

**SCOTTISH CROFTERS' UNION ANNUAL CONFERENCE 6 NOVEMBER 1997:
THE INTEGRATION OF AGRICULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND
EMPLOYMENT POLICY IN THE CROFTING CONTEXT**

**CROFTING AND THE NATURAL HERITAGE: FINDING THE COMMON GROUND
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Introduction

My theme is that crofting and the natural heritage should go hand in hand and that the outcome is mutually beneficial to the crofting communities, and to the natural heritage and to society at large. We just have to be sure that we can find common ground to demonstrate in practice what we can achieve.

I want to examine what appear to be commonly-held views about development versus the environment and why many consider that perhaps "people are the endangered species in the Highlands & Islands"; assess what is actually happening; point out the signs of hope in the working partnerships which are already underway; and, finally to, spell out further areas of common ground in policy and in practice.

Development versus the environment

To many people, if the columns of some newspapers and the words of some politicians in the north are to be believed, development is restricted because environmentalists get in the way. Indeed the phrase "people are the endangered species" has become a truism.

Let us examine some commonly expressed views

One simple, if not simplistic, cause-and-effect view is now taken for granted. That is that resources from Government, from Europe and from developers create more

jobs, give greater prosperity and encourage well-being and confidence in communities. The environmental resources of water, rock and sand, scenery, fish and birds are to be exploited for the benefit of local communities.

In terms of this perception, for example, quarries are just exploiting a resource which is in plentiful supply and thereby creating long-term jobs for local residents. Industrial development in major estuaries is claimed to be of benefit and brings with it greater longer-term prosperity. New methods of production are said to allow the development of new industries which are in tune with the environment, whether aquaculture or microelectronics, and provide long-term economic stability. Good sporting estate management is considered by some to be achieved by controlling river systems, and by removing predators; as a result employment for local communities through this form of management is maintained. Crofters claim that they are the guardians of the land, they always have been and always will be. The conclusion often expressed is that there is no need for a body like SNH: it stops development.

And let us look at what some say that environmentalists and environmental organisations do! They buy land and act as absentee landowners. They employ staff who are not born and brought up locally and bring attitudes and lifestyles which are not in keeping with the area. They drive around in new vehicles and work from well-appointed offices. They claim, however unconvincingly, that the environment is a great asset of the crofting counties but all their efforts seem to stop activity or go through labyrinthine routes to allow long-standing practices to continue. They only react to demands for special measures when they have to, for instance when an ever-growing goose population all but destroys the early bite for cattle or when the white-tailed sea eagle, which they re-introduced without asking anyone, takes off the lambs and reduces, even further, already low lambing percentages. And they never explain their decisions, or if they do it is obfuscated by references to European Directives, legislation from a Westminster Parliament, obscure Financial Guidelines and even more obscure scientific arguments.

In the light of these often expressed views, it is very easy for anyone, either resident or visitor, or indeed living in Edinburgh, to believe that people are indeed the

endangered species, and that the environmentalists have taken over to the detriment of local communities.

There are, of course, the caricatures from the other perspective. We can all recall the near-libellous jibes of the late Nicholas Fairbairn and the views from the deep south of England of subsidy, dependency, indolence.

But, frankly, do we believe **any** of these comments arguments or views? Are they real or imagined? And if so by whom? And which, if any, is real? The only certainty is that they are the stuff of the newspaper columns.

Another perspective

People may well be the endangered species - but for quite different reasons.

Let us look briefly at crofting and crofting agriculture. Crofters Commission statistics tell me that there were 17,685 Registered Crofts in 1996. More significantly only 18% were owner-occupied with only 1% owner occupation in the Western Isles. This suggests to me that you have perhaps not as great a control of your own destiny as people in other parts of Scotland. Gordon MacMillan estimates that Registered Crofts are occupied by some 11,000 to 11,500 crofting households with a total population of over 33,000. That is only about 10% of the population of the Crofting Counties. And yet the activity which is performed in managing the land, and therefore managing the environment, is far more important than the simple population statistics would suggest. Crofters' Commission records show that there are some 1,560 'absentee' crofters, while others estimate that only between 50% and 70% of crofts are being worked at present and that there are perhaps fewer than 8,000 active crofting households. The point for me is that the environmental assets of crofting land are the result of crofter's activity, and that with declining numbers and fewer crofts being worked there is less active management.

