

A Passion for Safeguarding the Natural Environment

A sound knowledge of how government works plus the ability to build bridges with key environmental organisations are two of the reasons Roger Crofts was appointed to the SAC board in 2002. In this interview, he explains how he sees his role and what CAP reform might mean for the environment

A former senior civil servant and founding Chief Executive of Scottish Natural Heritage, Roger is currently on the board of Plantlife International, the global plant conservation organisation, and The National Trust for Scotland. And he's in the early stages of co-writing a coffee table book on the earth history of Scotland – tapping into his earlier academic background in geomorphology.

As environmental, agricultural policy and business considerations become increasingly important for Scotland's land-based industries, Roger sees one of his key roles as helping SAC watch out for new, emerging, strategic issues,.

He suggests that it's too early to say how reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will affect the environment. "On the one hand", he explains, "the policy of delivering a single farm payment in return for keeping land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GEAC) is a great step forward. I believe farmers will respond positively to those signals where the previous production-focused regime led to confusion. But we still need to see how the international playing field levels out. The big players such as Australia and the USA have seen moves towards larger farm sizes and deep cost-cutting to make businesses profitable. And our farmers need to be able to compete with them. But GEAC will lead to an increase in the need for good management and it's not clear where the money will come from to fund that.

"The Scottish Executive recently announced funding of over £38 million for the Rural Stewardship Scheme, which is the main vehicle for supporting environmental improvements, but this falls woefully short of the funds that are actually needed to do the job. At least three times this amount is justified"

He believes that CAP reform will see a variety of new futures emerging for Scottish farmers depending on what sort of farming they do and what sort of land they work. And that SAC has a role to play in modelling those new futures and advising government on what support is needed to help farmers meet the requirements of GEAC whilst competing internationally against low-cost alternatives.

He said: "CAP Reform will also lead to new opportunities and a demand for new skills and I'm convinced we will see a change in the structure of our industry. I am keen to help ensure that SAC anticipates the future needs of the industry and is even better placed to serve them than our competitors. That means making sure we have the right knowledge base to help our industry adapt and building on our delivery mechanisms for both advice and education.."