

Land Reform Bill

The Scottish Government has welcomed the overall message and direction of the Land Reform Review Group's report, *The Land of Scotland and the Common Good*, published in May this year. As part of the on-going commitment to land reform and as part of the response to the report, they have taken forward commitments:

- To improve the transparency of land ownership in Scotland Scottish Ministers have announced the target to complete the Land Register of Scotland within 10 years, and within 5 for public sector land
- Proposals to improve existing community rights to buy, introduced to the Scottish Parliament by the Community Empowerment Bill, that, if passed, will allow urban communities to exercise a right to buy and will introduce a new community right to buy for neglected or abandoned land;
- A commitment to develop a strategy to achieve the First Minister's target for 1 million acres in community ownership by 2020
- A commitment to extend the Scottish Land Fund over the 2016-2020 spending period
- A commitment to bring forward a Land Reform Bill within this Parliamentary term.

Land Reform is a key component of the Programme for Government for 2014-2015 and the Scottish Government's aim to improve the lives of the people of Scotland.

On the 26 November 2014, the First Minister, as part of the Programme for Government, set out the Scottish Government's vision that Scotland's land must be an asset that benefits the many, not the few.

Land reform aims to ensure the correct balance of land rights to achieve this vision. This can only be achieved through a package of measures, taken forward and understood together.

The Land Reform Bill that is designed to:

A) DEMONSTRATE A LONG TERM COMMITMENT TO LAND REFORM

- by setting up a Scottish Land Reform Commission to underpin land reform by providing the evidence base for further land reform measures and assessing the impact of existing policies.

B) IMPROVE THE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF LAND OWNERSHIP

- by making public sector information on land, its value and ownership readily available to support open and transparent decision making by both the private and public sectors; and
- limiting the legal entities that can, in future, take ownership of land in Scotland.

C) ADDRESS BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BEGIN TO DIVERSIFY PATTERNS OF LAND OWNERSHIP

- by providing powers for Scottish Ministers, or other public bodies, to intervene in situations where the scale or pattern of land ownership in an area, and the conduct of a landowner, is acting as a barrier to sustainable development.

D) DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE LAND AND RIGHTS IN LAND FOR THE COMMON GOOD

- by facilitating proactive management of public sector land in the wider public interest by extending the powers of Forestry Commissioners;
- placing a duty of community engagement on charitable trustees, when making decisions on land under the trustees control; and
- to end the business (non-domestic) rates exemption for shooting and deerstalking and bring these businesses back into line with other ratepayers who help fund local services.

E) ADDRESS SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF LAND OWNERSHIPS AND RIGHTS

- by further modernisation of Common Good to promote greater flexibility on use and remove the need for references to the Courts;
- to improve deer management legislation;
- to take forward legislative changes required in light of the upcoming recommendations of the Agricultural Holdings Review on the future of tenant farming; and

on public access, to make clarifications to the core paths planning process as set out in Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.