



**CROFTING COMMISSION
COIMISEAN NA CROITEARACHD**

Crofting Succession

Research Paper

DECEMBER 2024

www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk





Overview

As part of the Crofting Commission's work on croft succession, a survey was issued to crofters in Uist, Barra and North West mainland in 2023. This was to understand more about plans for, and attitudes towards croft succession, in crofting areas that have experienced depopulation and an ageing population. The results found that 54 % of respondents have a succession plan in place for their croft, with the older age groups more likely to have one. Results showed that some respondents were willing to consider living succession, which is passing on the croft within the crofter's lifetime.

Chosen successors were mostly family members (95 %) and the majority of chosen successors would become a new entrant crofter (77 %). Results showed that most chosen successors are already resident or have indicated a willingness to become resident to meet the residency duty (91 %), with 9 % of chosen successors reported to be not resident and have not indicated a willingness to meet the residency duty.

Introduction

Croft succession is the process of passing on a croft to a chosen successor. This typically happens when the crofter dies and can also take place when the crofter is still alive and no longer able or willing to work their croft.

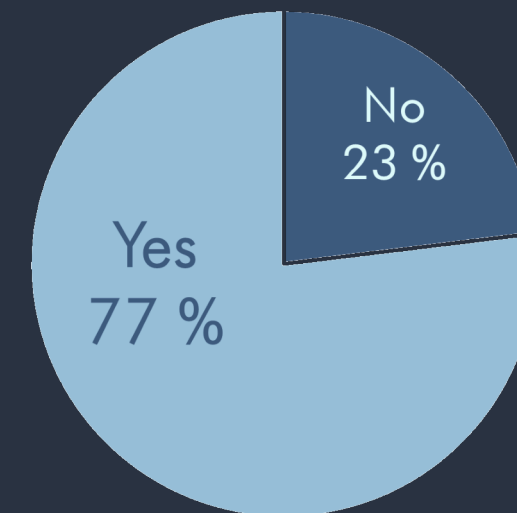
Croft succession is the process of passing on a croft to a chosen successor. This typically happens when the crofter dies and can also take place when the crofter is still alive and no longer able or willing to work their croft. Putting a succession plan in place is important to avoid crofts sitting unused whilst intestate succession is resolved, which can take years. Previous surveys to crofters have asked about the existence of succession plans, which consistently indicate that a proportion of crofters do not have a succession plan in place. Results from a Crofting Commission survey show 43 % of respondents had a croft succession plan in place in 2022 and results from the Economic Condition of Crofting Report (2022) show 60 % of respondents had a croft succession plan in place in 2022.

In 2023 the Crofting Commission embarked on work to encourage crofters to put a croft succession plan in place. This aimed to help avoid cases of intestate succession and encourage a turnover of crofts, enabling active croft use and opportunities for new entrants. In 2023 the project focused on the areas of: Uist and Barra in the Western Isles; and Assynt, Eddrachillis, Durness and Tongue in the North West mainland. These areas were selected as they have been subject to depopulation over the last 10 years (National Records of Scotland, 2021) and there has been a focus to address depopulation in these areas, including with the introduction of resettlement officers by local authorities.

