



Commissioners' Board Meeting

22 January 2026

Online

Agenda

Item no.	Item	Paper no.	Action	Lead
1	Welcome/Apologies	-	-	Chair
2	Declarations of interest	-	-	All
3	Minutes of the previous meeting	1	For agreement	Chair
4	ScotLand Futures: draft output for publication	2 Annex A Annex B	For agreement	Hamish Trench
5	AOB	-	-	All



Minutes of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Thursday 4th December at An Lochran, Inverness

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

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th November were agreed as true and accurate.

2. Commissioners Updates

Commissioners provided updates on their recent activities since the last board meeting. Michael thanked staff for the publication of the ScotLand Futures document. Michael attended the International Land Reform Symposium at the James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen, at which he was invited to speak. Michael also attended a meeting at the Cabrach with Hamish and Sarah, where the community ambitions and land ownership were discussed. Michael, Rob and Hamish met with the Cabinet Secretary, to discuss resourcing of the Tenant Farming Commissioner.

Michael and Calum attended a post board meeting debrief with staff after the November meeting. Calum attended a session with SG on the Community Rights to Buy. Deb attended the good practice advisory group meeting. Craig noted updates on carbon markets and peatland credits. Rob noted increased casework. Rob and Peter attended a Crown Estate meeting in Moffat and will attend TFAF meeting in Edinburgh this week. Lucy attended part of the International Land Reform Symposium at the James Hutton Institute and the opening of Stac Pollaidh car park.

3. Report from Chair of ARC

Craig provided an update on the most recent ARC meeting where Hamish provided a paper on the balance of fixed and flexible spend. The committee's preferred target is 15% with a minimum of 10%. If the GIA does not increase sufficiently to deliver this, the board will need to review when considering the business plan in the new year.

Internal audit will be reviewing SLC's preparedness for the land reform bill, noting this will be assessing work in progress. The chair of the ARC will share the outcomes of this audit review with the board in due course.

The chair spoke about issues with the process of audit this year. SLC have been assured by external auditors that this process should be smoother next year. Nikki will meet with the external auditors in the new year to discuss plans for the year ahead, Craig is also looking to arrange a meeting with them also.

Action 251204.01	Nikki to arrange meeting with external auditors for new year
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Craig noted the changes to risks considered by the Committee following the last board meeting, these will now be updated for the next quarterly risk review by the board.

Action 251204.02	Hamish to update strategic risk register
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Craig asked the board to remain on top of cybersecurity training, noting the upcoming cyber audit due to take place. Michael asked for these to be completed before the new year.

Action 251204.03	Board to ensure cybersecurity training is up to date for new year
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4. Land Reform Bill- Implications for Commission

Hamish provided a paper to the board on the consideration of the changes made by the Land Reform Bill to the functions and operation of the Commission and Commissioners. It is expected the LRB will receive Royal Assent by the end of this month, where it will then become an Act. However, most of the bill will not be implemented until further secondary legislation is brought into effect.

Commissioners discussed the implications of the additional 'matters relating to land', including repopulation, scale and concentration, natural capital markets and diverse ownership. The board agreed that through the strategic plan and business planning processes it will be able to scope where the priorities lie for the Commission's focus in these topics.

The board noted that there is already a significant evidence base for several of these areas, and that consideration should be given to information gaps, what monitoring or analysis may be required, and stakeholder views sought. The SLC business plan and strategic plan will provide a means of considering the key areas of work and focus, including the planned stakeholder discussions in February.

Hamish also drew attention to the Land Commissioners' obligation to review part 1 of the bill in years to come, noting that early consideration should be given to the data and information requirements to meaningfully assess this new duty.

5. Model Lease Project

James provided a paper to the board on work to develop the new Model Lease. Part 2 of the LRB includes a duty on Ministers to publish a new Model Lease for environmental purposes within two years of the Bill receiving Royal Assent. Project planning and scope is already underway and will continue to develop and be formalised through Q4.

James asked commissioners to note the ask from SG for SLC to undertake the work and the opportunity it creates and also the resourcing plan and implications for 26/27 business planning. In particular the board noted that this is dependent on associated resource which has been committed by government.

The board were content with the next steps and James will report to the board as the project progresses, with the project arrangements being built into the 26/27 business plan.

Action 251204.04	James to update board with progress on Model Lease Project
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6. Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership- Pilot Project Update

Uwe joined the meeting online

Gemma joined the meeting

Uwe provided a paper to the board on the update of progress of the Commitment to Responsible Landownership pilot project and the key issues for the next stage.

