

INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE SUPPORT FOR SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE: THE INTERIM REPORT BRIAN PACK CRITIQUE BY ROGER CROFTS

One of the objectives given by the Minister was to define conditions to secure public benefits. The interim report is examined from this perspective as it has been regarded a fundamental element for the future of Scottish Agriculture for some years. This point was argued cogently by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the report of its *Committee of Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hills and Islands*. Significantly, there is no mention in Brian Pack's Interim report of this analysis and the conclusions and recommendations made. This is a major omission and is one off the reasons why, despite the opening rhetoric on delivering public benefits, the report totally fails to describe how these are to be achieved through revisions in the agricultural support regime. This is such a fundamental flaw that the treatment of support needs to be radically revised if the final report is to have any real relevance to the way Scotland agricultural land is used and managed.

The report readily acknowledges that agriculture 'must be part of the bigger picture' meeting broad public policy objectives and providing outcomes for society and the environment. The report states that 'agriculture needs to meet multiple benefits', and these are specified: greenhouse gas emissions reduction, water management and security of its supply, food security, biodiversity maintenance and where possible enhancement. It goes on to argue, quite correctly, that these are non-market goods and services and require public financial support. But, thereafter, the report returns to a more traditional agriculture focus. By basing its revised system of support on the Macaulay Land Capability Classification for Agriculture the report ignores the wider public benefits, and the proposed payment rates result in support which does not take into account any of the other factors, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity maintenance etc. The most agriculturally productive land receives the highest level of support without any recognition of how the other public benefits can be supported. There is no recognition of the role which farmers and land managers play in delivering good environmental stewardship, indeed stewardship is never mentioned despite the fact that opening rhetoric implies that it is a fundamental objective for the future. It is therefore not surprising that the detailed proposals on future support focus on agricultural production and totally ignore how these are to support the delivery of public, non-market benefits.

There are some good points, particularly arguments in favour of the move to area-based payments, and that payments are not an entitlement to the owner. The concerns expressed about abandonment of land, and the need to retain stock levels in the more fragile areas, coupled with definition of upper and lower level of stocking intensity are well made. The need for strengthening of the GAEC is supported, but leaving the judgment on its implementation on the farm to 'agriculturalists' is surely a slip of the pen, when many of the conditions relate to management of environmental resources.

The current thinking needs to be radically revised if the final report is to move the debate forward. First, there needs to be a shift in focus away from agriculture to a broader view of the value of the management of the land and away from support schemes primarily addressing the needs of agriculture to ones which address the other factors. The four objectives of agricultural support specified will need to be radically

revised to broaden the basis of support. The revised will need to define precisely what public benefits should be expected from the land, and how performance in their achievement can be measured in an efficient way. It will need to define how the current flawed system of Pillars 1 and 2 can be revised to produce the whole range of benefits, including agricultural production, in a less bureaucratic and more transparent and publicly defensible manner than the present arrangements. It should define the future beyond the CAP and take on board the well-argued proposals by the RSE on an EU Land, Environmental and Climate Change Policy. It will also need to change the language from agriculture dominance to one of the land as a multi-benefit resource which has to be stewarded carefully with the aid of public financial support. To do this the report will need to define the future roles of farmers and land managers and the re-skilling that will be required. It should also make recommendations on how the organisational support for land management and the delivery of public benefits within the Scottish Government can be made more integrated.