

Tenant Crofter: Duty to cultivate and maintain

LAW

Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993, sections 5C & 26

*A crofter must comply with each of the duties set out in subsection (2), **Section 5C(1)***

Those duties are that the crofter –

(a) *must –*

- (i) *cultivate¹ the croft; or*
- (ii) *put it to another purposeful use²,*

So that every part of the croft which is capable of being cultivated or put to another purposeful use is cultivated or put to such use;

(b) *must keep the croft in a fit state for cultivation³ (except in so far as the use of the croft for another purposeful use is incompatible with the croft being kept in such a state). **Section 5C(2)***

*The Commission must investigate whether or not the duty to which the report or, as the case may be, information relates is being complied with.⁴ **Section 26A(4)***

... where the Commission consider (whether following an investigation under section 26A(4) or otherwise) that –

(a) *a crofter is not complying with any of the duties mentioned in section 5AA, 5B or 5C; **Section 26B(1)(a)**...*

*The Commission must, unless they consider there is a good reason not to, give the relevant person⁵ a written notice informing the person that the Commission consider that the duty is not being complied with. **Section 26C(2)***

¹ Cultivate includes the use of a croft for horticulture or for any purposes of husbandry, including the keeping or breeding of livestock, poultry or bees, the growing of fruit, vegetables and the like and the planting of trees and use of land as woodlands. **Section 5C(8)**

² Purposeful use means any planned and managed use which does not adversely affect the croft, the public interest, the interest of the landlord or (if different) the owner, or the use of adjacent land. **Section 5C(8)**

³ Keep in fit state for cultivation (Maintain): includes whether appropriate measures (which may include the provision of drainage) are routinely undertaken, where requisite and practicable, to control or eradicate vermin, bracken, whins, broom, rushes and harmful weeds. **Section 5C(3)**

⁴ Refers to a report from the grazings committee under section 49(A)1 or information in writing from a grazings committee, grazings constable, an assessor, or a member of the crofting community in which the relevant croft or owner-occupier croft is situated that a crofter or owner-occupier crofter is not complying with the duty to cultivate and maintain their croft. **Section 26A (1- 3)**

⁵ Relevant person means the crofter in the case of a croft or an owner-occupier crofter in the case of an owner-occupied croft. **Section 26B(4)**

The Commission must, before the expiry of the period of 14 days beginning with the day on which the representation period ends,¹ decide whether the duty is being complied with. **Section 26C(5)**

If the Commission decide that a duty is not being complied with, they must, before taking any action under section 26H or 26J², give the relevant person a written notice giving the person an opportunity to comply with the duty before the expiry of such period as the Commission consider reasonable. **Section 26D(1)**

The Commission must decide whether to accept an undertaking before the expiry of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the relevant person offers to give the undertaking. **Section 26D(4)**

If the Commission are satisfied that it is in the general interest of the crofting community in the locality of the croft, the Commission must make an order terminating the tenancy of the crofter unless they consider that there is good reason not to. **Section 26H(1)**

POLICY

Crofting Commission Policy Plan on “Duty to cultivate and Maintain”

Failure to cultivate and maintain improved land in the climatic conditions that prevail in the Highlands and Islands can rapidly lead to loss of fertility, water-logging and reversion to scrub land. The Commission considers the duty to cultivate and maintain land or put it to purposeful use to be a priority, reflected in its policy.

Competent reports of failure to cultivate and maintain crofts will be investigated and where proven, the Commission will enforce the requirement to cultivate and maintain crofts. The Commission will determine whether the croft is being cultivated and maintained, as defined in the Act, or put to another purposeful use, taking appropriate specialist advice when necessary.

The Commission will also take evidence from grazings committees and others as necessary in determining whether crofts are cultivated and maintained. The Commission will use its discretionary powers to allow mixed use of crofts for both production and conservation purposes and will allow realistic time for uncultivated or poorly maintained crofts to be brought back into good condition. It will also allow crofters who are unable fully to work their croft, reasonable time to seek assistance.