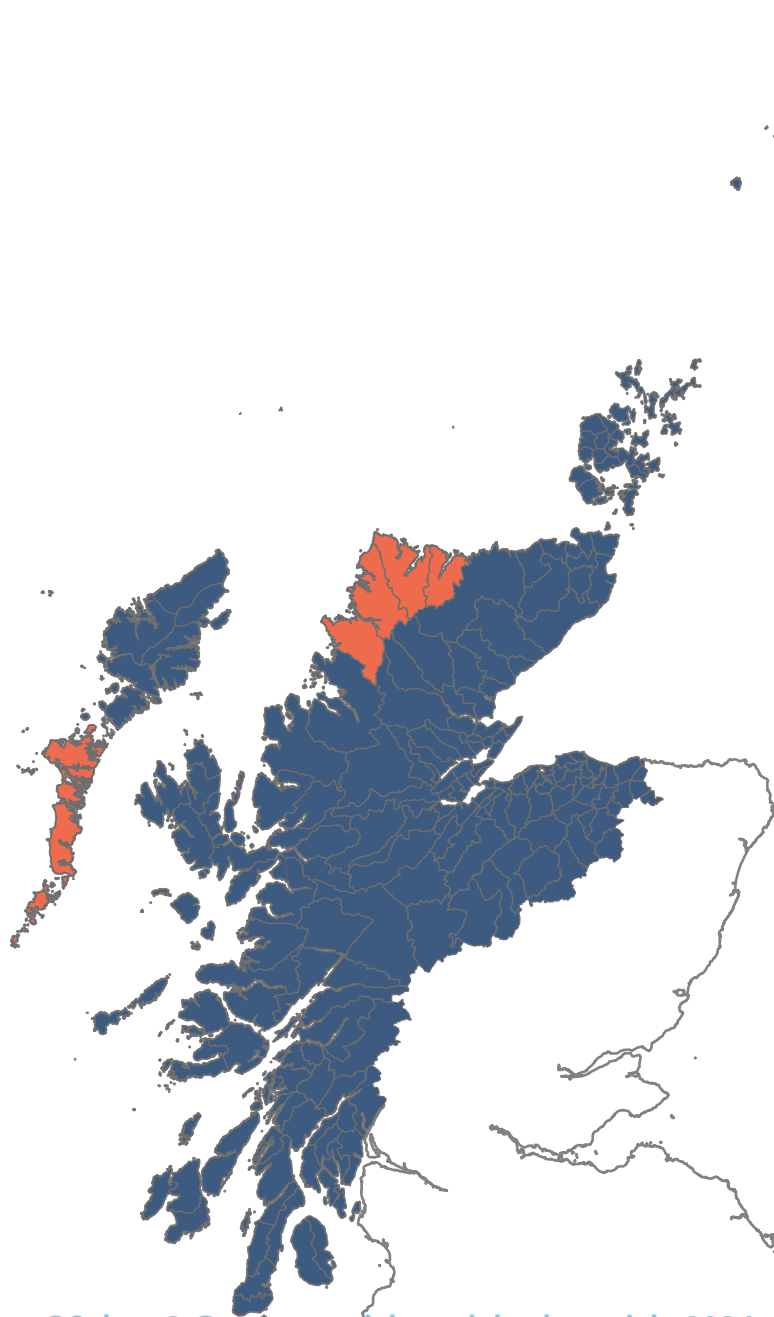
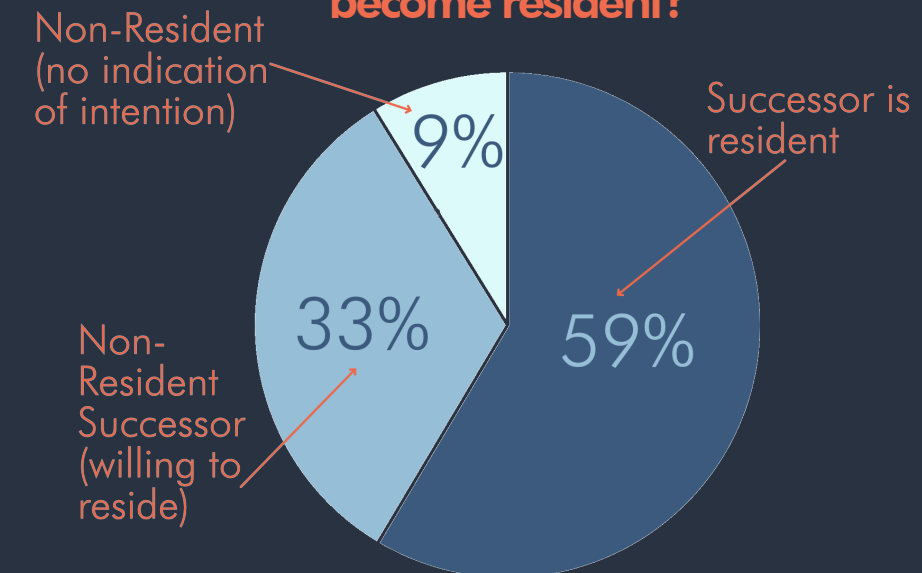
The work involved a survey and information pack sent by post to crofters in the target area, and drop in events to provide information to crofters on succession. The survey was issued to crofters in autumn 2023 to learn more about their plans for the succession of their croft and attitudes towards croft succession.

