eligible for crofting status. However, in practice, the conversion of small landholdings to croft status has proved to be too expensive and of uncertain outcome so that to date there have been no applications for conversion. This is surely a situation in need of remedy.

The simplest solution would be to allow small landholders to convert to crofting status as a right if they so wish. Compensation could be paid to the landlord when and if the croft is sold or the tenancy is relinquished. The landlord would in practice be unaffected as he would continue to collect rent as usual and the crofter could take advantage of crofting grants etc. and would be more likely to invest and diversify.

Another factor is that many small landholding tenants have, over the years, invested capital and time in improving their landholdings. They will have erected the farm buildings, and seen to the installation and upkeep of fencing, hedging, drainage etc. However, there seems to be no adequate system of compensating such tenants should they relinquish their tenancies.

The outcomes I would like to see from any amendments would be;

1. Allow tenants covered by the Small Landholders` Acts 1911-1931 the right to convert to crofting status if they wish, with the issue of compensation addressed if they retire or wish to buy.

2. Small landholders should be given the absolute right to buy the land under the farm steading as compensation for their expenditure. This could be on condition of relinquishing the tenancy. They could not therefore be rendered homeless!

At the very least this group of disadvantaged tenants should not be ignored!

If the Scottish Government`s stated aim is to extend land ownership as well as encourage new entrants into crofting then this is surely a way to achieve that.