But why is this the case? Economics has to be a major part of the answer. Although the figures are now dated, your Union estimated that in 1989, of an average annual

crofter household income of £8,500 only 4% was generated on the croft, 33% came from support mechanisms, and, significantly, 63% came from activities **off** the croft. The amount of time therefore available to manage the croft land is limited - and therefore the amount of time to engage in non-remunerative activities such as environmental management is minuscule. Labour inputs into crofting agriculture overall appear to be declining further.

Examination of the statistics of financial support perhaps gives the reason why. Only some £20 million of support is provided for crofting agriculture and associated infrastructure. Other commentators have noted that this is less than 2 % of UK farm support (a far cry from Arable Aid in England) and accounts perhaps for only 10% of net income. So subsidy junky myths are finally blown, I hope. More important - it is clear that the economics of crofting agriculture remain marginal. And yet you are working in areas of and contributing to high environmental value - often as a result of the practices which you have performed over many generations and without adequate support.

The nature of the support is also critical, both in terms of determining the type of activity and its impact on the environment. Payments under existing livestock support regimes, have encouraged high stocking rates but do not give any encouragement to higher labour input to manage the sheep flock; hence flock sizes per shepherd are significantly higher than before. Payments for environmental work have, until relatively recently been restricted to ESAs and even then, the annual ceilings and low support rates have resulted, sadly, in underspends on the agri-environment programme, and claims by hard-nosed financial scrutineers that the programme is over-funded.

Pluralism of occupation has long been an important feature of the Crofting Counties. It has become more so and the opportunities emerging, for instance in the fish farming industry and tourism are to be welcomed. Others are developing as a result of the availability of the telecommunications infrastructure and the establishment of locations such as the Auchertyre Business Park near Balmacara, which permit hi-tech industry to be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner.

Welcome though all of this activity is in bringing economic benefit to the communities of the Highlands and Islands, it means that less effort is put into environmental management - a point I shall return to later.

What's more, it would seem that, overall, sources of support will decline once the cushion of Objective 1 status is replaced by a new scheme and the CAP is further reformed as the response to the last and the next round of world trade negotiations. Funding for environmental activity is declining in real terms and for agri-environment is rising only slowly. Perhaps more importantly, funding is not targeted properly. None of you who is a practising crofter or farmer gets paid properly for your environmental work; you are still paid largely to be food producers whether the market requires it or not. With the marginal economics of farming in the Crofting Counties, we are seeing under management of land and, in a few places, abandonment. And yet, ironically, in some parts of the area there clearly is not enough land for those who wish to sustain crofting agriculture. I am sure this position saddens all of you just as it saddens me and the much-maligned environmentalists. We in SNH wish the land to be managed actively to yield benefits for local communities and for the natural heritage.

We must also remember that the way the land is used is not static. Far from being determined by the negativity of environmentalists, as some would claim, there are much larger forces at work which have had a significant impact on land use. Our major survey of land cover change over the 40 years from the late 1940s has shown the occurrence of significant **increases** in afforestation, with conversion of mire, moorland and rough grassland to coniferous plantation (an almost tenfold increase from 40,000 hectares to 370,000 hectares), a 66% increase in bracken, a one third increase in managed improved grassland, and a fourfold increase in the area of reservoirs to nearly 20,000 hectares. The most significant **decreases** have been a one third reduction in mixed and broad-leaved woodland.

I am sure that we can all interpret these figures as reflecting the impact of the forestry and agriculture support regimes, low land values compared with elsewhere

and the use of land and water resources for the benefit of Scotland. But have all these changes been beneficial to you? Are the jobs created secure in the longer term? Are the benefits really accruing to the area or are they leaking out?

Turning now to designations, we fully realise that the system of wildlife and landscape protection is neither particularly people friendly, and that it is not working effectively. Imposed solutions from Brussels and Strasbourg, Westminster and Whitehall, Edinburgh and Bristol are neither comfortable to you, nor comfortable to us. Systems based on compensation for 'net profit foregone' are hardly a good use of taxpayers' money and require very careful judgements by SNH staff and Board members to safeguard prime wildlife interests as Parliament and Government has instructed us to do. We badly need new approaches. The SSSI system was established to protect small areas of remnant habitat. It was not intended for dealing with large areas of high natural heritage interest. But it is the only mechanism on the statute book and we have to use it. I have every hope that the new Government will allow all of these to be considered and, where appropriate, to be brought into practice. So far we have done what we can within the very limited flexibility which exists the system: that is not an excuse - it is a fact. But, as we all know, it is the messenger who is made the scapegoat and not the system itself.

