

Division of an owner-occupied croft

Enables the division of an owner-occupied croft into two or more parts which then become separate individual crofts.

LAW

Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 (“the 1993 Act”) – sections 19D & 58A

*An owner-occupier crofter may not transfer (whether or not for valuable consideration) ownership of any part of the owner-occupier’s croft without first dividing the croft into the part which the owner-occupier crofter proposes to transfer and the part which the owner-occupier proposes to retain. **Section 19D(1)***

The owner-occupier crofter may so divide that owner-occupier’s croft only if the owner-occupier crofter first obtains the consent of the Commission to that division.

Section 19D(2)

*Any transfer of ownership of any part of an owner-occupied croft which is not a new croft created by a division under this section, and any deed purporting to transfer ownership of that part, is null and void. **Section 19D(6)***

Where the transfer of ownership of any part of an owner-occupied croft is null and void under subsection (6), the Commission may declare the original croft vacant.

Section 19D(7)

In considering their decision on the application, the Commission must have regard to the following-

- (a) In the case of an application relating to a croft-
 - i. Whether any person is or will be ordinarily resident on, or within 32 kilometres of the croft*
 - ii. Whether the croft is being or will be cultivated or put to such other purposeful use as is consented to under section 5C(4)**
- (b) the interests of the crofting community in the locality of that land*
- (c) the sustainable development of that crofting community*
- (d) the interests of the public at large*
- (e) any objections received under subsection (4) or (5A)*
- (f) any plan of the Commission approved and published under section 2C*
- (g) any other matter which the Commission consider relevant. **Section 58A(7)***

POLICY

Crofting Commission Policy Plan 2022

Policy on Division (Paragraph 66)

It is the Commission's policy not generally to allow the fragmentation of croft holdings into smaller units where such fragmentation would result in a holding of a size that would be unlikely to attract financial assistance, grant or subsidy (where the original holding would be of a size that it could attract such support). Reference should be made to the relevant rules on eligibility for financial assistance and the minimum amount of land required for a crofter or farmer to be eligible to apply for subsidy. The Commission recognises that fragmentation of crofts can result in holdings that are of insufficient size to afford any incoming croft tenant with a range of realistic options as to how to use the land. It is the Commission's policy to prevent this from happening.

Policy on access to croft land (Paragraph 66)

When considering applications that could result in croft land becoming separated from the nearest adopted public road from which access can reasonably be taken, the Commission will wish to ensure that the croft land or, as the case may be, common grazings can be accessed directly from the public road by agricultural vehicles or other machinery required for the cultivation and maintenance of the croft or in connection with the common grazings. The Commission will scrutinise applications where it is proposed that an existing access from the public road will no longer be available to croft land or common grazings or where a new access is proposed from a public road that may not be suitable. Applications should ensure that any consent or approval sought would not result in croft land or common grazings being cut off from a public road. Failure to do so is likely to result in an application being refused.

PROCEDURE

Any transfer of ownership of any part of an owner-occupied croft, which is not a new croft created by division with the consent of the Commission, and any deed purporting to transfer ownership of that part is null and void.

Where the transfer of ownership of part of an owner-occupied croft is null and void, the Commission may declare the original croft vacant.

- (1) An application by an owner-occupier crofter for the Commission's consent to divide:
 - (i) a croft; or
 - (ii) a grazing right or land deemed by section 3(5) to be a croft,

into two or more new crofts shall be made on the appropriate form provided by the Commission.

- (2) On receipt of an application on the said form, the Commission will check that the application is valid. This will include checks that the applicant has:
 - (i) given public notification¹ of the application (as required by section 58A(3)(a))
 - (ii) where the land to which the application relates is, or is part of, a common grazings, given written notification of the application to the owner of the common grazings (as required by section 58A(3)(b)).

If the application is invalid or not complete, it will be returned, and reason(s) provided for doing so. If the croft is **unregistered**, the Commission will also advise the owner-occupier crofter of the requirement to submit an application for first registration of the croft.

