



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Tuesday 7th November 2023 at Fisher's Hotel, Pitlochry

Commissioners Present: Andrew Thin (Chair), Sally Reynolds, Lorne MacLeod, Megan MacInnes (Land Commissioners),

In Attendance: Hamish Trench, Gemma Campbell, James MacKessack-Leitch, Miranda Geelhoed (Scottish Land Commission)

Apologies: David Adams (Land Commissioner), Bob McIntosh (Tenant Farming Commissioner)

Declarations of interest: None

1. Minutes of previous meeting 3rd October 2023

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the discussion subject to the following amendment for accuracy:

Page 3: first sentence should refer to the *Scottish Graduate School of Social Science*.

Matters Arising: None

2. Quarterly Progress Report

Hamish introduced the progress report for Quarter 2, drawing the board's attention to reduced capacity during this period due to staff vacancies and the prioritisation made as a result. He noted that delivery of key outputs remains on track despite reduced capacity but some planned work had been rescheduled. He also set out a look ahead at key delivery outputs planned for the second half of the financial year.

Delivery: the board welcomed the good progress and momentum in delivery. They sought more information about the decision to postpone the intended refresh of the Good Practice Programme and agreed that given the context of the land reform bill it is sensible to do this at a time that can integrate with any wider changes in approach to LRRS implementation.

Budget: the board noted the current half year position and sought assurance that the risk of underspend is being actively managed. Hamish noted the savings against budget as a result of staff vacancies and confirmed that additional delivery spend is being brought forward. He noted the management team are working with staff to ensure that the capacity is available alongside project budget. The board asked about planning assumptions for the 24/25 budget. Hamish noted that although the Scottish Government budget proposals are not yet known, based on discussions with sponsor team the Commission is planning on a flat cash basis, ie anticipating the same level of grant-in-aid.

Risk: the board reviewed the strategic risk register and noted in particular the risks shown as rising, related to the ability to react quickly to changing priorities and stakeholder relationships. The board considered that risk 2 (ability to react quickly in matching resources to changing priorities) is likely to remain high in the

coming period given tighter financial resources and rising costs combined with a very dynamic political environment including the land reform bill. There is likely to be a need for the Commission to remain highly agile in prioritising its work and responding to emerging requests for advice.

The board also discussed whether there is an additional strategic risk that should be identified, reflecting risks to the long-term reputation of the Commission if its advice and recommendations are not seen to be impactful in influencing legislation and policy. The board asked the ARC to consider further with the Chief Executive whether a new specific risk should be included to reflect this.

Communications: Hamish noted the capacity challenge with the Communications and Engagement Manager post being vacant until January and thanked the team for working well to maintain our communications profile in the meantime. The board welcomed the continued profile and emphasised the importance of the Commission retaining its visibility and voice, particularly at a time when attention will focus on the land reform bill.

Hamish outlined the series of publications and events planned over the coming Quarter. In relation to the planned publication on the French SAFER system the board asked that we emphasise in communications the value of looking to international experience to learn from others. The board also noted planning for communications about new board appointments in due course.

3. Framework for reviewing vacant posts

Hamish introduced the paper which responds to the board's request for more information about how the management team consider vacant posts in the context of our medium-term financial strategy.

Hamish outlined the key factors considered in relation to financial strategy and business planning. He noted the value of retaining flexibility to ensure that the skills and capacity mix of the staff team can evolve and adapt, within overall planning of our total FTE commitment to manage our medium-term financial position.

The board welcomed the paper and the approach to decision making it sets out.

AOB

The board recorded their thanks to the John Muir Trust, Highland Perthshire Community Land Trust, Forestry and Land Scotland and neighbouring land owners who joined the board visit in the morning, noting the value of the visit and discussions.

Following the board meeting the board went on to have an informal discussion on emerging strategic issues looking ahead to the coming months.

Date of Next Meeting: 5th December 2023

**Scottish Land Commission
November 2023**