And what about National Parks? Maybe you see these as yet another threat. SNH has been asked formally by the Minister to prepare a system which is friendly both to the natural heritage and to people and which can be tailored to the different requirements of different parts of Scotland. We intend to seek views early next year on the key issues and then to consult more formally later in the year. We need input from crofters and farmers so that the propositions we put ultimately to Government are well informed, will benefit the natural heritage, and will ensure that local people have a key role throughout.

My argument is therefore that the environment has been used as the blame factor, when other factors have much more influence.

The environment as an asset

So let us not treat the environment as a headache and a brake on human well-being. Let us treat it as an asset to be protected and sustainably exploited. You as crofters must be proud of your environment and your role in it.

- You have shown how a globally endangered species can begin the path to recovery: the calling of male corncrakes are breaking out all over.
- You have shown that the white-tailed sea eagle can be successfully re introduced.
- You have shown the role you can play in enabling barnacle geese numbers to recover to biologically viable levels.
- You have shown how to protect and maintain 2 extremely important habitats of international significance - the blanket mires of the highlands and the machairs of the Hebrides.

These animals and plants are a key asset not just for the crofting counties but internationally. We must jointly be proud that the Highlands and Islands commands such a high status in the UK, in Europe and internationally. And that, in considerable part, is because of the role you have played over many generations, including the present one. I would echo the words of the Minister, Lord Sewel, speaking in Oban last week "I am determined to meet our European nature conservation commitments. But I would like to see designations such as SSSIs, Special Areas of Conservation, and Special Protection Areas regarded as accolades from which local communities gain real benefit, rather than as constraints." So instead of thinking that the designation of areas as SSSIs, SPAs, SACs, NNRs, National Parks etc endangers the survival of people, and implies notices saying 'Welcome to the museum of crofting life', let us celebrate and exploit this asset. The progress which we have made, and the further progress which we could make, can make the Crofting Counties the living exemplification of agriculture and the natural heritage working together: a world role model.

But it needs resources. There is surely an overwhelming case for more resources and redirection of existing resources for maintaining and enhancing these environmental assets - targetted in particular at the labour inputs and the positive environmental outputs which we all know are required. The first point for a joint agenda must be the formulation of our proposals for the redirection of resources and for new mechanisms so that the Highlands and Islands, and other areas of rural Scotland are the living, forward-looking demonstration of people, economy and natural heritage working together effectively.

Let us also recognise that the environment means jobs and that it brings money into the economy. There are 2,000 jobs in natural heritage related activities in the Highlands and Islands, and over 400 wild life tourism jobs. Mountaineering supports almost 4,000 jobs and generates over £100 million per annum income. Significantly, compared to the rest of Scotland, there is a greater proportion of jobs related directly or indirectly to the environment in the Highlands and Islands. And more significantly still, our surveys have discovered that a higher proportion of jobs related to the environment are in the more economically fragile areas (as defined by the HIE). Often, when land is transferred from sporting estate management to environmental management, jobs are created: a tenfold increase in the case of the environmentally best managed estate in Strathspey.

And do not forget the economic benefits of SNH's presence and its activity in the area. We have 187 staff based in the Highlands and Islands spread throughout the area in 15 offices. They inject annually about £7.4 million into the economy. A further £4.6 million annually is provided through grants, management agreements, action projects and initiatives. Using a conservative multiplier we create the equivalent of over 250 jobs and generate over £14.5 million into the local economy. These jobs and expenditure figures are, I hope you will agree, significant in the area when set alongside the contribution from other public sources of employment and money.

So my conclusion, and I hope yours, is that "development **versus** the environment" is a tired myth and rather (as the theme of this conference suggests) viable

economic activity **and** a sustainable environment go hand-in-hand is the refreshing reality. The key word here is “integration”. That is the essence of the best environmental thinking in the north, in Scotland as a whole, and indeed throughout the developed world, by those who have understood fully the importance of crofters and farmers and local communities in being the managers and stewards of the environment for their own benefit now and for the benefit of future generations. That is the simple definition of the important philosophy of “sustainable development”. I am particularly pleased, as I hope you are, that the new Government, and especially our Minister, Lord Sewel, are leading on this approach. Lord Sewel said last week that “Sustainable development requires an integrated approach to each of three main policy objectives: economic, social and environmental These three facets of sustainable development are equally important. We must have regard to all three when taking decisions on any issue affecting rural Scotland, maximising social and economic benefits from environmental involvement, as well as maximising environmental benefits from economic and social investments.” The Crofting Counties can be, should be and, I hope, will be the role model for this approach.