Any crofter who has consent to be absent from the croft is not released from the duties to cultivate and maintain the croft. In such cases it is likely that the consent to be absent will include conditions to ensure proper management of the croft during the consented absence.

The Commission is not obliged to investigate information provided by individuals or organisations others than those specifically listed in the legislation. However, it may give consideration to information provided where it could prove detrimental to a crofting community, there is specific public interest or the Commission is collaborating with other organisations “for the economic development and social improvement of the crofting counties.”

¹ A representation period of 28 days is available from the date the notice is given to the relevant person. **Section 26C(2)(b)**

² Section 26H enables the Commission to make an order terminating the tenancy of a crofter. Section 26J enables the Commission to direct the owner-occupier crofter to submit a proposal to let the owner-occupied croft.

PROCEDURE

(1) Where the Commission receives a report from a common grazings committee under section 49A(1)¹ which includes information that a crofter is not complying with their duty to cultivate and maintain their croft, it will investigate whether that crofter is complying with the duty. As part of its investigation the Commission may seek further information from the grazings committee. Should the Commission consider the information to be frivolous or vexatious, it will not investigate.

(2) Where the Commission receives information in writing from:

- a grazings committee;
- a grazings constable;
- an assessor;
- a member of the crofting community within which the relevant croft is situated;

that a crofter is not complying with their duty to cultivate and maintain their croft, it will investigate whether that crofter is complying with their duty. As part of its investigation, the Commission may seek further details from those providing the information and will make them aware that all information is subject to Freedom of Information requests. Should the Commission consider the information to be frivolous or vexatious, it will not investigate.

(3) The Commission will investigate reports or information that a crofter is not cultivating and maintaining their croft by writing to the crofter at their last recorded address or any new address provided. If the Commission is unable to contact the crofter concerned, it will post a notice on the relevant croft, indicating the reason why it wishes to contact the crofter. The Commission may also place a notice to the same effect in a relevant newspaper circulating in the locality of the croft. The Commission will provide the crofter with an opportunity to complete a duty compliance investigation form, giving details of their situation, that of the croft and of any mitigating circumstances which may be preventing them from cultivating and maintaining the croft. The Commission may carry out other checks as necessary in the course of investigating whether a crofter is cultivating and maintaining the croft. This may involve an inspection of the croft and report on its condition from a suitably qualified person.

(4) Following the Commission investigation or having determined by some other means that a crofter may not be cultivating and maintaining the croft, the Commission, unless it considers that there is a good reason not to do so, will provide the crofter with written notice informing that it considers the duty is not being complied with. The notice will normally be sent by recorded delivery mail. In certain circumstances the Commission may deliver the notice to a responsible individual on the croft or attach it, or a copy of it to an object on the croft. The Commission will also provide the landlord with a copy of the notice.

(5) Where the Commission has consented to a sublet of the croft under section 27, a notice may only be issued if the subtenant is not complying with the duty. Where the Commission receives a sublet application while in the process of investigating a possible breach of duty to cultivate and maintain it will only issue a notice if the application has been refused. However, no notice will be issued until the period for appealing the decision to the Scottish Land Court has passed. If appealed, the Commission will await the outcome of that appeal before the issue of a notice, if it is required.

¹ A Common Grazings Committee is obliged to provide the Commission with a report which amongst other matters must include whether the Committee considers that a crofter sharing in a common grazing is not complying with duty to cultivate and maintain mentioned in section 5C