The board welcomed the progress and the mix of participants engaged in the pilot. Commissioners raised some risks about expectations of the pilot, noting it is important that the board have an opportunity to consider fully the learning from the pilot, before deciding on whether and how the initiative might progress further.

In particular, the board is keen to understand the learning in relation to managing the risks of 'assurance', how to ensure clarity about what the recognition is and is not providing, and the interaction with future work on Land Management Plans and the role of the Land and Communities Commissioner.

Uwe provided more insight into the engagement to date with participants, their expectations and what we have learned so far on the process.

The board asked that prior to confirming how participation in the pilot is recognised, the management team consider further the process for concluding the pilot, the key issues and how learning feeds into a decision about a longer-term commitment to the project. It was agreed to schedule a further board discussion in February and Michael asked the Board to note that he had been approached by one of the pilot participants who had ideas regarding the development of the scheme and that he and Sarah would meet that individual in the New Year.

Action 251204.05	Staff to consider further the process for concluding the pilot for board discussion in February.
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Uwe left the meeting

7. Review of Guidance on Community Engagement

Gemma's paper focused on SG's review of effectiveness on engaging communities in decisions relating to land. SLC will submit response to SG by deadline of 12th December. SG will analyse responses received which were consolidated from the GP advisory group. SG will then prepare a report on the effectiveness of the guidance which will be laid in parliament by 20th March 2026. There is no formal consultation this time.

The evidence being used to inform our response is from casework relating to engagement and results from surveys in previous years.

The board noted that the current guidance is non-statutory, and that the interaction with the new statutory obligations for large landholdings will need to be clear and articulated.

Action 251204.06	SLC to submit response to SG by 12 th December 2025
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8. Budget Update

Nikki provided an update on the budget to the board for noting. The Board congratulated Nikki and the staff involved in finance given the great improvements in the presentation of the budgetary figures over the past year and noted the narrow margin by which it was expected the Commission would stay within its grant in aid during this financial year.

9. AOB

Scarlett spoke about the next steps of the ScotLand Futures campaign. Invitations have been sent out for the February event with the RSVP deadline in January.

Next Tuesday the rural land market report will be published. Michael observed that next year will be the 5th year of the report, which SLC should seek means to highlight and celebrate.

Board debrief sessions for staff will resume in the new year as there is a staff/board event immediately after this board meeting.

Date of next meeting:

Thursday 22nd January 9:30am

Online



Commissioners Meeting 22 January 2025

Online

Paper No.2 ScotLand Futures

Purpose	To agree the output of ScotLand Futures for publication
Previous board papers	2 nd October 2025 & 4 th December board/staff workshop
Action required	For agreement

Background

This paper provides at Annexes A & B the draft output for ScotLand Futures, seeking board agreement for publication.

Annex A is the full report and Annex B is a proposed summary document. The previously published ‘What We Heard’ and ‘Voices from Scotland’ are also available as supporting documents.

The publication uses what we heard through our ScotLand Futures engagement, together with the Commission’s wider body of research and experience, to set out a focus for the next big steps in land reform.

It is intended for use by policy makers and stakeholders to inform a future programme for land reform, and to provide a clear statement of where the Commission sees the opportunities, having engaged widely over the last year.

It is not just about the work of the Commission, it seeks to inform a programme that would require leadership from many parts of government and across the land sectors. In turn, we will also use it to inform development of our next strategic plan for 2026-29, shaping where the Commission’s focus should lie in the coming years.

Discussion

The draft has developed significantly from the building blocks provided at the board/staff workshop on 4th December. Using the feedback from that workshop we have developed a draft that:

- is rooted in the appetite for change we heard expressed in our ScotLand Futures engagement;
- articulates what success could look like;

- provides a focus on three key themes, while also addressing some of the underpinning work required;
- states clearly the key areas of reform we think need to be addressed, without prescribing at this stage exactly how that is done.

The board is asked to:

- a) consider the draft with particular regard to:
 - overall tone;
 - strategic focus;
 - impact and key messages;
- b) agree any changes required and to proceed with publication.

Next steps

Once approved, we plan to publish this in the week of 23rd February.

The board is hosting a stakeholder event in Perth on 25th February at which we will discuss the direction set out in the ScotLand Futures publication and connect this to a discussion on where the focus for the Commission should lie in our next strategic plan.

We are putting in place a communications plan to ensure the publication is shared widely with media, our key contacts and networks.

Through our business planning and strategic plan development, we will consider how best the Commission builds on the themes identified.

Hamish Trench

Chief Executive