Real signs of hope

None of us should despair, as there are real signs of hope and also major opportunities.

Lack of control over the land resource has been seen by many generations as the greatest social ill and economic impediment to progress in the Crofting Counties. But surely there are signs of hope with the Assynt and Borge crofters in the vanguard, followed now by the Eigg Community Trust and the successful outcome of negotiations for Orbost here in Skye, and hopefully, also at Armadale on the north coast. Certainly in the case of Orbost, we in SNH see great opportunities in working with Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise and the Trust putting the best practices into effect to benefit people, economy and environment.

Many of you realise the awesome responsibilities which ownership of land brings; but you are not on your own, as there is strong support from Government and all of its

agencies. Here I applaud the establishment of the Community Land Support Unit in Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

SNH is also a landowner with major social and economic , as well as environmental, responsibilities. Take Rum for example. Our first responsibility has to be to the natural heritage. Although the island is designated as an SSSI, NNR, SPA and NSA and will become an SAC, the habitats are degraded as a result of decades of mismanagement: over grazing by sheep (until they were removed) and by deer (protected because of a critical research project, the results of which are influencing major changes in deer management on the mainland) insufficient cattle, and post muirburn. Not only shall we protect the species (the internationally significant Manx shearwater population, for example) but we shall continue, and at a greater pace, to increase the diversity and the biological productivity of the island by reducing deer numbers and increasing cattle numbers. That is important for its own sake, but it is also important for the opportunities it can create for the future. At present, apart from the school-teacher employed by Highland Council, all residents on Rum are SNH staff or their partners and families. But it is our hope, with greater productivity of the land, with improved ferry services to all of the Small Isles and by using the telecommunications network, that people will come to live and work there; and that our staff and their dependants can retire there - in other words, we intend to rebuild an active community based on the reinvigorated natural assets of the island. Our vision is described in our newspaper which is available from all of our offices, and also in the book 'Rum: Nature's Island' compiled by Magnus Magnusson which he will be promoting in Lochinver, Gairloch, Inverness and Oban later this month. It's a new future for Rum - to benefit people as well as the natural heritage on Rum and hopefully on the Small Isles as a whole.

Changes in support to agriculture are at the heart of the future of the crofting way of life. The advent of Environmentally Sensitive Areas and, more recently, the Countryside Premium Scheme, gives hope for proper support for your environmental stewardship role. However, despite our best efforts and those of Ministers and officials in the Agriculture Department, much remains to be done. Artificial ceilings have been imposed which block initiative. Prescriptions have proved to be inflexible and still do not cover many of the environmental management aspirations which

SNH and crofters jointly have. There is little recognition, as yet, of the different needs of different parts of the Crofting Counties even within individual ESAs such as Argyll and the Islands. So it is no surprise that budgets under the ESA Scheme have been consistently underspent. Surely that is not something which any of us at this Conference wants. Surely our joint task is to help officials and the Minister amend schemes to enable you to respond flexibly, with us, to different circumstances: schemes to help beneficial management for the corncrake, schemes to recover the natural food of white-tailed sea eagles and thereby reduce conflict with lambs, schemes to find a more palatable and tolerable compromise between protected geese and livestock rearing. We in SNH will have to give clear advice on the viability of natural populations. We are already clear, for example, that the barnacle geese population are viable and could be reduced if suitable means could be found. Most importantly, we would like to see in practice schemes which recognise that the natural heritage needs managing by providing resources for labour input: "headage" payments for shepherds, for cattle hands, for gamekeepers. Are you prepared to join with SNH in working out detailed plans and prescriptions to submit jointly to the Minister and his officials so that we can move forward? Can this be the second point of our shared agenda?

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world. We know from the statistics compiled for the Scottish Tourist Board that tourism income to Scotland is growing all the time on an upwards trend, although there has been a blip this year. But the trick for the Crofting Counties has to be to ensure that the benefits come to, and stay in, the local communities. A substantial income already comes from tourism, such as through providing bed & breakfast accommodation. But there are even more opportunities for you to consider. You are the people, after all, who look after the corncrake, who give space for birds of prey on your land, who provide sustenance for protected geese and many other species which are still not at a level of biological viability. But what benefits do you get?

