



Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commission held on Thursday 6th August at An Lochran, Inverness

- **Commissioners present:** Michael Russell, Deb Roberts, Lucy Beattie (Online), Craig MacKenzie (Land Commissioners), Rob Black (Tenant Farming Commissioner)
- **In attendance:** Hamish Trench, Nikki Nagler, Kathie Pollard, Kayleigh Wilson, Scarlett MacFarlane, Annabel Davidson Knight, Uwe Stoneman, Karen Grant
- **Apologies:** None
- **Declarations of interest:** None

1. Minutes of meeting from 4th June 2026

The minutes from the last Board meeting held on 4th June were agreed as true and accurate.

2. Commissioners Updates

All Commissioners provided updates on relevant activities on behalf of the Commission since the last meeting.

Michael reported on the success of the Commissions events at the Royal Highland Show. He also noted he and Hamish had met recently with the Director of the new Local Government and Communities Division in Scottish Government. He noted that Scottish Government's arrangements to begin recruitment of the Land and Communities Commissioner are progressing with an initial recruitment meeting scheduled and interviews planned for January 2027. In addition, Michael will be attending the next Tenant Farming Advisory Forum.

Other updates included the RHS engagement, Strategic Research Framework, tenant farming engagement and improved reporting. Discussion included the current wildfires and the potential for the Commission to support some of the learning and engagement needed in due course.

3. Quarterly Report

Delivery

The board noted the busy first quarter the commission has had and welcomed the delivery progress.

Finance

Nikki provided an update on the budget. The current budget reporting format is under review, with a more detailed financial report expected to be presented at a future meeting. Expenditure continues to be monitored closely.

The Board asked for further detail on the budget allocated under land reform act, Hamish confirmed this relates to provision for possible recruitment in Q4 of a post to support the Land and Communities Commissioner, though this will need to be considered in context of expected 27/28 budget.

Action 260806.01	More detailed financial reporting to be developed by finance and presented by Nikki at next meeting
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Risk Management

Hamish highlighted that the risks assessed as high relate to the implications and uncertainties associated with implementation of the Land Reform Act. He spoke about the updated mitigations.

Craig highlighted at the last ARC meeting the 2027/2028 budget process is a high risk area given new functions. Hamish confirmed that he has had initial engagement with sponsor team on projected costs for 27/28 and 28/29.

Commissioners discussed the decision made by the Cabinet Secretary to reduce the number of Land Commissioners from five to four, noting the impact it has on board capacity.

Lucy joined meeting

Lucy joined the meeting online having resolved connection issues.

Communications

Scarlett provided an update on communications activity during Quarter 1, highlighting a busy period that included work relating to the Royal Highland Show, the publication of the Rural Land Market Insights Report, and ongoing work relating to tax.

The Board noted upcoming communications activity, including a webinar on community ownership scheduled for 20th August.

An update was provided on the Gaelic Language Plan. Feedback is currently being gathered ahead of consultation and the development of commitments for the next five-year period.

The Board discussed media and press coverage, noting that publication activity had been affected during the pre-election period but was expected to increase as reports are released.

Scarlett also reported on website analytics. Further exploration of AI tools had been undertaken, although current costs were considered prohibitive. Commissioners discussed the potential to utilise trial periods and monitor future developments as technology becomes more affordable.

Good Practice

Hamish provided an update to the Board on Good Practice case figures which has been broadly consistent, however higher than last year. Recent work has included the CoRLa project and land agents training.

Tenant Farming

Rob provided update to the Board on tenant farming. The formatting of the TF quarterly reports will be further developed for future Board meetings.

Peter and Ellen are building an improved data pool thanks to the new functions of the new TF SharePoint.

Action 260806.02	Quarterly tenant farming report to be further developed by Rob for future Board meetings
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4. Strategic Plan & Programme of Work

Hamish sought approval from the Board for the strategic plan and programme of work, noting the process and engagement to date. The draft has been shared with sponsor team. The board welcomed the changes made following the last board discussion.

In discussion the board considered the challenges of monitoring, particularly in relation to new land opportunities and crofting. In relation to crofting, the relevance of sub-lets as well as new crofts was highlighted.