Key Findings

Will your chosen successor become a new entrant crofter?



Is your chosen successor resident or willing to become resident?



Succession Plan

The survey was sent by post to 2,050 crofters in the study area and resulted in 259 responses (13 % return rate), from a range of geographical locations, ages and genders. The survey found that 54 % of respondents have a succession plan in place in the form of a Will, which is similar to previous surveys.

68 % of respondents aged 66 and over have a Will specifying how they wish their croft and/or grazings share to be passed on. This compares to 42 % of respondents, aged 65 and under, who have a Will specifying how they wish their croft and/or grazings share to be passed on. This means that crofters in older age brackets were more likely to have thought about succession and have a succession plan in place. For most respondents who have not yet chosen a successor it is because they have not yet given it any thought. 95 % of chosen successors are family members, reflecting the strong family connections within crofting and likelihood of crofters to pass on crofts within families.

Living Succession

Living succession is referred to as passing on your croft within your lifetime. This option is beneficial because it can allow a croft to remain in use and encourage crofting skills to be passed on within the crofters lifetime. 53 % of respondents reported that they would consider living succession. There was a difference in terms of the age of the crofter, as to whether they would consider living succession or not. 59 % of those aged 65 and under would consider living succession, in contrast to only 45 % of those aged 66 and over, who would consider living succession. Respondents who would not consider living succession were asked why and invited to select as many of the options that applied to them. Of the respondents who would not consider living succession the most common reasons were because they already had a Will (58 %) or intend to make one (25 %). For 25 % of those who would not consider living succession, one of their reasons is because their house is still part of their croft.

Chosen Successor

The majority of chosen successors would be new entrant crofters (77 %). Of chosen successors 54 % were reported to be male, 36 % female and 10 % were undisclosed. Of chosen successors 59 % already meet the residency duty for the croft (which is defined as living within 20 miles of the croft). 33 % of the successors are not already resident, but reportedly indicated a willingness to move to meet the residency duty for the croft. A small proportion of chosen successors (9 %) do not meet the residency duty and are reported as not indicating a willingness to move to meet the residency duty for the croft.



Conclusions

THE SURVEY REVEALED 54 % OF RESPONDENTS HAVE A SUCCESSION PLAN IN PLACE, WHICH IS COMPARABLE TO FINDINGS IN OTHER SURVEYS.

For the majority of respondents who don't have a succession plan in place, it is because they haven't given it any thought. This, alongside the evidence for an ageing population of crofters and an ageing population in remote rural crofting areas, demonstrates the value of raising awareness about croft succession.

Chosen successors are typically family members (95 %), highlighting the value placed by crofters on keeping crofts within families. The relatively high numbers of new entrant crofters for chosen successors demonstrates the potential for future new entrants coming into crofting.

The information on residency or intended residency for successors provides a picture of intention to meet the residency duty in chosen successors. It highlights the value of raising awareness of the residency duty for both crofters and potential crofters.

The Crofting Commission website provides general information on croft succession. The Crofting Commission recommends that individual crofts seek their own independent legal advice on any of the matters raised.



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References

Economic Condition of Crofting: 2019 to 2022

National Records of Scotland, Small area population estimates for Scotland, 2021



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**The Crofting
Commission
regulates and
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