Written submission from Miff Tuck

While sympathising with the Government's wish to disperse ownership of land it must be realised that most of the thousands of hectares have no other use than as moorland due to the height, poor soil and severe climate. In the past we have planted at great public and private expense 500 acres of conifers which have failed over 60 years and had to be clear felled at further expense. The management for grouse shooting and deer stalking provides an income and employment and keeps the land good to look at and to walk through. It considerably benefits Scotland's tourist industry.

There is no "Community" here to take over or purchase any of the land. If it were not for us and our employment of keepers and farmers there would be no one living here. We also use the shop, building labour and tradesmen, garages church and school.

The term sustainable development rings hollow. What development is the Government thinking of in remote areas like this.? Unless a business can operate here and provide employment there is no point in building houses. Broadband and Mobile Phone reception is very poor indeed. Those houses that remain are mostly empty except for occasional holiday use. We have ourselves converted ruined buildings to make them habitable, but there are no tenants except for holiday visitors.

It is a conceit to think that because land is valuable and therefore a landowner appears to be rich; that he is therefore making lots of money. We run a very efficient business with costs reduced to a minimum and every effort made to make money from country sports, forestry, farming, tenancies and tourists. Even so we never make any profit, but have to input capital from other sources whenever a capital expense arises - eg new tractor or vehicle or building repair.

When I chaired a committee of landowners in the Cairngorms to liaise with the predecessor to the National Park Authority we found that members were investing about £20million a year to keep their estates going. I am sure that this level of investment persists. Where profits are made then these are taxed in the usual way. Further taxes like sporting rates will make our ability to manage the land well more difficult.

One further comment about agricultural tenancies. There has been much too much fiddling with the tenancy legislation over the years. The effect has been to frighten people like us into taking all our so-called agricultural land out of tenancy and into in-hand operation. Quite the opposite effect to which government seeks to achieve. In any case farming of smallish areas in these less favoured conditions is definitely not profitable.