



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

**Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at Perth Concert Hall.**

**Commissioners Present:** Michael Russell (Chair) Deb Roberts, Craig Mackenzie, Lucy Beattie, Calum MacLeod (Land Commissioners)

**In Attendance:** Hamish Trench, Nikki Nagler, Emma Cooper, Scarlett Macfarlane, James MacKessack-Leitch (Scottish Land Commission); Patrick Kirkham (Scottish Government)

**Apologies:** Rob Black (Tenant Farming Commissioner)

**Declarations of interest:** None

**Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes from the meeting held on 4 March 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record with no matters arising.

**1. Commissioners Updates**

Commissioners provided updates on their key activities and events since the last meeting.

The Chair noted his recent engagement with land agents in south-west Scotland, Crown Estate Scotland and meetings of the Community Land Leadership Group. Commissioners noted participation in other groups including participation in a school event at Bettyhill, crofting podcast and nature finance meetings.

**2. Quarterly Progress Report**

**Delivery:** the board welcomed the significant level of delivery maintained through the last financial year and thanked staff for the successful completion of planned work.

**Finance:** the board noted the good expected outturn of 0.5% underspend, welcoming the work undertaken to bring the financial year to conclusion within target. Commissioners sought an update on the transition to the new finance and accounting system. Nikki confirmed the transfer was successfully completed and the new system is now in use. Future financial reports may be in an updated and improved format as a result and monthly reports will be shared from the next meeting.

**Risk:** the board considered no significant changes to the risk profile at this time, noting the significant risks remain those related to the implications of the Land Reform Bill and constrained public finances.

Casework: the board welcomed the overview of casework, noting that the steady level across the years in part reflects the limit of staff resource the Commission has available. Emma confirmed that work to review options to develop the good practice programme is underway and will be discussed in the forthcoming board meetings.

Communications: Scarlett provided an update on communications and the board welcomed the continued profile. The board asked that our presence on the social media platform X is kept under review and agreed to return to it at the end of the next quarter.

<b>Action 25050801</b>	<b>Nikki to keep presence on X under review for further discussion at next Quarterly report</b>
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### **3. Research Strategy**

The board welcomed the strategy as a useful articulation of the Commission's approach. Commissioners emphasised the focus on collaboration, in part recognising the limited financial resource available to the Commission directly, and the need to continue to position the Commission as an effective partner for others to work with. The value that the Commission can add as a convenor and in connecting research to policy impact was identified as a key strength.

Commissioners noted the need for future board discussion on the research priorities, and that this should connect to the work being taken forward on ScotLand Futures, and that we will need a regular cycle of identifying research priorities. Commissioners also discussed the value of identifying broader areas of research interest, where there may not be immediate funded projects, but a helpful signal for researchers.

Commissioners discussed the issues raised in the paper relating to the use of AI in research and agreed with the approach of using principles set out, noting some of the examples of applying principles to research are a useful model. It was agreed that a significant risk to consider is the data protection implications if research data is uploaded to an AI tool and that this must be addressed in our research protocols. In relation to wider use of AI, Patrick undertook to share the Scottish Government's recent guidance for information.

The board agreed the strategy subject to amendments to include:

- A commitment to publish areas of research interest;
- Clearer commitment to monitoring outputs and impact;
- Reference to how research priorities will be identified.

<b>Action 25050802</b>	<b>James to amend research strategy for sign-off by Hamish, revised strategy to be circulated to board.</b>
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### **4. Rural Land Market Insights Report**

James provided an update on the emerging findings of this year's report which looks at the 2024 rural land market. The board discussed the key issues referred to from the interviews with land agents, noting that the findings in relation to natural capital and other key trends appear to reflect other discussions.

The board discussed the value in being able to look increasingly across multiple years and reflect on changes over time, beyond an individual year's snapshot. Commissioners noted there is particular value in the insights reports identifying new and emerging drivers of change, and the spatial reporting of the data reports.

#### **5. Community Wealth Building Bill – call for views**

The board discussed the strong connections between land reform and community wealth building, noting the opportunity of the bill to further support delivery. The board agreed that all public land owners have a strong role to play, and that it would expect Forestry and Land Scotland to be included in the list of relevant bodies, noting its long track record of community asset transfer.

The board agreed the proposed response for submission to the Committee.

<b>Action 25050803</b>	<b>Hamish to submit response to Committee.</b>
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***Date of next meeting: 5<sup>th</sup> June, online***