Written submission from Liz Albert

Land Reform (Scotland) Bill introduced June 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my views on the Bill.

I restrict myself to commenting on certain sections of the Bill

Part 3

Section 35

It is extremely important that information about Land Ownership is readily available to members of the public. This must be online and preferably free, though if a charge is essential it must be a nominal charge only, that does not prevent members of the public getting access to the information. The present situation of great secrecy about the information is absurd, and helps to hide the extreme inequality in land ownership. I do not see why it should only be members of the public directly affected by that land who can ask for the information. If public opinion is to be effective, it needs to be informed public opinion.

If possible I would also like to see it be a requirement that any trusts or corporate bodies owning land in Scotland, regardless of where the trust or corporate body is registered, should be required to name the beneficiaries of the trust, or the chairperson and/or directors of any corporate body.

Section 36

‘Power of Keeper to request information relating to proprietors of land’. I would like this to say ‘Power of the Keeper to require information to be submitted relating to proprietors of land’. Penalties should be required for failing to do so.

Part 6

Section 66

I wholeheartedly agree with the repeal of exemption. The exemption has been totally unjustified from the moment it was made.

Section 67

Valuations of shootings and deer forests should not be based on head of stag killed per year, or any similar system, as this motivates owners of shooting estates to keep the numbers of deer artificially high, e.g, by winter feeding. A method of evaluation that involves a broader look at the quality of the land and the potential uses for it should be used in assessing valuations. Dr Helen Armstrong, ecologist, wrote an interesting article on this in April 2015, based on research on how things are done in Norway compared to Scotland. Her article is available in Andy Wightman’s blog on his website www.andywightman.com
Part 8

Section 70

Given that some landowners have been actively resisting controlling deer for decades, despite the work of Deer Panels, the timescales for SNH intervening need to be short, SNH’s compliance monitoring should be thorough and swift, and penalties should be tough. It can be taken as read that high levels of deer will have been causing damage to biodiversity for a long period of time, and in some areas will be the most important source of degradation of biodiversity. Intervention needs to be high profile and no-nonsense. Nothing against the deer themselves It is human decisions and actions / lack of action that have caused the problems, and it is humans that need to get busy and make things change for the better.

Section 71

I entirely support the increase in penalty to a maximum of £40,000