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Land Use Strategy must give clear guidance for managing competing demands on Scotland's land resource.

The Scottish Government's draft Land Use Strategy is a helpful starting point for the formidable task of improving decisions on Scotland's land use, but fails to translate its admirable aspirations into practical guidance for land owners, users and decision makers. This is a key message from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), which has today responded to the consultation on the Strategy.

The RSE calls for the Strategy's core purpose to be made explicit. With intense competing demands on Scotland's land resource, it must be able to deliver maximum public benefits in an integrated manner. These include food and fibre production, biosecurity, biodiversity, landscape conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water management, and recreational access.

Professor Roger Crofts, who chaired the RSE's response expert group to the consultation, commented: "Improving decision making on the use of Scotland's land to achieve the greatest public benefit is a hugely complex task. The consultation draft provides a starting point, but many key issues are not addressed. We are particularly concerned about the lack of recognition of the many conflicts between different land uses. The situation will become even more complex and innovative methods need to be developed, rather than relying on traditional mechanisms which have not achieved the resolutions needed. Detailed information and assessment tools that enable the analysis of conflicts and different options are already available, but this is not recognised in the draft document. There is a long way to go before an adequate Strategy is available. Having recommended the preparation of a Land Use Strategy in our report on the Future of the Hills and Islands of Scotland, the RSE, with its expert fellowship on all relevant issues, is in a strong position to assist in the development of the Strategy prior to submission to the Scottish Parliament in March next year."

The RSE is concerned with the current lack of clarity about implementation, the decision making process, the roles of key players, and how policy instruments, regulation and incentive measures will be integrated. The Land Use Strategy must contain clear, measurable targets and specific steps for implementation.

The Strategy must define the role of national and local government, find the balance between government intervention and market operation, and protect both the rights of land owners and of those who benefit from use of, and access to, land. The Land Use Strategy must recognise the competing demands and priorities on Scotland's land and provide a national framework that allows policies to be integrated.

Further, the draft Strategy does not consider Scotland's land in the UK, European or global context. This is a significant limitation in light of the reliance of many land-based businesses on non-Scottish markets, either through exports or tourism.

The RSE also calls for the strategy to contain new and innovative conflict resolution mechanisms that are beyond the highly divisive processes of the Town and Country Planning legislation. The current process is not adequate for dealing with the increasingly frequent conflicts that arise from onshore wind turbines applications, the need to safeguard land for food production, and the achievement of the Scottish Government's forestry planting targets. The Scottish Government has an active role to play in developing these mechanisms, through integrated policies, new guidelines, and, where possible, by devolving decision making to the local level.

Finally, it is vital that the Scottish Government recognises that in developing and implementing the Land Use Strategy, the research strengths of Scottish universities and research institutes must be creatively drawn upon to provide knowledge and understanding that is not available within the government and support policy development.

The RSE is well placed to contribute to the development of the strategy which it recommended in its major inquiry report into *the Future of Scotland's Hills and Islands* in 2008. Both then and now, the RSE recognises Scotland's land resource and its proper management are fundamental to the wellbeing of the country.

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