Written submission from Jeanette Ellwood, CR

This submission reflects a geographical community experience in monitoring the impact of proposals of change of land management.

Although we fully appreciate the complexities of determining and balancing local, regional and global imperatives on carbon sequestering, improvement and maintenance of bio diversity, economic development and stability, and community well being, we will focus on the local impact of the proposed reforms.

Land Reform

Land is quoted as being Scotland's most significant asset (Royal Society Edinburgh) and as such its use should be carefully balanced between competing demands and interests. These frequently cause conflict between financial gain and desirable conservation of bio diverse and healthy Eco systems. Sustainable development and environmental issues (Scottish Countryside Alliance) should maintain a mutually beneficial partnership.

We support the formation of a Land Commission, independent of Government, which should consist of a panel whose expertise and range of skills would enable it to take informed holistic decisions on every aspect of land management.

A knowledge of ‘...law, land reform, economic issues, planning, development and environmental issues...’(Scottish Countryside Alliance) would be identified areas of expertise.

An integrated approach to land reform should include how land is owned and how land is used so that if fiscal considerations conflict with best practice decisions can be taken in order to ensure that bio diversity and environmental considerations prevail, always bearing in mind Climate Change issues.

In the context of the Bill, accountability and transparency on the part of landowners would be a statutory requirement, particularly when in receipt of grants, exemptions and subsidies. Current practice allows taxpayers money to be allocated with little or no public knowledge or influence on its use. Evidence of good stewardship should be publicly available.

If current or proposed land usage has a high impact on local (geographical) communities it should be mandatory for landowners to engage with that community from the outset.

‘...landowners have to recognise they have a responsibility to the communities that live and work around (the periphery or near the boundaries) their land.’ Section 36 Statute 1966

Also in place should be mechanisms to enable bodies such as the Rural Development Program, Woodland Grant Scheme and Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme to alert the public to changes such as variations of contract or change of ownership.
Planning applicants looking to take advantage of legislation for building development linked to forestry/agricultural land management should demonstrate the need and sustainability to the Planning Departments and local community, showing that the application is not solely based on a desire to increase land value or for personal gain.

The appointment of an independent party in order to carry out a feasibility study could achieve this objectivity.

**Sporting rates**

Any landowner deriving any income from shooting on their land should have an obligation to pay sporting rates.

**Deer Management**

The current deadline of 2016 for the formulation and presentation of Deer Management Plans should be brought forward in order to ensure the proper balance of culling and conserving biodiversity of any given area. The current voluntary Deer Management Code of Practice (2012) has not encouraged enough land managers to present their plans.

Engagement of Deer Panels with local communities, and a legal requirement to produce plans, would be an essential component in Management transparency.

Landowners who choose not to deploy deer fencing because they intend to raise revenue from stalking should be considered as running a sporting estate whether or not they maintain a herd and provide supplementary winter feed.

**Core Path and open access**

Core paths should satisfy the basic needs of local people. These needs encompass a wide range of outdoor activities, including horse riding mountaineering and walking with or without dogs.

Clarification of access points and a formation of core path networks and clear signage should form part of the Reform Bill.