



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

Minute of the meeting of the Scottish Land Commissioners held on Tuesday 6th February 2024 at An Lochran, Inverness.

Commissioners Present: Michael Russell (Chair), Sally Reynolds, Lorne MacLeod, Deb Roberts, Craig Mackenzie (Land Commissioners), Bob McIntosh (Tenant Farming Commissioner)

In Attendance: Hamish Trench, Emma Cooper, Scarlett Macfarlane, Claire Bremner, Caron Munro, Felicity Peall (Scottish Land Commission)

Apologies: None

Declarations of interest: Michael Russell, Deb Roberts and Craig Mackenzie confirmed that they have submitted information to the register of interests. No declarations of interest declared.

The Chair welcomed the Commissioners to the first meeting following new board appointments. He encouraged active participation in the key issues through the agenda and noted that the Board meetings are public and that all minutes are published.

1. Minutes from previous Board Meeting 05 December 2023

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the discussion held at the previous board meeting (05 December 2023).

Matters Arising: None

2. Commissioners Update

The Chair introduced this as a new standing agenda item providing an opportunity for all Commissioners to update on any key issues or events to be aware of. Commissioners provided updates of recent and forthcoming engagement on behalf of the Commission.

3. Quarterly Progress Report

The board reviewed the progress report for Quarter 3, acknowledging the substantial work delivered. The board noted effective communications and progress in managing the budget towards our target year-end position. In considering the strategic risks, the board noted the risks to stakeholder relationships associated with changes in board membership should also be considered and reflected in the risk register.

The board sought assurance on delivery of the remaining spend for Quarter 4, noting the high volume of spend planned. Hamish confirmed that staff are focused on ensuring planned spend progresses on time in the final quarter and that the management team are keeping this under regular review. He also noted that Quarter 4 spend controls from Scottish Government mean that government is seeking any significant underspends to be returned rather than reallocated.

4. Quarterly Casework report – Land Rights and Responsibilities – Good Practice

Emma provided an overview and introduction to the Land Rights and Responsibilities (LRRS) casework, particularly for new members, as well as the casework report for the previous two quarters. The discussion raised questions on how best to assess the impact of our good practice work, where our limited resource should be prioritised and noted the need for this work to continue evolve, particularly in the context of the land reform bill.

5. 2024/25 Business Planning

The board emphasised the importance of prioritising our work in our business planning. The board agreed that our first priority must be to support the development of an effective land reform bill, drawing on our existing body of work to provide evidence and advice as appropriate. The board also asked that we give a higher priority in the coming year to ways our work can help meet Scotland's housing challenge. The board noted the continued relevance of the Commission's previous analysis and recommendations, and that our focus now should be on ways to convert this into action. The board asked for a short scoping brief to consider this further at the next meeting.

The board also agreed the importance of retaining flexibility in our business planning for 24/25 in order that the Commission can respond effectively as the land reform bill develops. Therefore the business plan should be careful not to over-commit at this stage.

The board welcomed the budget settlement for 24/25 though noted continued cost pressures which over time risk reducing the available spend for research and programme spend, this to be kept under review through medium term financial planning.

Commissioners asked for an update on progress with the Crown Estate Scotland collaboration on community land acquisition, noting the need to maintain regular external communication. The potential for other bills requiring input was also flagged, for example on Community Wealth Building, charities and human rights.

Action 24020601	Short proposal on future housing work to be considered at the next meeting (Hamish)
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6. Staff Survey

The board agreed to hold a separate discussion to consider the staff survey results and follow-up actions.

Action 24020602	Arrange a separate meeting time to consider the staff survey (Hamish)
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7. Communications Update

The board decided to temporarily pause the programme of online public meetings in order to refresh the approach. Commissioners will continue representing the Commission at a range of events. The board also agreed to review and refresh the Commission's website, requesting a short proposal for the March meeting detailing available resources, scope, and timescale in order that this can be progressed within the 24/25 business plan.

Action 24020603	Short proposal for review of website to be considered at the next meeting (Scarlett)
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8. ARC Committee Membership

The board agreed the nomination of Craig and Deb as members of the Audit and Risk Committee with immediate effect. In doing so the board noted it is not necessary at this point to co-opt an external member of the ARC, though this remains an option in future. The transitional arrangement previously agreed by the board in which Sally would join the ARC if required was agreed to be superseded.

9. New Board Member Induction

It was noted that the new board members have received their induction packs and arrangements to attend 'On-board' training are in place. Commissioners were asked to raise any ongoing requirements for induction with Hamish, noting that induction progress will be reviewed at end of March.

10. AOB

Conference – the SLC conference event will take place on 13th June in Aviemore. The focus will be on supporting implementation of diverse land ownership and governance arrangements in practice, with examples of current and emerging practice invited as speakers. A programme will be shared with Commissioners in due course.

Board programme – the board noted the March meeting arrangements may change to align with a possible meeting with the Cabinet Secretary (since arranged separately, March meeting scheduled as planned for 5th March). The board agreed to change the June meeting to 12th June in Aviemore to align with the conference event.

The board also agreed that two meetings later in the year's schedule should be arranged for other locations around Scotland.

Freedom of Information – the board requested a briefing on FOI procedures at the next meeting.

Action 24020604	FOI briefing to be on agenda for next meeting (Caron)
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The next board meeting is scheduled for 5th March 2024 at An Lochran, Inverness.

**Scottish Land Commission
February 2024**