SNH, and RSPB, have worked together, often with the Scottish Crofters' Union, to develop ideas. But now is the time to put them into practice to benefit you.

Why not have hides on your field and visitors paying a fee to use them, with the money going to you to help your management? Why not have video cameras linked to a viewing area in an old byre where again the public can pay for the privilege of seeing sea eagles eating rabbits from Coll? Why not charge the wildlife tourism operators for coming onto your land to see wildlife? Surely all of these are opportunities.

We are preparing to upgrade our facilities at Knockan on the Inverpolly reserve with a new centre jointly funded by ourselves and CASE and hopefully the Lottery. From there, we shall be able to promote satellite centres owned by others. On Fair Isle we are collaborating with NTS, the owners and the crofting communities on a marine tourism initiative.

We know that tourism jobs are not necessarily full-time in themselves, but they are opportunities to supplement your income, ideally suited to the crofting lifestyle which has wisely never put all its eggs in one basket. We put some of these ideas to Brian Wilson, the Minister for Tourism, when he chaired his first meeting of the Scottish Tourism Co-ordinating Group at our headquarters in Edinburgh last month and he has asked SNH and STB to work them up jointly into certain projects. And there are many more ideas which we ought to be putting jointly as proposals to the Tourism and the Environment Task Force. So that should be our **third** joint initiative.

The greatest sign of hope I detect, when I get out of my Edinburgh eyrie, is the growing confidence in communities around the Highlands and Islands. I recognise that some were perhaps near to despair, but many others, particularly I notice on this island, have turned the corner. And we all know: that with confidence comes success. If we can change from that most fundamental BSE culture of "blaming someone else" to SCU and SNH working actively together, as we have demonstrated that we can, then that is a way forward.

We have proved we can do it

There are many initiatives which SNH has been able to take, within the strictures imposed upon us, which have brought benefits not just to the environment but to those, like yourselves, who manage it. Take for example the Peatland Management Scheme in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. Here we have brought on board 390 landholders covering 73,000 hectares and providing funding of £133,500 per annum. You may say that is just scratching the surface; but remember this is hard cash and maintenance of existing management is critical.

Only last week we announced that a new scheme to help owners and occupiers protect the peatlands of Lewis would be introduced if designation under European Directives is required. Here again, you have in the Crofting Counties internationally important habitats and species. Here again SNH, with the Government's strong support, is proposing to deliver a positive management scheme to help you play your role in maintaining the quality and diversity of this habitat. I was pleased to read the Press and Journal comments under the headline 'Lewis wins nature award: 'The peatlands area on Lewis has won acclaim for its teeming and active blanket bog habitats. And there are hopes that the recognition of the natural heritage of the area at a European level could bring economic spin offs to the island.'

We recognise the concern of crofters and farmers because of the apparent imposition of European designations. We are working actively, and will continue to do so with the support of Government, to seek resolutions. At Inverasdale, for example, we have made an offer, although perhaps we should have made it earlier, and we look forward to a constructive dialogue. At Mointeach Scadabhaigh, North Uist negotiations are proceeding. We are in active discussion on other cases to find solutions now for particular problems - barnacle geese, sea eagles, aquaculture etc.

In all of these situations, and others like them, our Areas Board Members who have great knowledge and experience of crofting and related issues are a great asset. I hope you will make it your business to approach them directly: Annie MacDonald, South Uist; Simon Fraser, Lewis; Isobel Holbourn, Foula; Jim Hunter, Borge; Michael Foxley, Achaphubuil; Ken Swanson, Caithness; Malcolm Ogilvie, Islay; Robin Malcolm, Knapdale and our two Areas Board Chairs: Bill Ritchie and Barbara Kelly are all there to provide a link .

Creative approaches are needed and we intend to ensure that they happen. For example, we have secured European Funds under the LIFE programme to trial new management approaches for proposed marine SACs. Three of the four Scottish sites in the programme are in the Highlands and Islands; Loch nam Madadh, Arisaig and around Papa Stour. This project, together with the support for the use of Regulating Orders in appropriate locations will, I am convinced, help us to make progress. Certainly our joint efforts with the Highland Council and the Western Isles Council and other partners in the Minch project will yield a much greater mutual understanding and awareness.

