SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH LAND AND ESTATES

In advance of the evidence session on 20 September 2011, which will consider provisions contained with the Scotland Bill pertaining to the Crown Estate, Scottish Land & Estates wishes to make the following short representation to the Scotland Bill Committee on the positive impact of the Crown Estate’s rural portfolio.

Scottish Land & Estates is a member organisation which represents those who own or manage land and business across rural Scotland, as well as the many professionals who advise them. Scottish Land & Estates strives to demonstrate, promote and represent the very good work and contribution our members make on farms, landholdings and estates across Scotland -- to both the communities to which they belong and also to the wider economy and society.

Scottish Land & Estates strongly refutes the claims made by Community Land Scotland (“CLS”) that the Crown Estates puts little back into local communities. We believe that there is much more to the Crown Estate’s work in Scotland than the marine assets that CLS focuses on in its submission, and recently published policy paper. The Crown Estate takes a long term approach to land management in Scotland, working in partnership, or as a co-investor, with other legal entities and individuals and, contrary to the arguments put forward by CLS, contributes in many ways to rural communities. There are many examples of where the Crown Estate has worked to benefit the local community, including the gifting of land at Fochabers to the Burn O’ Fochabers Woodland Trust; employment opportunities within fragile rural communities; the provision of affordable housing, and also the provision of opportunities for tenant farmers.

The Crown Estate also makes a significant contribution to meeting Scottish Government and local targets in issues as diverse as forestry and the private rented sector. We believe that the Crown Estate embodies sustainable development, stewardship and good practice and should be applauded for the work that they do.

We would like to underline the positive social, economic and environmental contribution made by the Crown Estates in Scotland, clearly evidenced by the many awards which they have won over the years, including the New Native Woods category at Scotland’s Finest Woods Awards at the 2011 Royal Highland Show, the special award for excellence in 2008 from the European Landowners’ Organisation in recognition of their holistic approach to land management and the Highlands and Islands Tourism Award for green tourism in 2009.

Being part of their larger UK wide body, in Scotland the Crown Estate can react quickly and effectively to major rural problems. Examples of this can be seen in the considerable sum made available to cover recent snow damage to buildings and substantial financial support given some 10 years ago during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. In addition to the long term investment and improvements to its rural estate in Scotland is also the priceless advice provided by their expert staff to local and national stakeholder groups.
In addition, we believe that the Crown Estate has undertaken a number of steps to address concerns raised by others in relation to governance and accountability, and has also offered to undertake further action in this area as detailed within its written submission to the Scotland Bill Committee. This proactive approach should be recognised and encouraged.

We would suggest that partnership working with the Crown Estate for the benefit of our rural communities, and the nation as a whole, is a more effective approach than the one suggested by Community Land Scotland and others.

Sarah-Jane Laing
Head of Policy, Scottish Land & Estates
19 September 2011