

# **Royal Society of Edinburgh Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hill and Island Areas**

## **Submission by the Scottish Equestrian Association**

### **Introduction and Background**

The Scottish Equestrian Association (SEA) wishes to inform the Inquiry on behalf of equestrian interests in Scotland. SEA is the governing body of equestrian sports in Scotland and is recognised as such by **sportscotland** and the Scottish Executive. The Association is also the umbrella body of all equestrian activities and industries. Membership of SEA includes 24 bodies (Appendix 1: SEA Members) ranging from Riding for the Disabled to Scottish Racing and Racing School. SEA has the objectives of leading, guiding and enabling the equestrian sector to achieve higher levels of participation and excellence through its member bodies, and by promoting horse-based activities within all sections of the community

The responses to the questions posed by the RSE Committee will be specific to equestrian and allied interests.

### **Responses to Questions**

#### ***1) What would you perceive to be the main drivers of change and sources of income generation in upland and island areas of Scotland?***

Deleterious drivers for change in upland and island areas have been some aspects of the Common Agricultural Policy and the dismantling of much of the Scottish fishing industry as a result of EC Fisheries Policy. In addition to the development of e-business, aquaculture and forestry, the main driver of positive change and income generation has been and continues to be the expanding tourism industry. Equestrian tourism plays an important role in the overall vacation experience by both British and overseas visitors. Equine tourism involves tourists taking part in or observing horse-based activities such as pony trekking, trail riding, hacking, horse trials/shows, racing and carriage driving. Participants, from beginners to experienced riders, may take part in activities offered by riding and trekking centres or use their own horses for competitive sport or leisure riding, often arranging B & B for both rider and horse.

A recent BETA survey (British Equestrian Trade Association: The National Equestrian Survey 2006) showed that, in line with the British data, 7% of the Scottish population participated in equestrian activity (based on riding at least once in the previous 12 months). Approximately 200,000 people ride, drive or vault (gymnastics on horseback) each week. There are around 100,000 horses in Scotland, including those used for leisure pursuits and competition, and breeding and young stock. Further there is convincing evidence of a sharply rising trend in rider numbers over the years between 1998 and 2006 for Britain as a whole. The survey indicated that in 2005 86% of riders did so for pleasure rather than competitive reasons, emphasising the important role the countryside plays in the enjoyment of their sport.

The BETA survey was limited to observations on the activities and attitudes of the British population, and thus took no account of foreign tourists who participate in

equestrian tourism. Unfortunately there are no reliable statistics on the number of overseas visitors who include horse riding as part of their vacation, although centre managers report that large numbers of Europeans and North Americans regard riding as an important component of their holiday.

In Scotland there were 251 licensed (under the Riding Establishments Acts 1964 and 1970) riding centres in 2005 (Survey of Local Authorities conducted by SEA: Appendix 2). This figure does not include an increasing number of unlicensed centres that operate illegally with apparent impunity, unconcerned about health and safety, and public liability insurance. In the upland and island areas there were 156 licensed centres. In Scotland as a whole and in the upland and island regions there were 35% and 36% respectively of the licensed centres approved by one or more of the three standard setting bodies, the Trekking and Riding Society of Scotland (TRSS; the governing body of recreational riding in Scotland), the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS) and the British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS). These organisations by inspection of personnel, premises, horses and practice methods give an assurance of quality to the riding public over and above the requirements for licensing. If one of the drivers of the tourist industry is a demand for improving quality standards, this must also be apparent in rider safety, animal welfare and ride experience. It is, thus, important that membership of the approval bodies increases above its present level. Essential to this objective is the training of riding centre staff. All three organisations offer qualifications for riding centre personnel, but only TRSS and British Equestrian Tourism (administered by the British Horse Society) have qualifications specifically targeted at the equestrian tourism business.

By combining their survey data with information from a Henley Centre Report (A Report of Research on the Horse Industry in Great Britain 2004, commissioned by DEFRA and the British Horse Industry Confederation, with the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive) ([www.defra.gov.uk/rural/horses](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/horses)) BETA estimated that the value to the Scottish economy from the equestrian sector, including leisure riding in addition to competitive activities and related industries and professions (saddlers, clothing, feed, farriery, veterinary services, deer stalking, horse transport etc) was over £250M per annum.

## ***2) What are the attributes of social, cultural and economic value in Scotland's hill and island areas?***

The low population density found in most upland and island areas leads to an appreciation of local identity not found in major towns and cities. This results in a greater level of social cohesion and interaction. Participants in equestrian activities interact with nature and the environment leading to an understanding of the need for conservation on a local and global scale.

The major economic value of Scotland's hills and islands to equestrian and other types of tourism lies in the unspoilt topography that is almost unique in Europe, particularly where wild country (characterised as remote with low population density) is concerned.

