Written submission from Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers

We are the trade association representing the self-catering sector across Scotland, and we would like to comment on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Rights and Responsibilities of Land: Entry in the Valuation Roll of shootings and deer forests.

Many self-catering businesses in Scotland are on farms and estates, providing diversified businesses and adding value to the rural economy as well as increasing the tourism offer to visitors to Scotland. Visitors in rural areas benefit local economies by shopping, eating out, attending events and visiting local attractions. Self-catering operators tend to work closely with other local businesses to add value to the visitor’s experience by way of special offers etc. They also offer employment to local people and use local tradesmen etc.

Many self-catering businesses are able to take advantage of the Small Business Bonus Scheme, which gives up to 100% discount on rates payable, controlled by thresholds of all rateable premises owned by an individual in Scotland.

We are concerned that the introduction of sporting rates may have the unintended consequence of tipping the Small Business Bonus Scheme threshold when added to a diversified tourism business, in this case, suddenly landing the small self-catering enterprise with a hefty rates bill. This seems rather unfair when compared with a small rural stand-alone self-catering business, not allied to sporting activity, which may, as things stand, still be able to claim 100% discount.

Tourism is an important element of the rural economy, but it is fragile, particularly in remote areas with a shorter visitor season. We wish to bring to the attention of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee the possible knock-on effects of introduction of sporting rates on tourism, and in this case, self-catering enterprises.

Furthering the sustainable development of land: Right to buy land for further sustainable development.

We are concerned about the lack of clarification in the Land Reform Bill as it gives powers to Communities over the right to buy land for sustainable development.

We do not feel that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect self-catering businesses should a Community suddenly wish to use these premises for (as they see it) more sustainable development.

An articulate and well-funded Community group may, as these proposals stand, become a threat to an established self-catering business by an eloquent and passionate presentation of the set of Key Tests, for instance. Perfectly viable and successful self-catering businesses might be caught up in Communities targeting ‘second homes’ for example.

Standing this on its head, it might be that a Community group invests in a self-catering business. Communities investing in self-catering with substantial public funding assistance are unfairly advantaged over other self-catering operators and
could oversupply a local market. Communities should compete on a level playing field.

We would like to see robust safeguards in place to protect existing self-catering businesses in the same way as promised for owner-occupied homes. We also believe that some thought be given as to what defines a Community group and how strongly and democratically it actually represents a local area.

As stated above, rural self-catering enterprises are valuable additions to what can be fragile economies, and the added complication of the threat of a forced community buy-out could have unfavorable economic consequences for tourism, and sit at odds with the National Tourism Strategy to 2020.

Self-caterers are legitimate and important members of communities and their businesses contribute to local prosperity. Anything in the Land Reform Bill which disadvantages them would be an unintended consequence.