



Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Thursday 5th February at An Lochran, Inverness

- **Commissioners present:** Michael Russell (Chair), Calum MacLeod, Craig Mackenzie, Rob Black, Lucy Beattie, Deb Roberts
- **In attendance:** Hamish Trench, Nikki Nagler, Kathie Pollard, Sarah Madden, Kayleigh Wilson, Gemma Campbell, Uwe Stoneman
- **Apologies:** None
- **Declarations of interest:** None

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd January 2026 were agreed as true and accurate.

2. Commissioners Updates

All commissioners provided updates on recent activities on behalf of the Commission since the last meeting. Michael noted that annual appraisal discussions are scheduled with each Commissioner.

Deb flagged the potential relevance of Scottish Government's LIDAR work to land management plans and other Commission data work. Deb and Lucy noted they will be attending the land agents event the following day.

Hamish also provided Commissioners with an update on the Land Reform Act. He noted the section on additional 'matters relating to land' is expected to come into force in mid-March. He referred to recent discussion with Scottish Land and Estates on the positive opportunity of land management plans and noted that staff have a meeting with the Scottish Government team scheduled for the next week, to hear more about the planned implementation timetable.

3. Quarterly Report

Hamish highlighted the general updates on the report, including the additional time sought for the TFC role, recent staff team development, and the perceptions audit recently commissioned. This is due to be completed by end of March and will be brought for discussion to a future board meeting.

Action 260205.01	Hamish/Nikki to schedule a future board discussion on the perceptions audit report
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Delivery Progress

Hamish provided context on delivery progress for Q3, highlighting delivery progress on track and noting the amber/red lines in which some planned delivery has been superseded. Commissioners asked more about timescale for implementation of the act much of which will come beyond the next financial year.

Commissioners asked about the delay on the lessons learned report from the Crown Estate Scotland collaboration. Hamish confirmed this has been completed, but not yet published by CES. He agreed to speak to CES with a view to sharing the report with the Commissioners.

Action 260205.02	Hamish to speak with CES and share lessons learned report with Commissioners
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Commissioners noted that the student award is not being delivered this year due to lack of capacity, and asked whether Commissioner or partner support could help run this in future. Kathie suggested a wider discussion about implementing the research programme in the year ahead would be helpful. The annual student award was highlighted; there is due to be discussion on this at a future board.

Action 260205.03	Kathie to schedule discussion on research strategy implementation at future board meeting
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Commissioners also reviewed the KPIs, noting that a staff survey has recently closed and will be reported shortly.

Finance

Nikki provided overview of the budget update, which is on track to be within a 2% underspend. She noted the risk of underspend given at least one contract which was unable to proceed as planned and some costs that have now come in at less than expected. However, she noted management team are reviewing the final planned spend for Q4 including necessary IT equipment.

Risk Management

Hamish highlighted the strategic risk register including new and amended risks reflecting changes agreed at the previous ARC and board meetings. The new risks being number 4 and 5. There continues to be increased risk with Act implementation. The board welcomed the new and amended risks which are as agreed.

Communications

Nikki provided an overview of communications for Q3. Coverage increased with comms around Land Reform Bill, ScotLand Futures and Rural Land Market Report. Website traffic dipped during Q3, this is expected from the festive period. Email marketing

showed a strong opening rate, however down slightly on the previous quarter. Looking ahead the ScotLand Futures event is due to take place on 25th Feb in Perth. SLC has decided to step away from X, Nikki will revise KPIs for next year.

Good Practice Casework

Gemma summarised the good practice casework undertaken in Q3. There were 32 enquiries, which is a slight increase to last quarter. There are ongoing complex cases and transparency cases are increasing. In relation to geographic location, the Highlands are the main cases covered. The board noted that the new owner of the South Sleat estate is now known and suggested that contact be made given the Commission's previous involvement.