Native breeds such as the Clydesdale horse and Highland, Shetland and Eriskay ponies form part of Scotland's heritage, and their conservation should be encouraged, not only to maintain diversity within the equine gene pool. With studs of other non-

indigenous types, they constitute a source of animals for all types of equestrian sport from trekking to thoroughbred racing.

***3) How will changes in agriculture, forestry and tourism affect the economies of these areas and what scope is there for alternative sources of income and employment?***

Changes in agriculture and forestry that have an adverse effect upon the scenic value of the countryside will result in reduced revenue from tourism. There is considerable scope for alternative sources of income and employment in expanding the 'extreme sports' sector such as trail riding, canyoning, paragliding, etc. The development and promotion of such activities by VisitScotland are limited and uncoordinated, probably because of limited funding. An example of their current publication to promote riding in Scotland (*RidingScotland, 2005*) is attached. The booklet represents 'Riding Centres that meet all your needs' but includes only 32 out of 88 approved centres, possibly because of the requirement for each centre to pay for an entry. This highlights the need for improved promotional training of centre proprietors and for increased appreciation of the potential of equestrian tourism by VisitScotland. The importance of the internet for holiday information and booking of accommodation and sporting activities cannot be overemphasised. An example of a web site promoting centres approved by the Trekking and Riding Society of Scotland may be seen at [www.ridinginscotland.com](http://www.ridinginscotland.com). There is an opportunity to combine many of the country sports with the rapidly increasing interest in wildlife tourism, fuelled by TV programmes such as *Nature Watch* and *Planet Earth*.

In spite of the 251 licensed equestrian centres there remains scope for increasing the number of centres in remoter areas where access to leisure riding is absent or limited. The constraining factors include the economics of running such a business with possibly seasonal (Easter to October) operation and scarcity of suitably qualified staff. Farm Diversification Grants and, in the Highlands and Islands, the Agricultural Business Development Scheme led to the development of a few riding centres and livery yards; however, these funds are no longer available, although they may continue in some form once the Rural Development Regulation 2007 – 2013 has been approved. Care must be taken in the use of public money to subsidise the start-up of new equestrian businesses, as in some areas existing centres are struggling to remain viable without the introduction of more competition.

In 2006 the Scottish Executive produced a document, Consultation on Rural Development Programme for Scotland 2007 – 2013, that disappointed in many of its strategic themes, particularly for equestrian interests. The horse was not mentioned in any part of the document. The inference was that equestrian activities, whether recreational, sporting or breeding, are not seen as playing any significant role in the social, economic or environmental fabric of rural life during the programme period. The absence of the horse may have been in part a direct reflection of it not being categorised as an agricultural species, unless used to farm agricultural land or produce meat or hides (Agriculture Act 1947). Reclassification would have a profound impact on how equestrianism is regarded in all aspects of legislation, funding and planning; however, there are EC implications that have to be taken into account.

The refusal of the last Scottish Executive to develop a strategy for the horse in Scotland is a major disadvantage (Appendix 3).

***4) What are the impacts of changes to land use and ownership on the landscape, environment and communities of these areas?***

As long as changes to land use and ownership result in minimal or no impact upon the scenic beauty of the countryside and the sustainability of the environment there should be little effect upon the expanding tourism industry. Equestrian activity is dependent upon access to paths, bridleways and drove roads which will continue to be protected by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The legislation confers a duty on local authorities to draw up plans for a system of paths known as core paths, providing a framework of routes for reasonable public access. It is important that leisure riders are accepted as legitimate users of both core and non-core paths.

Policy planning in these areas is vitally important to the enjoyment of the countryside and the protection of both the indigenous population and the environment. Sustainability is key to the use of paths, bridleways and drove roads. Access forums should be aware of their responsibilities in this regard, and of the differing needs of walkers, riders, cyclists and other path users.

Recent changes in land ownership in upland and island areas have led to a rapid growth in new housing, frequently comprising kit houses that sadly do not conform to traditional building styles and are more suited to urban suburbs. The implications of this in the generation of tourism have yet to be assessed.

The conservation of wild land is very important with the greatest threat at present being the development of wind farms and their associated transmission systems. These would have a deleterious effect on this primal landscape so valued for recreational activities including equestrian sport, while providing a relatively small contribution to the national grid. The Lewis wind farm and the proposed Beaully/Denny power line are cases in point. Wave and tide power should be developed more quickly, and the opportunity to research, design and manufacture the necessary technology in rural and island areas pursued as a matter of urgency.

***5) What are the implications of climate change on agriculture, forestry and communities in Scotland's hill and island areas?***

If global warming continues winter sports will be the first to suffer, but alternative country sports may well benefit. Little effect on equestrian sport and leisure riding is anticipated, although increased rainfall during the peak tourist seasons could prove a disincentive for participants in outdoor pursuits.

