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Media Information

Independent Inquiry Calls for New Policy to Avert Crisis in Hill & Island Agriculture

A new commitment to achieving rural community viability in Scotland is required. The report of The Royal Society of Edinburgh's major, independent Inquiry into Scotland's Hills and Islands, launched today (8 September 2008), states that there is a critical need to integrate social, economic and environmental measures for rural areas and empower communities to act within an overall national strategy.

Highlighting opportunities as well as challenges, the wide-ranging report makes 66 key recommendations. The independent Inquiry's overall objectives are: achieving a sustainable future for the Hills and Islands with vibrant and viable human communities; an integrated diversity of land uses; well-managed natural systems and landscapes that also contribute to amelioration of climate change; development of other economic opportunities such as tourism, renewable energy and food; supported by appropriate financial mechanisms and services. The report suggests that Scotland:

- recognise that the continuing decline in hill and island agriculture has implications for biodiversity, landscape management and food security
- develop a Strategic Land Use Policy Framework to provide a more integrated and coordinated basis for decision-making
- needs substantial shifts in decision-making and delivery of public resources from centrally-based agencies to regionally-based structures
- recognise the importance of tourism and stimulating economic growth and radically reform the support structures for tourism
- halt the closure of rural post offices until a new, wider rationale is developed
- has no possibility of achieving the targets set by Scottish Government, (at present rates of planting forestry), but that an effective carbon trading scheme, which gives forestry benefit, could transform the industry
- recognise that combating climate change now needs to be a major factor and that the EU should be urged to give credit to forestry investment in meeting emissions targets.

Inquiry Chairman, Professor Gavin McCrone said:

This independent Inquiry arose from concerns at the decline in hill and island agriculture and the possible impact on rural communities. We reject the UK Government's proposals to end direct support when the Common Agricultural Policy is reviewed in 2013. This would have a very damaging effect on the natural heritage and on agriculture in the Hills and Islands and accelerate the present decline. Scotland receives less EU funding for rural development than other countries which puts land managers at a serious disadvantage. This needs to be changed when the CAP is next reviewed.

Having gathered evidence widely, our broadly-based report makes recommendations encompassing policy, the environment, land-use, tourism, economic stimulation, energy, forestry, and the re-shaping of institutional structures to help develop viable communities. We hope that this document will support decision-makers, the people of these distinctive communities and all involved in working to achieve a sustainable future for the Hills and Islands.

Background

Recognising that the survival of distinctive communities in Scotland is at risk from changes to policy affecting the countryside, The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) has undertaken an independent Inquiry into the future of Scotland's hill and island areas. Instigated by the Council of the RSE, the aim of this wide-ranging investigation has been to find ways to help secure a prosperous and environmentally-sustainable future for these economically-fragile communities. Chaired by the distinguished economist, Professor Gavin McCrone, the Inquiry Committee today makes recommendations that seek to respond to threats posed by changes in agricultural support as a result of present and anticipated reform to the Common Agricultural Policy. Through evidence-gathering and extensive consultation, it has sought to recognise opportunities for local skills and natural resources to be harnessed. It will make specific recommendations with regard, not only to policy for agriculture, but also the expansion of other parts of the economy such as tourism and forestry and measures to safeguard the environment. The Committee has reported to the Council of the RSE and will now make its findings widely available.

Committee Membership:

Professor Gavin McCrone, CB, FRSE (*Committee Chairman*) Former RSE Vice-President and General Secretary

Professor Jeff Maxwell, OBE, FRSE (*Committee Vice-Chairman*) Former Director Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

Professor Roger Crofts, CBE, FRSE (*Committee Secretary*) Former Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage; Chairman, Plantlife International; Non-Executive Director Scottish Agricultural College and The National Trust for Scotland; Honorary Professor, Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh

Dr Andrew Barbour, Forestry manager, Atholl Estates; Member, Forestry Commission's Regional Advisory Committee; Vice-Chairman, Deer Commission for Scotland; Farmer at Glen Fincastle

Dr Barbara Kelly, DBE, DL partner in a farming enterprise in Dumfriesshire; President Southern Uplands Partnership; Convener, Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust; Convener, Crichton Foundation; Trustee, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Professor Karl Linklater, FRCVS, FRSE Former Principal and Chief Executive of the Scottish Agricultural College

Mr Drew Ratter, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Board member; Convener, 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; former Chief Executive, Scottish Tourist Board

Professor Bill Slee, Science Group Leader, Socio-Economics Research Group, Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

In addition to the above, **Professor James Hunter** CBE, FRSE, Director of the University of the Highlands and Islands Centre for History and former Chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, was initially a member of the Committee, but resigned because of other commitments. **Professor Nicholas Hanley**, Professor of Environmental Economics, University of Stirling, was also initially a member of the Committee, but due to sabbatical leave in New Zealand was not able to contribute to the work after the end of 2007. Both remained available for consultation, although it should be recognised that neither had any responsibility for the final Report.

Remit

The remit of the Inquiry has been to:

- Identify the main drivers of change in hill 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 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. VisitScotland 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 Report sets out the action 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 has been the subject of a recent Scottish Executive Inquiry, but there is also a need to consider what role a revitalised crofting system can play in the broader context of the use of the land. There are also wider issues: the implications for these areas of climate change, the development of biofuels and the implications for food production. The Report looks into 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.

Notes for Editors

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 £2 million to top researchers and entrepreneurs
- Showcasing to the World the best of our research and development
- Increasing two-way international exchanges
- 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”. It is regarded as Scotland’s National Academy of Science and Letters. 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. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland’s National Academy, is Scottish Charity No. SC000470.

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