Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Scottish Crown Estate Bill

Written submission from Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA)

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA) represents tenant farmers throughout Scotland. Its stated aim is to support and enhance the tenanted sector and in that role welcomes the opportunity to briefly comment on The Crown Estate Bill at Stage 1. STFA has fully supported the devolution of the assets of the Crown Estate since the CERWG report commissioned by Highland Council in 2006 and would like to reinforce its support for the implementation of devolution through this Bill.

STFA will be making a fuller submission on the Crown estate Bill to the ECCLR Committee and will restrict comments to issues affecting the rural estates before the Committee’s meeting on 13th March.

STFA has welcomed the way in which the Scottish Government has engaged directly with the tenant farmers on the four rural estates who have had the chance to express their views to the Cabinet Secretary, government officials and the management team of the Crown Estate. The tenants on the estates have formed themselves into a fully constituted group, facilitated by NFUS a move supported by STFA who further welcomes the committee’s decision to hear evidence directly from this group who are best placed to comment on their hopes and aspirations rather than depending on a stakeholder organisation to speak on their behalf.

STFA welcomes the option to continue to manage the rural estates nationally. Farming tenants had expressed their concerns that in dividing the Crown assets the rural estates might be split up and brought under the management of local authorities. The Crown Estates comprise a large and diverse portfolio of rural and urban land, foreshore and mining rights, including several thousand hectares of tenanted farming land and tenants have been concerned about the Bill’s intention to give local communities greater control over these assets in their area.

The devolution of management of these assets to local communities will not be appropriate in every circumstance and in some situations, it may be necessary for some assets to continue to be managed at a national level. The tenants on the four rural estates are firmly of the view that it would be more appropriate for the rural estates to be managed directly by the Scottish Government, or a body set up for the purpose rather than becoming devolved in the future to local authorities who have neither the skills nor the experience in managing agricultural estates.

The rural estates have traditionally benefitted from being part of the wider Crown portfolio which has allowed to spread some of the surplus income from one sector to another. Although the rural estates have a high capital value and make a significant contribution to local communities and the environment, they produce a relatively low-income stream and continuing under national management will allow continuing investment in the farms providing the tenants with the security and confidence for the future development of their businesses.
STFA notes Section 6 dealing with the Meaning of a Community Organisation and would like to see this definition broadened to include tenants on each of the estates as communities with rights to be involved in the strategic decision-making process on estate management. In particular, STFA considers that the community of tenants on each estate should be directly consulted by the managing body on any decisions relating to a proposed change in land use involving tenanted land; such as sale of land or conversion to forestry.

The Crown Estates have traditionally been good landlords and STFA considers that they now have the added opportunity to take the lead in making use of the new provisions enshrined in the Land Reform Act 2016, to stimulate investment by both landlord and tenant, encourage the smooth transition of farms from one generation to the next, ensure fair rents for all and create opportunities where possible for the next generation.

Angus McCall
Executive Director