

CROFTING COMMISSION

MINUTE OF THE COMMISSION MEETING HELD IN GREAT GLEN HOUSE AT 9AM ON 21 AUGUST 2024

Present:	Malcolm Mathieson	Convener
	Andrew Thin	Commissioner
	Mairi Renwick Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Duncan Gray	Commissioner
	Duncan Macaulay	Commissioner
	Colin Kennedy	Commissioner
	Donald Macdonald	Commissioner
	Rod Mackenzie	Commissioner
	Gary Campbell	Chief Executive
	Aaron Ramsay	Director of Operations
	David Findlay	Commission Solicitor
	Jane Thomas	Director of Corporate Services and minute-taker
	Joseph Kerr	Head of Regulatory Support (for paper 10 & 15d)
	Heather Mack	Head of Policy, Development & Grazings
	Lynne Hendry	Development Officer (afternoon session)
	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. Apologies were received from Commissioner Maciver.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

3 BOARD MINUTES FROM 26 JUNE 2024

The Minute was approved, and the Convener extended his thanks to Commissioner Thin for chairing the meeting.

4 REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Most of the Action Points had been discharged or were agenda items for this or future Board meetings. Commission solicitor emailed Board members regarding Action Point 3 on 20 August. As they had not had the chance to respond, the item will remain live and be carried forward.

5 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

6 AUDIT & FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(a) Update from Vice Chair

Members had a paper drafted by the Vice Chair summarising the main topics covered in the committee meeting. It had been a very full meeting. One issue noted by the committee was a project which had not been budgeted for. Care needs to be taken to ensure this is not repeated.

The Vice Chair also wished to raise a concern around the adequacy of the senior management resource at the Commission. Without an adequate senior management resource there is an increased risk to the effective running of the organisation.

(b) Draft Minute of 24 July 2024

The draft Minute was noted, and the Convener thanked the Head of Finance for the quality of the Minutes and committee papers.

(c) Annual Report on committee activity

This was noted.

(d) Annual Report & Accounts 2023-24

Commissioners were content to approve the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24.

Decision	Commissioners approved the Annual Report & Accounts for 2023-24
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7 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 APRIL-JUNE 2024

Director of Corporate Services introduced the short paper accompanying the report. Many of the report targets have a Green RAG status. The Board discussed the item currently with a Red status and those sitting at Amber.

There was a general discussion on the resourcing of the Grazings team and the role of the Commission in engaging with grazings committees. There was a call for more cross team working to assist with grazings work if necessary. There was a recognition that the work of supporting grazings committees and common grazings in general is challenging and therefore the Board will review and discuss this in more depth at a future meeting.

In response to a query on a public consultation on agricultural support mechanisms, the Convener agreed to arrange a separate online meeting with members to discuss.

Action Point 1	The Board will discuss how the Commission engages with grazings committees at a future meeting
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Action Point 2	Convener to arrange an online meeting with Commissioners to discuss public consultation on agricultural support mechanisms
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8 REVIEW STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER Q1

The Audit & Finance Committee had considered the Strategic Risk Register. A new risk at S14 was recommended, to cover the appointment of a new Convener and it was recommended that the risk at S10 on CIS could be discharged. This was agreed and the Board noted the increasing risk to medium term budgets, given the recent Directive from the Scottish Government.

9 ANNUAL REVIEW OF GAELIC LANGUAGE PLAN MONITORING REPORT

Director of Corporate Services explained that the Board has an opportunity each year to review progress on the Commission’s commitments in its Gaelic Language Plan, before a report is submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Members were content with progress and with the format to be used for the report to the Bòrd.

The need to be aware of budget constraints was recognised.

(Connectivity with those joining the meeting as observers via Teams was lost at this point)

10 VACANT CROFTS

Head of Regulatory Support joined the meeting and introduced the paper, explaining that it stems from work undertaken by a Short-Term Working Group formed by the previous Board to review the work of the RALU team. There are around 1100 crofts that fall into the category of vacant crofts, in a legal sense but where the croft is often not ‘vacant’ in common sense terms.

The paper recommends a new status of owner of a vacant croft, changing the status on the RoC, conducting some publicity work, and writing to those affected. There are 908 crofts which fall into this category where the status will be changed from “Landlord to Owner”.

Commissioners expressed support for the initiative but felt that it is important for the organisation to articulate what the Outcome will be, as staff resources are being expended on it. We need to understand what success will look like, via a measurable target. This will be included as a new KPI as part of the forthcoming vacant crofts project. The four recommendations set out in the paper were approved.

Decision	<i>The Board approved the four recommendations set out in the paper</i>
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Action Point 3	A new KPI will be devised to measure the Outcome of the change as part of the forthcoming vacant crofts project
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11 BOARD DATES FOR 2025

The Convener introduced the paper, explaining the context, asking if Board members are content with the suggested mix of virtual and face-to-face meetings. The CEO explained that the proposals bring the Commission into line with the practice of most NDPBs and establish a fixed day for the Board to spend with staff, as well as a Strategy Day at a good point in the year to look ahead with senior managers.

Commissioners were supportive but stressed the value of interacting outside Board meetings, with a need to have discussions to allow for horizon-scanning and information exchange. There was also support for more systematic stakeholder engagement but a recognition that this needs to be driven by the CEO. There was a mix of views on preference for virtual or in-person meetings but an acceptance of the trend towards more virtual meetings for convenience and cost saving.

Commissioners agreed the dates set out in the paper except for the late April meeting, which will be moved to early May.

12 REVIEW OF APPROVED PUBLICATIONS

Director of Operations explained that while the paper covers a fairly low level operational issue, it comes to the Board because the existing policy was set by the Board. In answer to a question about the inclusion of smaller local papers in a particular area, he confirmed these would be included in the list. He explained the publications list is dynamic and will change.

Members queried why the website could not be used more. At present, it cannot be used exclusively. The paper was approved, and the Director of Operations will bring a short paper to the October Board meeting about displaying advertisements on the website and Regulatory applications.

Action Point 4	Director of Operations to bring a short paper to October Board meeting on displaying adverts on the website and Regulatory applications.
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13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held in St Kilda, Great Glen House on 9 October 2024.

14 ANY URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent business had been raised with the Convener. He wished to take this opportunity to thank Board members for the way in which they have participated in the Bill consultation meetings across the crofting counties, ensuring the Commission has been represented at all the meetings. He also wished to put on record his thanks to staff who have attended a variety of agricultural shows over the summer, which has resulted in positive feedback from crofting communities.

Commissioners also wished to record their appreciation of the strides being made by staff on efficiencies and change improvements.

The Convener closed the public session of the meeting.

15 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Board reconvened after lunch for an afternoon session led by Head of Policy, Development & Grazings and Development Officer, Lynne Hendry on the Future Vision of Crofting.