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Media Information

Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hill & Island Areas

Recognising that changes to policy affecting the countryside will have a major impact on distinctive communities in Scotland, The Royal Society of Edinburgh's independent Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hill & Island Areas is launched today. Instigated by the Council of The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), the aim of this wide-ranging investigation is to find ways to help secure a prosperous and environmentally-sustainable future for the rural areas, especially the more economically-fragile communities. Chaired by the distinguished economist, Professor Gavin McCrone, the Inquiry Committee will make recommendations that seek to respond not only to threats posed by changes in agricultural support as a result of present and anticipated reform to the Common Agricultural Policy, but also to the opportunities for expansion in other parts of the economy, such as tourism and forestry, and measures to safeguard the environment. The Committee will report to the Council of the RSE by June 2008 when its findings will be published and made widely available.

Inquiry Chairman, Professor Gavin McCrone said:

Issues affecting Scotland's hill and island areas create uncertainties about the future of the communities, maintenance of environmental quality and prospects for economic development. Major challenges and opportunities exist, especially to and for agriculture as the CAP is reformed, but also with proposed major expansion in forestry and the potential for recreation and tourism. Greater recognition is also being made of the natural resources of these areas and the contribution that can be made, especially in renewable energy with careful planning and wildlife management, which calls for stewardship. These issues affect not only the Highlands and Islands but the whole of the Scottish uplands, including the Grampians and the Southern Uplands. They will have implications for the environment, management of the landscape, the economy and the communities themselves.

Remit

The remit of the Inquiry will be to:

- Identify the main drivers of change in upland and island areas of Scotland, including:
 - changes to European agricultural and regional development funding;
 - European and International Instruments on biodiversity;
 - trends in tourism, forestry and recreational pursuits;
 - demography; and
 - Scottish and UK Government legislation and policy.
- Identify the attributes of social, cultural, environmental and economic value in Scotland's hill and island areas.
- Consider how a change in agriculture may affect the economies of these areas and what scope there is for alternative sources of income and employment.
- Consider the impact of changes to land use and ownership on the landscape, environment, housing and communities of these areas.
- Review some of the implications of climate change for Scotland's hill and island areas.
- Recommend policies, financial instruments and institutional arrangements to encourage new patterns of enterprise, and to facilitate community initiatives in these areas.

Challenges and Opportunities

The economies of some of these areas are now much more prosperous and diversified, with growth in service industries as well as in other types of production. Population, which had

previously declined, has increased in many of the areas, particularly in the north and west. But their future sustainability and prosperity will be dependent upon progressive change and adaptability.

Despite the welcome diversification, many areas are still very dependent on land-based activities. Changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) mean that support which was geared to production has now largely been replaced by direct support to farmers' income through the Single Farm Payment (SFP) and the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme. Further changes in the CAP are expected in 2013, with possible changes to both of these major forms of support as governments seek to reduce the cost of the CAP. Increasingly, support for agriculture is likely to be linked to the need for environmental preservation and improvement.

Both in the Highlands and Islands and in the Southern Uplands, there have been significant changes in the past 50 years. While the number of sheep has fallen sharply in recent years, other modes of land use which will help retain population have developed. In forestry, the emphasis has shifted to give public access, recreation, biodiversity and other environmental benefits a place alongside commercial planting. The Scottish Executive's Forestry Strategy aspires to increase coverage of woodland from 17 per cent to 25 per cent of total area by the second half of this century. Tourism now makes a greater contribution to both GDP and employment in these areas than either agriculture or forestry, but earnings are low and seasonal. Visit Scotland is looking for a 50 per cent increase in this industry - much of which could be in the Hill and Island areas. The RSE's Committee will aim to set out the action that will be necessary in these areas for such an increase to be achieved.

New technology can open up more opportunities for a wider range of economic activity. But in all these instances, appropriate community structures are needed to permit advantage to be taken of these opportunities. It is essential that we explore what lies ahead, both with those who live in these areas and the public more generally. There are important interconnections between changes in agriculture, forestry, tourism and other activities that will have an impact on the prosperity of these communities, and their cultures, landscapes and environments. Crofting is the subject of a current Scottish Executive Inquiry, but there is also a need to consider what role a revitalised crofting system can play. There are also wider issues: the implications for these areas of climate change, the development of biofuels and the implications for food production. We need to understand much more about all these interconnections, how they might be strengthened and how the institutional arrangements and policies that will determine the future of our hills and islands might be made more effective.

Committee Membership:

Professor Gavin McCrone CB, FRSE, (*Committee Chairman*). Former RSE Vice-President.†

Professor Jeff Maxwell OBE, FRSE, (*Committee Vice-Chairman*). Former Director, Macaulay Land Use Research Institute; Chair of the Tenant Farming Forum (Scotland).

Professor Roger Crofts CBE, FRSE (*Committee Secretary*). Independent Environment and Management Adviser; Non-Executive Director, Scottish Agricultural College; Honorary Professor of Geography, University of Aberdeen; Former Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage.