- (6) The Commission will explain in the notice why it considers that the duty is not being complied with. It will also advise that the crofter may make representation to the Commission before the expiry of a period of 28 days from when the notice is given. The crofter may make representation in writing, but also has the right to an opportunity be heard in person by an appointee of the Commission within the same 28 day period.¹
- (7) The Commission will take account of any representations received within the 28 day period and may also take account of any representation received after the 28 day period has expired.
- (8) Before the expiry of 14 days from the day on which the period for representation ended the Commission will decide whether the duty is being complied with. The Commission will inform the crofter in writing of its decision.
- (9) Should the Commission decide that the duty is not being complied with, the crofter is entitled to appeal that decision to the Scottish Land Court.
- (10) Where the Commission has decided that the duty is not being complied with, it will give the crofter written notice allowing the crofter an opportunity to give an undertaking to comply with the duty to cultivate or maintain the croft. The Commission will also provide the landlord with a copy of the notice. The Commission will determine the timescale within which an undertaking to comply with the duty must be given.
- (11) The Commission will ensure that the notice will:
 - (a) *explain that the relevant person must give the undertaking before the expiry of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the notice is given;*
 - (b) *explain that the giving of the undertaking by the person constitutes acceptance by the person that the duty is not being complied with;*
 - (c) *set out what the person must do to comply with the undertaking;*
 - (d) *explain that if the person complies with the undertaking, no further action will be taken against the person in respect of the failure to comply with that duty;*

Section 26D(2)
- (12) Before the expiry of a period of 28 days from when the undertaking is offered the Commission will decide whether to accept the undertaking. The Commission may impose conditions as considered appropriate.
- (13) A crofter may appeal to the Scottish Land Court against a Commission decision not to accept an undertaking or to impose conditions on an undertaking. An appeal must be made before the expiry of 42 days beginning with the day on which the decision is made. The Commission will await the prospect of an appeal or the outcome of any decision where an appeal is made before continuing with the process.
- (14) Where the Commission has decided that the duty is not complied with and no appeal has been made or upheld, if made, it will take action to terminate the tenancy of the crofter unless it considers there is a good reason not to.

¹ Refer to Rules of Procedure on *Hearings and the opportunity to be heard following representations*. On account of the legislative requirements representation of this nature will generally have to be made at the Commission headquarters within the stipulated 28 days.

- (15) The Commission cannot take action to terminate a tenancy where the period for giving an undertaking has not expired, or where an undertaking has been given and the period for complying with it has not expired. Nor will the Commission take action where the undertaking has been complied with.
- (16) The Commission will not take such action where it has consented to the sublet of the croft under section 27 and the sublet remains in place. Nor will it take action to terminate the tenancy where a sublet application has been received but has not yet been decided.
- (17) Before taking action to terminate a crofter's tenancy the Commission will consider whether to divide the croft. In determining whether it is fair to do so the Commission will consider the use and occupation of the croft; the interests of the estate in which the croft is located, the sustainable development of the crofting community in the locality of the croft, and other matters that the Commission may consider appropriate.
- (18) The crofter may appeal to the Scottish Land Court against a Commission decision to divide the croft before the expiry of a period of 42 days, beginning with the day on which the decision is made.
- (19) Following the outcome of any appeal to the Scottish Land Court, if one is made, should the Commission divide the croft it will make an application to the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland to register the new crofts in the Crofting Register. Once registered, the Commission will advise the landlord in writing that the division has taken effect. Following registration the Commission may consider taking action to terminate the tenancies of any or all of the new crofts created by the division, where it considers it appropriate to do so.
- (20) Where the Commission has determined that a crofter is not cultivating and maintaining their croft, is also satisfied that it is in the general interest of the crofting community in the locality, and that there is no good reason not to, it will make an order terminating the crofter's tenancy. To assist its consideration of the interests of the crofting community, the Commission will provide an opportunity for representation to be made from members of that crofting community. It may do this by notifying its intent to terminate the tenancy in a newspaper circulating in the locality and/or by other some other suitable means. The Commission will make its decision in line with its policy on what it considers to be relevant to the general interests of crofting communities.
- (21) The Commission will normally send the order by recorded delivery mail to the crofter and also send a copy of the order to the landlord. The order will state the date on which the termination takes effect, which will be at least 28 days after both crofter and landlord have been notified. In certain circumstances the Commission may deliver the order to a responsible person on the croft or attach it, or a copy of it, to an object on the croft.
- (22) The crofter may appeal to the Scottish Land Court against the Commission order terminating the tenancy of the croft before the expiry of the period of 42 days, beginning with the day on which the order is made.