Commissioners asked that stronger reference to ‘all Scotland’ be included in the vision, that the drafting ensures that the relevance of the work on the model lease is sufficiently clear, and that reference to review of impact of the new Act includes the need to develop the approach to how impact will be assessed.

The Board formally approved the strategic plan and programme of work.

Hamish will make the remaining final adjustments, and it will then be sent to the Cabinet Secretary for approval.

Action 260806.03	Hamish to make final amendments to the strategic plan and programme of work and submit it to the Cabinet Secretary.
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5. Report on Pilot of Commitment to Responsible Land Ownership

Uwe provided the Board with a report on the completion of the pilot project. The Board were asked to consider the learning from the pilot and agree next steps. The Board welcomed the approach taken, noting the value in adapting the direction as a result of the pilot.

The board supported the approach proposed in the paper, including supporting a leadership group for landowners. The board noted the positive support shown by participants in the pilot and welcomed the commitment and time they have given.

The board supported the proposed leadership group, noting that the Commission would benefit from being able to engage directly with landowners that are demonstrating leadership and in turn could support peer-to-peer learning and discuss new opportunities.

In taking forward a leadership group, Commissioners agreed that it should seek to have a broad range of landowners involved, and despite the reservations of some public landowners in the pilot, it should seek to continue to involve public landowners. Commissioners noted the opportunity of the leadership group to support a range of work in the Commission, including informing development of the new Land and Communities Commissioner functions, although there will also need to be wider and specific engagement associated with that.

The board asked that the terms of reference for the leadership group be developed as a next step, and that progress be discussed at a future board meeting.

Action 260806.04	Uwe to progress the recommendations from the responsible land ownership pilot including terms of reference for a leadership group.
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6. Report on Cairngorms Community Benefits from Nature Project

Annabel updated the Board on the progress of the Community Benefits from Nature project and highlighted emerging learning. The report set out the key delivery achievements, strategic learning, emerging risks and challenges, and outlines initial recommendations alongside options for future activity, should discussions with CNPA about extending the project be successful.

The board welcomed the report, noting the positive value in learning from the work being undertaken in specific locations. Commissioners supported further development of knowledge transfer using the learning so far, noted opportunities to inform the Commission's wider work and discussed potential project extension. In particular the

board is keen to ensure the learning from the project is used, whatever the outcome of the extension proposal.

Commissioners discussed the limited financial flows currently delivered through natural capital markets and agreed the emphasis of the Commission's work on community benefits should continue to take a broader approach to land use, not focusing entirely on natural capital markets.

Commissioners discussed the specific implications of the Cairngorms wildfire for the involvement of the Nethy Bridge community and Dorback, noting that delivery of the project will have to be flexible in adapting to local priorities, capacity and needs. The Commission should seek to support the community and landowners in taking forward some of the engagement and learning needed, once the immediate emergency phase has passed.

7. Tax Reforms Route-Map

Kathie sought commissioner approval for the route-map and approach. The route-map is the concluding advice of the Commission's work on tax over the last two years and sets out practical steps that can help improve and modernise the system of land tax administration. Kathie commented on her continued positive engagement with Registers of Scotland and Revenue Scotland.

Commissioners welcomed the progress and the collaboration with other partners, noting the importance of improved data to underpin viable policy reforms. The board asked that the route-map, and associated communications, makes clear that practical benefits will flow from each stage of this work, and that investing in this approach will deliver opportunities and improvements within the five years, as well as resulting in system at the end of that period capable of supporting significant tax reforms.

The Board confirmed approval for the route-map. The tax reform route-map will be published on 1st Sept, with communication activities to promote our advice.

SLC will continue to work on land data and anticipates further work on tax to support the delivery of the route-map, if required. This has been noted in the SLC's land data work plan.

8. Land Reform Act Update

Hamish provided update on land reform act implementation, as of today the Cabinet Secretary has confirmed the LCC recruitment and a broader timescale for the wider act implementation in a letter to the parliamentary committee.

The board will continue to schedule a series of discussions through the year to discuss parts of the preparation needed for act implementation.

9. AOB

There will be a Board meeting de-brief for staff on Tue 11th Aug at 11am with both Michael and Rob.

The meeting in September will be a board visit. The next board meeting will be 1st October.

Date of next meeting:

Thursday 1st October

An Lochran, Inverness