¹ For information on public notification refer to separate Rules of Procedure on *Public Notification*

- (3) If the application is valid and complete, the Commission will check whether it relates to a registered croft.
- (i) If it is for an **unregistered** croft, the Commission will check whether an application for first registration of the croft has been received. If not, the Commission will inform the applicant in writing that unless an application for first registration is submitted, it will not consider the application at the end of the 28-day public notification period. The applicant will be further advised that failure to submit an application for first registration of the croft within 6 months, beginning with the date on which the application for consent was made, will result in the application being returned.
 - (ii) If the croft is **registered** or where an application for first registration is received, at the end of the 28-day public notification period the Commission will review the information contained in the application form and any objections received.
- (4) Where any objections¹ to the application are received by the Commission – refer to separate section on objections.
- (5) The Commission shall consider whether it is necessary to undertake any further investigation before deciding on the application and, if appropriate, shall make such enquiry and carry out such inspection as it deems necessary to allow it to have regard to the criteria listed at section 58A(7)(a)-(h). This includes in the case of an application relating to a croft:
- (i) Whether any person is or will be ordinarily resident on, or within 32 kilometres of, the croft,
 - (ii) Whether the croft is being or will be cultivated or put to another purposeful use
- and may involve a report being prepared by the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) office situated in the locality of the croft which is the subject of the application.

¹ Details of the persons who can submit objections and information on how the Commission treat objections received, is contained in the separate Rules of Procedure on *Objections etc. received following the public advertising of regulatory applications*

- (6) The Commission shall consider all the information available, taking particular account of its specific policies on “division” and access to croft land. If it is satisfied that there is sufficient information available to allow it to decide on the application and:
- (a) if the Commission is satisfied that the application should be granted, and no valid objections and expressions of demand for the tenancy (of the croft or deemed croft) have been submitted, it may grant the application,
 - (b) where the Commission is not satisfied that the application should be granted, or where valid objections or expressions of demand for the tenancy have been submitted to the Commission and not withdrawn, prior to deciding the application –
 - (i) The Commission shall serve a copy of the available information in the form of a case paper (comprising copies of the application form and any additional information or evidence obtained by the Commission including, where applicable, the SGRPID report) on the applicant and other interested parties, to allow them sight of the evidence that the Commission will consider when reaching its decision. The case paper will **not** include any valid objections or submissions in support of the application received by the Commission following public notification of the application or the responses to these – refer to separate section on objections. The Commission will allow the applicant and other parties the opportunity to comment within 21 days from the date of serving of the case paper.
 - (ii) Copies of any comments received and accepted by the Commission following the serving of the case paper, shall be served on all involved parties for comment, prior to the Commission deciding on the application.
 - (iii) The Commission may direct that a public meeting is held before deciding on the application and shall consider any new information obtained at the public meeting.

- (7) The decision on the application will be taken at the appropriate level as set out in the Commission's Scheme of Delegation. When considering its decision, the Commission shall have regard to the criteria listed at section 58A(7)(a)-(h) and will consider all of the available information, including any comments received following the serving of the case paper and/or information obtained at a public meeting. It must decide the application by –
- (i) granting it,
 - (ii) granting it subject to conditions, or
 - (iii) refusing it.
- (8) The Commission will give notice of its decision to the applicant and the other parties listed at section 58A(12A) as appropriate, within 21 days of the decision being taken, specifying the reasons for its decision.
- (9) The applicant or any person with an interest in the application may appeal:
- (i) the Commission's decision, or
 - (ii) the imposition of a condition by the Commission,
- to the Scottish Land Court within 42 days after notification of the Commission's decision.
- (10) If the application is granted and relates to a **first registered croft** –
- (i) **The Commission** must, as soon as is reasonably practicable after consenting to the division, notify the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland of the change.
 - (ii) The division takes effect on the date the Keeper receives the notification from the Commission.

- (11) If the application is granted and relates to a **registered croft** (other than a first registered croft) –
- (i) Any consent of the Commission to the division of the croft expires at the end of 3 months, beginning with the date on which consent was given, unless an application for registration of the division is submitted by **the owner-occupier crofter who applied for the division** to the Commission for forwarding to Keeper of the Registers of Scotland before the expiry of this period.
 - (ii) The division takes effect on the date of registration.