



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at Inverness Creative Academy**

**Commissioners Present:** Andrew Thin (Chair), Sally Reynolds, Lorne MacLeod, Megan MacInnes, David Adams (Land Commissioners), Bob McIntosh (Tenant Farming Commissioner)

**In Attendance:** Hamish Trench, Emma Cooper, Caron Munro, Gillian Brown (Scottish Land Commission),

**Apologies:** No apologies.

**Declarations of interest:** No declaration of interest.

**1. Minutes of previous meeting 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the discussion and all actions have been discharged.

**2. Organisational Development Programme and HR update**

Hamish presented the paper and provided an update on the organisational development programme sessions with Toward to date, including what the main focus of the sessions has been. The board confirmed they are supportive of this work and the commitment made to investing in the Commission staff.

Caron provided an update on her learning having completed a diploma in HR. She explained that she has taken on more HR responsibilities so more HR is being done in-house, but the Commission still requires a contract with a HR specialist to provide support for payroll and strategic advice, this contract is due to be retendered in the new year.

Action 22120601	Hamish to schedule a future agenda item to provide board with an understanding of how the work with Toward will conclude.
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**3. Staff Survey results and Action Plan**

Hamish provided an update on the results and the focus of the action plan. The board considered the results and noted the low response rate, widespread scoring and the timing of the survey. The board noted areas of concern in feedback comments and noted that the action plan addresses the key areas raised. The board welcomed the action plan and sought assurance that we have resource for to implement it.

The board also sought assurances that the management team maintain a regular overview of staff feedback on a more day-to-day basis and noted that some of the issues raised could be most

effectively addressed in line management relationships. Hamish confirmed that the management team has regular check-ins on team capacity and wellbeing, and seeks to ensure that staff are able to feedback concerns or issues effectively through line management. He also noted that the organisation has an effective suite of policies in place to support individual line management and that these are actively used in one-to-one relationships.

The board sought more information about how the Staff Engagement Forum operates. Hamish provided a brief overview and offered his view that it is working well.

The board noted the statistical constraints in a staff survey for a small organisation and noted it would be valuable for the management team to keep under review potential improvements to survey methods and other approaches.

#### **4. Hybrid Working**

Hamish introduced the paper noting it is now an appropriate time for the Commission to work with staff to formalise the approach to hybrid working.

The board recognised the consideration being given to the range of factors involved in establishing effective working patterns and noted there are sometimes tensions within these.

The board noted the proposed approach to formalising hybrid working arrangements, and that the management team will be engaging with staff to develop and formalise the approach.

Hamish advised that this will be taken forward with staff from January and expects to be able to review the approach in 6 months.

#### **5. Medium term financial strategy**

Hamish introduced the paper highlighting the core challenge of rising staff costs against a projected flat budget. He referred to the audit recommendation to strengthen medium term financial planning and the need for this to inform our business and strategic planning over the coming months.

Discussion on the key factors included:

- rising cost pressures against a likely flat budget;
- acknowledging the uncertainty of whether the Commission may have new functions over the next 3-5 years and what implications this would bring;
- medium term planning assumptions in Scottish Government and scenarios for flat or reducing budgets.

The board asked the management team to prepare 3-5 year budget scenarios, through discussion with the Audit and Risk Committee, to inform our strategic planning.

Action 22120602	Management team to prepare medium term budget to come back to board for consideration
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#### **6. Developing our next Strategic Plan**

Hamish introduced the paper, emphasising this discussion is an early step in developing clarity for our staff and stakeholders on the focus for our next Strategic Plan. Andrew emphasised the importance of being able to articulate a clear and simple focus for what the Commission does and why, noting the need to set our work in the context of the major priorities of the Scottish Government.

Discussion addressed:

- political expectations for the role of the Commission;
- the importance of net zero and a just transition, and the role land reform plays in this;
- our experience of where and how we have an impact and the need for a simple message about what we do.
- The focus on ownership is part of the unique perspective and value the Commission brings.
- Our role in achieving better governance and regulation.
- The value in connecting an overview on land matters.
- The need for clarity in outcomes and connection to the national performance framework.
- The framing of rights and responsibilities
- Continued relevance of work on land market reform, rural resilience and repopulation.
- It also considered our role in terms of:
  - Challenging ownership power
  - Confronting ownership constraints
  - Changing ownership behaviour

Action 22120602	Hamish to schedule further board discussions at key stages in development of the next strategic plan.
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## 7. Business Planning 2023/24

Hamish introduce the paper as a starting point in developing the annual business plan and asked for feedback on relative priorities in the context of the published Programme of Work. In discussion the board noted:

- the priorities for our business planning for 23/24 set out in our current programme of work and the need to complete delivery of these;
- the external factors shaping our work;
- the business plan should acknowledge the recruitment and changes in board membership due in 23/24;
- the importance of continuing to set out organisational development actions;
- the need to prioritise carefully given finite capacity and budget.

A draft business plan will go to the board in February.

## 8. AOB

The 2023 board programme was discussed and dates confirmed. Hamish flagged early notice of:

- 7<sup>th</sup> March board meeting to be held at An Lochran followed by a site visit to Bunloit Estate Highland Rewilding.
- 9<sup>th</sup> May board meeting will be a visit to Galloway, with plans for an evening meeting before.

**Date of Next Meeting: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023**