Thank you for looking into crofting and its future. I hope you appreciate the wider value crofting has to Scotland and the Highlands in particular and will help steer crofting in the best way forward.

I am a relatively new entrant to crofting having taken over a derelict croft on Skye in 2011. I am also the local grazings clerk.

I feel strongly that it is crofting land and the activities on it which should be protected. Crofting land is like a fragmented national park and to protect it requires additional rules and regulations for those living and working on it. It is irrelevant whether you are an owner occupier (as I am) or a tenant - it is crofting land.

Crofting is not farming. Crofts by their size are designed not to be sustainable by itself and crofters are very resourceful in having multiple income sources. In addition to a harsh environment, there is a complex law, poorly managed regulatory body, a derisory Scottish CAP scheme dictated by east coast farmers, strict animal welfare rules, nearest abattoir is over 3 hours journey (Dingwall) and real pressure to sell land for second / holiday homes.

Crofting Law

Please take the views of lawyers with due scepticism – they are the only people making a living from crofting (apart from crofting consultants!) and may have a vested interest in maintaining a degree of complexity. The law is horrid and is a major obstacle for new entrants and a catalyst for existing crofters giving up. I spent 4 stressful years trying to convince a lawyer that one of my fields is croft land despite it being in the middle of a crofting township (a common issue due to a lack of documentation and mapping of croft land and over-zealous lawyers of landlords / potential holiday home sites).

Crofting Commission

The Commission is slowly moving towards a modern, representative, transparent and fair crofting body. However, it needs greater clarity in its role and a simpler legal framework. Why are so many crofts still inactive if that is the Commissions role? It also needs greater representation from crofters and professionals as evidenced by the disgraceful behaviour of its current Convener. The Scottish Government has shown no leadership in this issue.
Ideally, the Commission should be the lead body over crofting land and not secondary to planning, crown estate, SGRPID, SNH etc. but only if it is representative of crofters, transparent, clear in its role and supervised by government.

Tourism/Planning

Crofting areas attract tourism but crofting will die if the land was to turn into a tourism park. Crofters do have the option to build a holiday home on their croft to supplement income which is essential. However, many crofts have become unworkable due to multiple holiday homes on it and usually by an owner who doesn't live in the community.

I urge you to look at Glendale, Isle of Skye, as an example of what is happening to crofting land in the 21st century which is not under crofting law and regulations. The township of Milovaig is known locally as Costa del Milovaig. There is a proliferation of holiday homes in recent years and very few people are crofting. Most of the owners do not live on Skye. The community is defined by Scottish Government as fragile. Land and house prices make it impossible for young people to live and work in the area.

Please read Roger Hutchinson’s Glendale Martyrs and, even better, invite him to speak to you. Glendale was the first community land ownership but without an effective management structure it has been lost to tourism and land speculators.

Common Grazings

A crofter in a township has a share in the communal grazing land, managed by a grazing committee usually comprising of all or the most active crofters in the township. However, the lawyers have invented Deemed crofts which have made this share a legal entity in itself which can be bought and sold separately. This is not wanted.

The Crofting Grant Scheme has great potential to make a real difference however both individual crofters and grazing shareholders have firstly to find all the monies upfront and then seek part recovery of the spend after the work is completed. Many crofters do not have the funds to make this initial outlay – crofting communities are in fragile areas!

The Crofting Commission should be more assertive in making both crofts and common grazings active by for example working alongside SGRPID. If crofters are claiming CAP funding they should be actively crofting on what they claim for. If they are not claiming they are inactive.

Continue to allow townships to manage the grazings locally, within a standard framework.
The CAP funds should go to the Grazing Committee.

The Commission should be more effective in dealing with shareholders who do not contribute to the grazings.

Crofting has shaped and defined the area I live and work and it is a valuable asset for Scotland and the Highlands. A unique and fragmented national park. It may be quaint but it's not a museum, it's full of resourceful and inventive people and its hard work. Please don't destroy it.

Ian McLean
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