Action 260205.04	Sarah to make contact with new owners of South Sleat Estate
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TFC

Rob provided an update on TFC casework, with an increase in enquiries this year. He is anticipating it will continue to increase. The board recognised that demand is likely to continue to exceed capacity event with increased resource, supporting the TFC's proposed approach to prioritisation and the resource plans set out in the business plan paper.

Commissioners agreed it would be useful for a regular update on TFC casework to be part of the scheduled quarterly reports. Rob agreed to provide this at board meetings going forward.

Action 260205.05	Rob to provide TFC quarterly reports going forward
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The use of AI was raised by commissioners. SLC's AI policy is still in progress and will be taken to the board in due course for discussion.

Action 260205.06	AI policy to be discussed in future agenda
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The Chair noted again the importance for Commissioners of adhering to the pre-election guidance for public bodies circulated by the Chief Executive, and to seek advice on any questions.

4. 26/27 Business Planning

Hamish introduced development of the 26/27 business plan, seeking discussion on delivery priorities and financial planning. He emphasised the need to retain flexibility within the year given several moving parts including Act implementation and the election.

The board agreed with the priorities identified for delivery and discussed in particular the timetable for act implementation, ScotLand Futures follow-up and the continued need for good practice advice and work on responsible land ownership. The board agreed that supporting public sector leadership and land data should be a focus of both policy and practice work. Commissioners asked whether public meetings are planned for 26/27, there is no programme planned yet but the board agreed the Commission should continue to ensure effective means of direct public engagement. Commissioners also sought more information about delivery of the Gaelic language plan, noting a desire to be imaginative in how we can promote use of Gaelic in our work.

The board sought more information about the expected staffing costs and the projected balance of fixed and flexible costs. The board agreed that additional resource should be allocated to tenant farming, including agreement to recruit an additional fixed term staff post to support tenant farming work.

The board also agreed that the Commission will need to retain flexibility within the year to respond and adapt as the Act implementation timetable becomes clear and as the priorities of a new government become clear.

Action 260205.07	Board to consider business plan and budget for approval at March meeting
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5. Draft Advice on Tax

Kathie provided a paper on advice to SG on tax for the board to consider and agree the draft advice. It provides a high-level set of advice, which will be supplemented in the summer with a delivery plan on how SG could get there. Kathie noted the strong engagement with Scottish Government colleagues and parallel experience in the Welsh Government in this field. There is also wider stakeholder engagement, with SLC in contact with key public bodies such as Revenue Scotland.

The board welcomed the draft advice and agreed with the direction of the advice proposed. In relation to a carbon land tax, the board agreed with the conclusions set out in the draft advice and noted the range of practical issues raised. However, the board asked that the advice be developed to say more about how the role of tax and regulation could be used more effectively in support of peatland restoration and wider land policy goals.

The board discussed the range of policy levers available to government in this context, noting that tax can be a significant behavioural influence. It also acknowledged the potential complexity and the need for clarity in the way tax interacts with other policy interventions. The board asked that the advice also consider more explicitly the interaction with land values.

6. Update on Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership

Sarah led the update on commitment to responsible land ownership, setting out the process to complete and evaluate the CoRLa pilot. The board agreed that the risks raised at the December board have been acknowledged and are content with this approach.

A shared learning event is due to take place where pilot participants will be invited. Sarah asked for 1-2 commissioners to attend this event.

Commissioners discussed the interaction with the LCC function and the need to evolve this approach as the LCC role develops. The board agreed that it continues to see a strong need for some form of self-assessment and/or recognition of responsible practice. Commissioners welcomed the next steps to complete the pilot and agreed that the board should keep open the options for how this initiative might best evolve in future.

7. AOB

The March board meeting will now take place in Inverness. There is no meeting scheduled in April. The May meeting will be in Inverness followed by a joint/staff commissioners' workshop on strategic plan. The June meeting is due to coincide with a site visit, with location to be confirmed.

The ScotLand Futures event is due to take place in Perth on 25th Feb, a schedule for this event will be sent out in due course.

Date of next meeting:

Thursday 5th March

An Lochran, Inverness