



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 15/04/08

CROFTERS' ANGUISH OVER SCOTLAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

As it unfolds, the true shortfalls of the Scottish Rural Development Programme are becoming apparent. The Scottish Crofting Foundation has been inundated with complaints and pleas for help from crofters and small-holders regarding the SRDP, the main route to Scottish Government support for rural enterprises.

SCF Past-Chair Norman Leask said "This is something that affects all rural development, crofting being one of the main enterprises in the Highlands and Islands. There were measures that were good for crofters in the old Land Managers Contracts and environmental schemes, for example the maintenance of footpaths for access to the countryside, animal health plans and membership of certain farm assurance schemes, but these have been taken out of the new Land Managers Options – the bit which can be accessed by post. So the only part of the SRDP that is fully accessible has little or nothing in it for crofters. The larger part, 'Rural Priorities', is out of the reach of many crofters, it being only accessible 'on-line' and so the only way they can apply is by paying for consultancy services to make an application for them – not cost effective for small initiatives."

"It is all well and good for an Edinburgh office based civil servant to say that internet applications are easy for all, but many people in the Highlands and Islands are not confident with computers and many areas do not get broadband – which is essential for this complicated process. To put it in perspective, even the Scottish Government's Crofters Commission notifies people of up-coming meetings or transactions by nailing bits of paper to telegraph poles in townships!"

Making the application process only available on-line has attracted a great deal of criticism from rural areas all over Scotland. Published broadband coverage figures do not relate to real life – many rural areas that officially have coverage only have a few ports available on local exchanges so few households actually get broadband. And many of those who do get broadband only get 0.5 Mb download speeds. And of course broadband availability does not mean broadband use – many people are not 'computer literate' and do not know how to access the internet.

Leask again "it may be alright for large farm businesses with a manager in an office, but not small, often single-handed enterprises like crofts. A recognised strategy to ease funding

management is to make accessibility difficult and unattractive to small bids, so that the funding tends to go to a smaller number of larger bids thus easing the funding administration workload.”

“When asked how a crofter with no computer accesses the Rural Priorities scheme a spokesman from the Inverness Scottish Government office advised ‘go to your local library’. Crofters are beyond being angry, they are despondent – this is just another nail in the coffin. Does this meet the Government’s no 1 target of a wealthier and **fairer** Scotland? Well, my advice to crofters and small-holders who can not access this fund is to let this be known to your MSP”.

END

<u>Contact:</u>	Norman Leask, Past Chairman	01595 693714 / 07957 936831
	Hugh Donaldson, Vice Chairman	01967 431815 / 07880 553989
	Patrick Krause, Chief Executive	01599 566 365 / 07739 941199
	Donald Murdie, Land Use Projects Manager	01851 612 484 / 07921 059396

Notes to editors

| Pictures can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/index.php/home>