Dr Andrew Barbour. Forestry Manager, Atholl Estates; Vice-Chairman, Deer Commission for Scotland; Member Forestry Commission, Perth and Kinross Forestry Forum and their Regional Advisory Committee; Farmer at Fincastle.

Professor Nicholas Hanley. Professor of Environmental Economics, University of Stirling.

Professor James Hunter CBE FRSE. Former Chairman Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Director, University of the Highlands and Islands Centre for History; Board Member, Scottish Natural Heritage.

Dr Barbara Kelly CBE, DL. Partner in a farming enterprise in Dumfriesshire; Convener, Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust; Governor, Crichton Foundation; President, Southern Uplands Partnership.

Professor Karl Linklater FRAgS, FIBiol, FRCVS, FRSE. Former Principal and Chief Executive of the Scottish Agricultural College; Past President of the British Veterinary Association.

Mr Drew Ratter. Highlands and Islands Enterprise Board Member; Chairman of the Crofters Commission; Member, Scottish Consumers' Council; Crofter in Shetland; Former Shetland Islands Councillor.

Professor Derek Reid. Chairman, Harris Tweed Textiles; Visiting Professor of Tourism, University of Abertay and former Chief Executive, Scottish Tourist Board.

Professor Bill Slee. Economist at Macaulay Land Use Research Institute.

Notes for Editors

Consultation Questions

In order to inform the work of the Inquiry, the Committee invites organisations and individuals with relevant experience to send in their views on some, or all, of the following issues:

- 1) *What would you perceive to be the main drivers of change and sources of income generation in upland and island areas of Scotland?*
- 2) *What are the attributes of social, cultural and economic value in Scotland's hill and island areas?*
- 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?*
- 4) *What are the impacts of changes to land use and ownership on the landscape, environment and communities of these areas?*
- 5) *What are the implications of climate change on agriculture/communities in Scotland's hill and island areas?*
- 6) *What are the regional variations in opportunities and disadvantage and how can these be accounted for in policies and support structures at the Scottish level?*

Submissions should be made to the Inquiry by 20 August 2007, preferably by e-mail to: evidenceadvice@royalsoced.org.uk, or by hard copy to:

Dr Marc Rands,
The Royal Society of Edinburgh,
22-26 George Street,
Edinburgh
EH2 2PQ

As with previous RSE Inquiries, in order to share and disseminate the evidence received, it is the intention to publish submissions on the RSE website, unless requested to be kept in confidence.

Funding

The Society is actively seeking funding from a broad range of individuals and private and charitable bodies to cover the cost of running the Inquiry. The RSE is most grateful to its Inquiry Committee Members who are giving their time and expertise voluntarily. Current donors to the inquiry are:

Argyll and Bute Council
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Highland Council
Orkney Islands Council
Perth & Kinross Council
Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland
Scottish Enterprise Rural Group
Shetland Islands Council
South of Scotland Alliance
The Lisbet Rausing Trust
The Scottish Forestry Trust
UPM Tilhill

Professor Gavin McCrone – Biography

Professor Gavin McCrone is a former Vice-President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and was Vice-Chairman of the RSE Inquiry on the Future of the Scottish Fishing Industry. He was a Visiting Professor at the Edinburgh University Management School from 1994-2005 and a professor at Glasgow University from 1992-1994. He was Chief Economic Adviser to the Secretary of State for Scotland from 1970-1992. Gavin McCrone was Chairman, Committee of Inquiry into Professional Conditions of Service for Teachers, 1999-2000.

Previous Independent RSE Inquiries

Inquiry into Energy Issues for Scotland

June 2006

Inquiry into the Future of the Scottish Fishing Industry

March 2004

Inquiry into Foot & Mouth Disease in Scotland

July 2002

The Scientific Issues Surrounding the Control of Infectious Salmon Anaemia (ISA) in Scotland

June 2002

Encouraging Resolution: Mediating Patient/Health Service Disputes in Scotland

June 2002.

Full details of these inquiries: www.royalsoced.org.uk

About the RSE

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is an educational charity, registered in Scotland. Independent and non-party-political, our wide-ranging educational activities include:

- Organising lectures, debates and conferences
- Conducting major independent inquiries
- Providing educational activities for school students throughout Scotland
- Distributing over £1.7 million to top researchers and entrepreneurs
- Showcasing to the World the best of our research and development
- Increasing two-way international exchange
- Encouraging, promoting and rewarding excellence
- Offering state-of-the-art conference facilities
- Publishing internationally respected learned journals

The RSE was founded in 1783 by Royal Charter for the “Advancement of Learning and Useful Knowledge”. Today it has around 1400 Fellows whose expertise encompasses the full spectrum of the sciences, medicine, engineering and technology, education, law, the arts, humanities, social sciences, business, industry, the professions and public service. This multi-disciplinary perspective makes the RSE unique amongst the United Kingdom’s learned societies. It is funded by a range of carefully selected charitable, public and private bodies. Its mission today is providing public benefit through the advancement of learning and useful knowledge.

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