***6) What are the regional variations in opportunities and disadvantages and how can these be accounted for in policies and support structures at the Scottish level?***

Emphasis should be placed on the role that equestrian activities can play economically and socially in sustaining remote areas, particularly where equestrian tourism (hacking, trekking and trail riding) can be developed. Availability and diversity of employment may lead to increased retention of young people in hill and island communities, particularly where vocational training is offered by the employer.

It would be a major advance if payments per hectare for actively farmed land were to encompass pasture grazed or conserved for horses, even in mixed stocking systems, although the non-agricultural status of the riding and driving horse precludes this at present. If hectare payments are retained it would assist our more disadvantaged equestrian centres were payments greater in more 'fragile' areas under a Less Favoured Area Support Scheme. Vocational training is also worthy of financial support.

06/08/07

## APPENDIX 1: Scottish Equestrian Association Members



# Our Members

### Full Executive Members

British Show Jumping  
Association  
Scottish Branch  
Scottish Carriage Driving  
Scottish Equestrian Vaulting,  
Trekking & Riding Society of  
Scotland  
Scottish Endurance Riding  
Clubs,  
Scottish Equine Breeders  
Association  
British Show Pony Society  
Scotland

### Probationary Members

The Pony Club in Scotland  
British Riding Clubs in  
Scotland  
Oatridge College  
(L.B.C.Scot)  
Riding for the Disabled  
Scotland  
British Eventing Scottish  
Committee  
British Dressage Scotland  
Committee

### Associate Members

Scottish Countryside Alliance  
Western Riding Scotland  
International League for Protection  
of Horses in Scotland  
Mounted Games Association (GB)  
Scottish Branch  
Scottish Icelandic Horse  
Association  
Scottish Racing & Racing School  
Jumpcross Scotland  
Association of British Riding  
Schools Scotland  
Scottish Polo Clubs  
British Equestrian Trade  
Association  
Scottish Harness Racing

## APPENDIX 2

### Riding Centres in Scotland licensed by Local Authorities\* and approved by Standard-setting Bodies\*\* (2005)

Local Authority	No of centres licensed by Local Authority	No of centres 'approved'
<b>Hill &amp; Island Areas</b>		
Aberdeenshire	19	11
Angus	7	1
Argyll & Bute	22	9
Dumfries & Galloway	18	4
Highland	33	8
Moray	10	3
Orkney Islands	0	0
Perth & Kinross	15	6
Scottish Borders	19	7
Shetland Islands	3	0
Stirling	7	4
Western Isles	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>54 (34.6%)</b>
<b>Other Areas</b>		
Aberdeen City	2	2
Clackmannanshire	1	0
Dundee City	1	0
East Ayrshire	9	2
East Dunbartonshire	4	0
East Lothian	6	3
East Renfrewshire	3	2
Edinburgh City	2	1
Falkirk	4	1
Fife	14	5
Glasgow City	3	2
Inverclyde	2	1
Midlothian	3	1
North Ayrshire	7	2
North Lanarkshire	4	2
Renfrewshire	5	1
South Ayrshire	6	2
South Lanarkshire	12	2
West Dunbartonshire	3	2
West Lothian	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>34 (35.8%)</b>

\*Licensed under the Riding Establishments Act

\*\*Three organisations, the Trekking & Riding Society of Scotland, the Association of British Riding Schools and the British Horse Society, have approval schemes for riding centres that provide an additional level of quality control and rider safety

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Strategy for the Horse Industry**

#### England and Wales

The strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales was launched on 6 December 2005 by the then Minister for the Horse Industry. The Strategy is supported by an Action Plan published in March 2006, and may be accessed on the British Horse Industry Confederation (BHIC) website [www.bhic.co.uk](http://www.bhic.co.uk), which was part-funded by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Strategy has been developed by BHIC in partnership with Government and sets out a vision of where the horse industry aspires to be within 10 years. Its purpose is to foster a sustainable horse industry, increase its economic value, enhance the welfare of the horse, and develop the industry's contribution to the cultural, social, educational, health and sporting life of the nation.

#### Scotland

The Scottish Equestrian Association believes that a Strategy for the Horse in Scotland would assist its objectives in fostering a sustainable and expanding equestrian industry, and achieve higher levels of participation and excellence.

With the importance of the horse in its potential contribution to tourism in upland and island areas, there is arguably as great a justification for a Strategy for Scotland as there is for England and Wales. The involvement of Government would increase recognition of the role that the horse industry can play in developing the social, educational and health benefits of equestrianism, in addition to its contribution to the economic performance of the countryside.

SEA made representations to the previous Scottish administration through the Scottish Executive Environmental and Rural Affairs Department requesting that the Executive participate in formulating a Strategy for the Horse in Scotland. The need for such a Strategy was rejected by SEERAD.