We have made it quite plain that we support cattle in the crofting counties. I hope you are all aware of our Western Isles Cattle Initiative, just as we are aware of the longer term implications of BSE. We recognise that it is labour intensive compared with current sheep management practices, and we acknowledge that the crofting lifestyle has changed to a much more part-time activity. Nevertheless, we should be jointly lobbying for greater support for cattle because they are a natural part of crofting agriculture and an intrinsic part of the management of the habitats in the Crofting Counties which bring benefits to wildlife, and therefore to visitors, and hence to you.

The Skye Grassland Corncrake Scheme which has been very well received and puts £10,000 per annum into the local economy is another of our initiatives. Interestingly, this scheme is not just about the Corncrake. It is about supporting many other species, including the human one on which the others depend. These grasslands support many plants and animals which depend on the active management of these fields. We have been encouraged to hear both locals and visitors genuinely enthusing over the beauty of these hayfields in the summer. Memories of childhood days long gone, you might say - but we would also suggest they are a modern attraction for the tourist which should not be ignored. We are working with The Scottish Office to introduce a new scheme under the agri-environment programme to provide beneficial management of corncrake habitat.

And who would have predicted 20 years ago that it would be a government natural heritage organisation which reinstated the cropping grant?!

We have also established a series of Farm Demonstration Projects. Those of particular interest to you are at Garros on Skye and at Skerray on the north mainland coast. Take, for example the project at Skerray, where 17 crofters running 28 crofts are involved. One important feature has been the re-introduction of rotational cropping on the in-bye land. This has created a range of different habitats for wildlife. And it will benefit the crofters by providing winter feed for their animals, thereby reducing the overall costs of bought feed. In addition, it is hoped that bracken and rush cover will be reduced, a joint woodland scheme introduced and proposals for a footpath network realised

And, of course, we have just completed the fourth year of our joint initiative with the SCU: the Crofting Township of the Year Award. The prize of £5,000 helps to fund crofting and environmental projects which have been identified by the community in their application. It is inspiring to see fine examples of activity and the sense of community pride in the townships which have won: Aird on Benbecula, Fair Isle, Drumbuie in Wester Ross and now Skerray, and indeed the community pride of all those which enter the competition. As you know, it has been very well received. Agnes Gunn, chairman of the Skerray Grazings Committee, this year's Award winner, said 'We are trying our best to prove that local development and improved crofting practices can continue in harmony with the natural environment. In this we have been greatly helped and encouraged by SNH through their local staff.' Here again as with the agricultural demonstration projects, you, with our help, are leading the world. Betty McKenzie, the Skerray Grazings Clerk said just the other day 'Our efforts would appear to have aroused some wider interest and we have had visits from groups as far afield as Scandinavia and Slovenia.'

And finally, on Awards I hope that you were proud of the winner of the Supreme Awards under the 1997 Environmental Regeneration Awards: The Crofters' Memorial Cairns on Lewis. SNH and Scottish Enterprise, the joint sponsors of the Award, salute this splendid achievement.

There is common ground

Our common ground, I hope, is wanting to sustain rural communities through their long-term stewardship of the environment and its use for their and their successors' benefit.

I suggest that our shared agenda should be

- Making the Highlands & Islands of Scotland the world role model for sustaining natural and human communities in harmony. Obtaining more European resources and re-distribution of existing resources in recognition of the international importance of the natural heritage to deliver the Government's obligations under the Birds & Habitats Directives and to benefit local communities.
- A system of agri-environment measures which reward at sensible levels, and flexibly, your stewardship of the land, across the crofting counties as a whole, not just for the "special areas", paying you for your environmental as well as your food production roles, in particular paying for labour input and special management schemes.
- Making sensible and responsible use of your local wildlife resource for the enjoyment of visitors and for the financial benefit of local communities through targeted projects. Let us work together with the Tourism and the Environment Task Force to produce and implement practical proposals for tourism in the Crofting Counties.
- A new, more people-friendly, system for protecting the special areas of wildlife and landscape interest in the Crofting Counties and elsewhere to be delivered through the Scottish Parliament at an early date, including bringing local people effectively into decision-making about their environment. Let us hear your views.

We live in a new era where radical agendas are the order of the day. Let us cultivate together the common ground to benefit livelihoods, lifestyles and the environment. One thing is certain: if we fail to cultivate that common ground, we shall all miss out on the opportunities which are out there. There is only a limited pot of money to go

round and there are many interested and well-organised groups with their eyes on it. We need to work to a shared agenda to succeed. But succeed we shall - if we put our collective minds to it.

Roger Crofts

Scottish Natural Heritage

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