

CROFTING COMMISSION

MINUTE OF THE COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON 20 MARCH 2024 AT 9:00AM IN GREAT GLEN HOUSE

Present:	Malcolm Mathieson	Convener
	Andrew Thin	Commissioner
	Mairi Renwick Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Duncan Gray	Commissioner
	Iain Maciver	Commissioner
	Colin Kennedy	Commissioner
	Donald Macdonald	Commissioner
	Rod Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Gary Campbell	Chief Executive
	Aaron Ramsay	Director of Operations (via Teams)
	Jane Thomas	Director of Corporate Services & Minute-taker
	Heather Mack	Head of Policy, Development & Grazings
	Lynne Hendry	Development Officer (for final item)
	Aileen Rore	Scottish Government (via Teams)
	Observers	Members of staff, Assessors, and public via Teams

1 APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting, with a greeting in Gaelic, followed in English. There were apologies from Commissioner Macaulay and the Commission solicitor. The Convener welcomed members of the public as observers.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 BOARD MINUTES FROM 06 FEBRUARY 2024

The Action Point associated with item 11 in the Minute was queried. The Minute-taker later checked the Minute wording and the notes taken on the day, confirming to the CEO and Convener that the Action Point was correct.

The Minutes were proposed by Commissioner Rod Mackenzie and seconded by Commissioner Gray.

4 REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (*of 6 February 2024*)

The Action Points had largely been discharged or were on the agenda for the day or for future Board meetings.

The CEO gave an update on Action Point 7 regarding National Parks, reporting that he had met with staff of the relevant SG Directorate on 19 March and, as a result, the Commission will now be consulted if there are any plans to take forward applications for park status, to the next stage in the process if they relate to crofting areas.

The Board expressed concern that the Commission had not been engaged as a formal consultee beforehand. A meeting would therefore be arranged for the Convener to speak to the relevant SG officials, on behalf of the Board.

Action Point 1	Arrange meeting for Convener to speak to SG officials on behalf of the Board regarding engagement on the creation of national parks.
-----------------------	--

5 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no Matters Arising.

6 BUSINESS PLAN 2024-2025

The Convener introduced the final iteration of the Business Plan, which had previously been discussed by the AFC in January and the Board in February. He was pleased to see it contains clear and measurable targets.

The CEO thanked the staff involved in putting the detail together for the plan and sponsor division for considering the plan and getting back to us with comments very quickly, to allow the plan to come forward to the Board today for approval. Sponsor Division have made one comment, which will be followed up with relevant staff shortly, but which is not material to the approval.

Commissioners commended the conciseness of the plan and welcomed the ability to approve and have a Business Plan in place for the start of the new reporting year. There was a wish, at some point, to look to the future ambitions of the Board and see this reflected in future plans. The CEO set this in the context of work going forward on the Future of Crofting and the series of Position Papers which will be developed over the next two years.

The Board approved the Business Plan for 2024/25.

Decision	<i>The Board approved the Business Plan for 2024/25</i>
-----------------	--

7 BUDGET 2024-2025

The Board considered the budget outlined for 2024/25. It was approved, while also reflecting that the Commission could not be certain of continuing to receive an inflation proof budget in future.

Decision	<i>The Budget for 2024/25 was approved</i>
-----------------	---

8 REGULATORY CASEWORK UPDATE

The Convener commended the paper, saying that it demonstrates that the positive changes put in place are bearing fruit, adding that he is receiving positive feedback on improvements from the crofting public. The Director of Operations wanted to thank everyone in the Regulatory team for their efforts in reducing the casework outstanding figure, which is on track to meet the end of year target.

In answer to a question on whether the 28-day period for closing incomplete cases is retrospective, Director of Operations explained that this is not always straightforward. He is actively looking at a range of issues and will bring some new ideas to the Board in May, in the form of a paper. The CEO added that it is sometimes a case of unravelling

what is going on in cases that have not progressed, staying within the law, and that there is a 'cold case' team looking at reviewing cases to identify best practice in future cases.

Commissioners wished to compliment staff on the work done so far and looked forward to discussing the paper in May. They agreed that positive change is now measurable and wished to see a future push to delegate more, to get as many cases dealt with at Tier 1 as possible.

A question was raised about RPID reports and whether they are always required. Director of Operations explained that a meeting is planned soon with the relevant RPID liaison officers and the option of requesting shorter reports is being considered. Commissioners wished to see data on how many reports are requested and queried whether there is now an actual backlog, the Convener pointing to a figure of 650-675, which the Glen Shuraig workforce review identified as a 'steady state' casework figure.

The CEO confirmed the determination to clear the oldest cases and work with the risk appetite of the Board, commenting that this will be aided once the changes to the Tier 3 process have bedded in. It was agreed that it is important for the relevant RPID officers to receive training on the recent changes, to allow streamlining to work.

Action Point 2	Provide data on how many RPID reports are requested
Action Point 3	Provide relevant RPID officers with training on recent changes to allow streamlining to work

9 EXTERNAL COMMS STRATEGY

The Convener introduced the topic by congratulating everyone concerned with getting more positive media coverage out over the last couple of months. This was heartening to see. The CEO explained that the paper sets out the idea of putting markers down for every point in the year. He wants to listen to staff and the Board when engaging in external comms, with the Board being informed before any major piece is released pro-actively. The CEO explained that the next stage is to see improvements in internal comms, which includes communication with the Board.

Commissioners advised that there is a need to ensure positive messages about crofting go out to a wide audience, so that the people of Scotland understand more about the value of crofting and what the Commission is trying to achieve. This is the focus of the work on the Future of Crofting and the Value of Crofting already underway.

10 ANNUAL REVIEW OF WORKFORCE PLAN

Before discussing the Workforce Plan, the Convener wanted to thank the authors of the Board papers, which Commissioners are now finding much easier to read. He explained that the plan has been reviewed by the AFC and asked if any clarification on its contents was required.

A point was raised about the need to think hard about how to empower junior staff more and the limited capacity of the senior management team. There was also a concern around clarity on the status of staff being seconded from SG and the role of the Board as an NDPB. In answer to a question on how staff could gain experience by moving within the Commission, Director of Corporate Services said this is being looked at, to see if a system of work-shadowing could be developed.

There were no changes to the Workforce Plan.

11 ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

No changes were requested to Standing Orders, but Commissioners noted that procedure for Tier 3 meetings does not seem to follow clause 4.2. The CEO confirmed there is an operational solution to this.

12 SCOTTISH LAND & ESTATES

The CEO explained that, out of courtesy, he is meeting with the head of SLE, and that the Development team lead on interaction with the group internally.

Commissioner Maciver is the Board member identified to represent the Landlords' interest, as per the Act. The Board need to receive a letter confirming that Scottish Ministers approve this. The Convener will cover this with sponsor division so that the Board has a letter confirming the Minister has approved the selection of Commissioner Maciver.

Action Point 4	The Convener will request that sponsor division arrange for a letter confirming the Minister considers Commissioner Maciver to represent the Landlords' interest.
-----------------------	---

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 May 2024 – St Kilda

14 ANY URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent business was taken in the public session. An item was taken in the closed session.

15 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Convener thanked staff for the presentation, and everyone for their contributions, and closed the meeting.