Written submission from William W Baird

I write as someone with no financial interest in land (other than ownership of a domestic home) but who has a first degree in geography and has undertaken postgraduate research into aspects of rural land use as well as a detailed analysis of a Highland parish.

In general terms I would support the statement from the Scottish Office of the Evangelical Alliance on this issue:

1. Stewardship

We are called as people at the beginning of Genesis to steward God's resources. We don't own anything – God does – but we are called to manage what He has given us for His glory and the flourishing of the community. Scotland is blessed with incredible natural resources and any discussion about land reform needs to have stewardship of resources at the heart.

2. Communities

Similarly the flourishing of communities will be essential to the conversation on land reform. God calls us to extend His kingdom and part of this involves bringing His values into how we order our society. Building strong communities – along with strong families – gives individuals and wider society an opportunity to flourish and provides a context for the Church to reach out with the gospel. We will support whatever land ownership structures best empower and enable communities to flourish.

3. Justice

Finally there is an inescapable justice issue in the conversation around land reform. That there are historical injustices in Scotland's land story is beyond doubt, but what is important now is dealing with issues of injustice or oppression that manifest themselves in the present day. In doing this we reject any approach that simply makes the debate into an 'us and them' issue, but rather we look for an approach that seeks justice for all, as God intends.

I would emphasise the last sentence in the EA statement – that this should not be a 'them and us' issue. There is a need to work together to address any injustices in the structure and pattern of land ownership in Scotland while acknowledging the fact that many estate landowners are committed to, and concerned for, their local communities.

The statement frequently made about a small number of people owning a large proportion of Scottish land needs to be considered alongside the nature of Scottish geography, with its large areas of relatively unproductive land.

I would hope that the legislative process would seek to provide realistic solutions where necessary and to introduce opportunities for enhanced development within urban and rural Scotland; it must not merely be an opportunity to apply a political ideology to the issue.