

CROFTING COMMISSION

MINUTE OF THE COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON 08 MAY 2024 AT 9:00AM IN GREAT GLEN HOUSE

Present:	Malcolm Mathieson	Convener
	Andrew Thin	Commissioner
	Mairi Renwick Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Duncan Gray	Commissioner
	Iain Maciver	Commissioner (via Teams)
	Colin Kennedy	Commissioner
	Donald Macdonald	Commissioner
	Rod Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Gary Campbell	Chief Executive
	David Findlay	Commission Solicitor
	Aaron Ramsay	Director of Operations
	Heather Mack	Head of Policy, Grazings and Development
	Aileen Rore	Scottish Government (via Teams)
	Observers	Members of staff, Assessors, and public via Teams

1. APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

The Convener opened the meeting and welcomed participants in English and Gaelic. There were apologies from Commissioner Macaulay and Jane Thomas.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

3. BOARD MINUTES FROM 20 MARCH 2024

Commissioner Thin highlighted the action point at section 12, proposing this is changed to read as “The Convener will request that sponsor division arrange for a letter confirming the Minister considers Commissioner Maciver to represent the Landlords’ interest.” The Board agreed and this was accepted.

Action Point 1	The wording of the action point to be amended as per the Board agreement.
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4. REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (20 MARCH 2024)

The Board went through the outstanding action points. There was no update for action point 1. Action points 5 and 6 are being done together and are in progress.

5. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

6. AUDIT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Vice Chair of the AFC provided an update from the last meeting of the AFC. The Convener noted that they would address a point about clarification of the process for appointing a new Convener in private session.

The Vice Chair noted that the AFC were increasingly concerned about governance between SG Sponsor and the Commission, and suggested the CEO propose a Commission Board led review of governance in a paper at the June Board meeting. This paper should include aspects of organisation structure and seek to clarify the secondee status of Commission staff.

Commissioner Rod Mackenzie raised that the Commission needs to bring SG sponsor with it during any review. This view was agreed by Commissioner Mairi Mackenzie.

Action Point 2	The CEO to bring a paper to the June Board detailing a proposal for a formal Board led review of Governance, to include the wider organisational structure.
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7. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4

The CEO opened this item with a general update detailing that the Commission had asked for more resource from SG to complete registration of common grazings. The CEO also updated on the planned introduction of “team brief” which is expected to contribute to increasing point 4.1 in the report (“Increase in employee engagement index”).

A short discussion was had around the challenges of mapping the common grazings, likely timescales and resource requirements. The Board were generally in favour of the approach but noted the many challenges.

Commissioner Thin wished it recorded that comms had been successful around this topic.

8. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER Q4

The Board noted the update on the strategic risk register.

Commissioner Thin noted that there was a risk of casework volumes not dropping (consistent with the SRR definition of ‘fallen’), while also noting the increase in the risk of inconsistent decision making (entry S3).

As vice chair, Commissioner Thin communicated that the AFC suggested a new risk be created for at least 6 months to raise concerns around succession. The Board agreed this.

Action Point 3	New entry on the strategic risk register relating to succession to be created with CEO as the owner.
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9. UPDATE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 6.6 AND NOTIFICATION OF AFFECTED GRAZINGS COMMITTEES

There was a refresher of point 6.6 from the NDP.

Head of Policy, Grazings and Development gave an update around the creation of the map, explaining that an online map had been launched via a Civic Tech Challenge. This shows peat extent but does not reference croft land. The Board agreed that they considered the Commission's action in this matter as complete.

The Board had a general discussion around the ongoing requirements for NatureScot, as well as the significant time required to conduct the actual assessments.

Commissioner Rod Mackenzie suggested that this work dovetailed with the work to register common grazings, which the Board agreed.

Action Point 4	CEO to include as an agenda item for the next sponsor meeting to discuss next steps.
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10. PROPOSED CHANGES TO DECISION MAKING FUNDAMENTALS AND SCHEME OF DELEGATED DECISION MAKING

The Director of Operations introduced the paper. Clarification was given that core principle 1 noted applications requiring consent, but that the intent was that the principle covered all application types.

The paper's recommendations were accepted unanimously by the Board. It was noted that it could be used as a basis for further delegation, but that would be a matter for the future and to be explored at the appropriate time.

Decision 1	<i>The Board agreed all recommendations in the paper and welcomed a future paper with proposals to extend the scheme of delegation further to enhance efficiency.</i>
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11. ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMMISSIONERS TRAINING PLAN

There was a brief discussion around the training, and Board agreed that no further training around the code of conduct was required. The Board was keen that it should determine its own training needs.

Action Point 5	A draft training plan is to be produced and taken to the AFC prior to presentation to the Board for agreement.
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12. SCOTTISH LAND MATCHING SERVICE – 6 MONTH REVIEW

The Head of Policy, Development and Grazings gave an update on the scheme. It has been a positive relationship for the Commission and there has recently been the first successful croft match done through the service.

The Board asked for the data behind the paper to be shared.

The Board were positive about the increased publicity and partnership working around this project.

Action Point 6	Head of Policy, Development and Grazings to share the data behind the land matching service update paper to the Board.
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13. UPDATE ON ENGAGEMENT ON PEATLAND RESTORATION

The Head of Policy, Development and Grazings gave an update and noted that a paper had gone to the SG Peatland Programme Board. Commission staff have been engaging in discussions with several stakeholders on this including the Scottish Government, RPID and NatureScot. Given the difficulties around peatland restoration on croft land it has become apparent that there is a need for a different approach to be taken on croft land with respect to peatland restoration.

Commissioner Mairi Mackenzie raised a question around the funding for peatland restoration as well as for CAGS and if there have been any recent changes around this.

The Board asked for an update to be given on this after the next SG sponsor meeting.

Action Point 7	Question to be clarified at next sponsor meeting and update given at the next Board meeting as part of the action points item.
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14. PRESENTATION ON FORESTRY BY PAT SNOWDON

The Convener welcomed the guest speaker, who introduced himself and then delivered a short presentation. There was a general discussion after the presentation concluded, with the speaker agreeing to share the following resources:

- Link to online “woodlands benefit calculator” tool that gives estimated earnings based on details entered
- “ESK” tool that allows users to enter their details to find out which species of trees are appropriate to grow
- Link to property grant scheme that can help with setup costs prior to grants being paid

Commissioner Rod Mackenzie asked if Biomass would be eligible and it was confirmed that it would be that only the first rotation is paid so it may not be financially viable.

Commissioner MacDonald asked if planning permission was needed, and it was confirmed that forestry legislation covered the scheme.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Convener noted that he was abroad for the next meeting and though would join remotely, he welcomed all Commissioners to contact him if they would like to chair.

16. ANY URGENT BUSINESS

None.

17. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Convener thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.