

RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT LAND USE STRATEGY

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE

HIE welcomes the discussion on land use in Scotland that may lead to a Land Use Strategy. Considerable work has gone into the draft document and its companion Environmental Report, as well as various discussion workshops. HIE would support many of the positive statements made in the document, particularly the following:

- the link to communities and the land (under "Our Objectives" p 7 and section 5 "Vibrant Communities")
- the ability for land use to deliver multiple benefits (1.1 and in 3.2.3)
- the need for change (2.1)
- the acceptance that the government may need to provide incentives (2.2 and 3.2.2)
- the importance of renewable energy (2.3)
- the role of small woods (2.4)
- the recognition of crofting and crofters (2.4)
- the relationship the other strategies and in particular the Scottish Planning Policy (2.6) and CAP review (3.3)
- a need for change to adopt lower-impact agricultural and forestry practices
- a commitment to action (4.3)
- a link to land, livelihoods and cultural tradition (5.2.1)
- an acknowledgement of the lack of affordable housing (5.2.1)
- the benefits of "greenspace" in relation to physical and mental wellbeing (5.2.2)
- the role of community land ownership (5.2.3 and 5.2.4)
- a need for capacity building (6.1.3).

General comments on the draft strategy:

- we believe that the draft strategy could be bolder in its aspirations. Many of the actions are being deferred to future reviews e.g. of regulation/incentives
- It would be helpful if the draft strategy spell out on more detail how the recommendations might affect activities on the ground
- The draft strategy needs to relate more closely to other strategies and policies, specifically the Scottish Planning Policy; the Low Carbon Economic Strategy for Scotland, the Government Economic Strategy, National Outcomes and local Single Outcome Agreements
- There is a need for recognition that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to regulation and incentives, given the huge diversity of land types in Scotland.

More specifically:

- Climate change is not the only driver of land use changes in Scotland. For example there is the issue of '**Peak Oil**'. The use of fossil fuels is now accepted by most as being inextricably linked to climate change, but the declining fossil fuel resource has implications for agriculture given its dependence on oil-based fertiliser, transport fuel and other chemicals
- the draft strategy could make more reference to producing **alternative fuels** such as Bioethanol, biodiesel and hydrogen for transport in particular. Wood fuel may be a more accessible route as an alternative to oil for heating

- the Strategy suggests that "**prime agricultural land**" should be a reserved issue. Many current agricultural practices are unsustainable and a more biodiverse regime needs to be reinstated
- with the push to increase **woodland and forestry** cover to 25% of the land mass, more and more marginal land will be utilised. This however may result in poorer growth rates, lower commercial returns and decreased value in carbon sequestration
- the emphasis on **renewables** is correct and onshore windfarms are one way of diversifying income from land-based assets. However this will assume some bold decision making and will have an impact on land use, landscape value, tourism, transport and industry
- the draft strategy should allude to the **barriers to further development of renewables**, especially on a community scale. These include Grid development including interconnectors, together with grid connection and transmission costs all need to be addressed. References should be made to the Government's recent consultation document on community benefits from renewables
- the role of **communities** in land use is underplayed by the strategy. Land use should be more than something that simply happens to communities, or something on which they are simply consulted. Land is more than an amenity or a service and rural communities are more than mere custodians to maintain the land for the urban population
- **leadership** is essential if we want to see effective community involvement in land use. Supporting NGOs who have specific land-based roles will encourage participation and development. Incentives should be available to these bodies to ensure investment in rural and fragile areas.
- **community land ownership** is acknowledged in the Strategy, though its achievements in more remote communities are understated. There is now a dearth of incentives to communities who have ambitions to acquire and manage their own land, particularly those who provide public goods, landscapes, water quality, biodiversity and carbon storage
- The role of the **Land Reform Act** is overstated in the Strategy. Most community land purchases have been by mutual agreement and have happened outside the Act. While it is recognised that the Act may have stimulated the debate, few successful buyouts have used the Act and none has proceeded under Part 3 (the Crofting Community Right to Buy)
- The draft strategy undervalues the role of **crofting** in sustainable land use and lacks acknowledgement of the role retaining population in local rural communities and in supporting Gaelic language and culture
- There is little reference to the **local food** movement, as a response to increased economic and environmental costs of transport
- More emphasis could be put on the links between **transport** and land use. This involves the production of alternative fuels. Hydrogen and the production of diesel from waste may offer alternatives more suitable to rural areas and will have less impact on land use than the previously discussed bio-fuels
- The draft strategy correctly highlights that **adaptability and diversity** are essential components of long-term sustainability. However, it needs to encourage innovation in management approaches within sectors (e.g. in agriculture & forestry), in sizes of landholdings and tenure arrangements
- While the draft strategy correctly differentiates the **urban-rural** influences on rural land uses, it should acknowledge that many people living in rural areas have little connection to the land and most do not make their livelihoods from it

- **rural populations** need access to the land, e.g. for housing, amenity, small holdings and crofts
- In order to align with regional equity aspirations in GES, the draft strategy should ensure that incentives provide opportunities for all to contribute to Scotland's sustainable economic growth to achieve more balanced growth across Scotland. This is a particular concern in the Highlands and Islands which has proportionately less productive land but offers many opportunities to show innovation.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise
6 December 2010