

LANDOWNERS SAY LAND REFORM REPORT 'FAILS TO ADDRESS REAL CHALLENGES' FACING RURAL SCOTLAND

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Scottish Land & Estates, which represents landowners throughout Scotland, said today the Land Reform Review Report issued today has missed the opportunity to deliver constructive land reform and fails to address the real challenges facing rural Scotland.

Instead, the report appears based on a bias against private landownership and makes a series of unfounded recommendations that will create more publicly funded bodies, increase bureaucracy and place an even heavier burden on the public purse.

Douglas McAdam, Chief Executive of Scottish Land & Estates said: "This report is extremely disappointing in that it does not reflect the very substantial social, economic and environmental contribution made to Scotland by private landownership of all scales – something that successive Scottish administrations have recognised.

"Instead, the report contains a very negative view of landowners despite the fact that in its first report the Review Group acknowledged and highlighted quite fully the very constructive work private landowners were engaged in.

"The majority of the recommendations in this report will also affect people in Scotland who only own one property or a small area of land or river. It is not just farmers and estates who will have concerns – all owners of property and land across Scotland including urban areas will be affected by these proposals.

"It is clear that since its first report, there has been a lack of external engagement by the group and a view emerged which sought to deny the positive contribution of estates and ignore the willingness of private landowners to address barriers to rural sustainability. This is inconsistent with the wealth of evidence provided to the group.

"We are not opposed to land reform – quite the reverse and we made a number of progressive recommendations to the group. We support community right to buy where there is a willing seller. Our members are wholly committed to a vibrant tenant farming sector and our members are the largest-scale providers of affordable housing in rural areas.

"The Land Reform Review Group has focused far too much on ownership rather than how land can be used to provide multiple benefits and has missed the opportunity to make more constructive proposals around community planning – which is critical to empowering communities and rural development. Continual references to a concentrated land ownership pattern do not take account of the fact that tens of thousands of people own rural Scotland.

"We do welcome the group's suggestion there should be greater recording and transparency of land ownership but it is something that we have been helping to drive for years.

“We agree the process for communities wishing to buy land should be streamlined but the suggestion that communities could enforce the sale of land against an owner’s wishes is completely unwarranted and we suspect would struggle to meet ECHR requirements.

“We are particularly concerned at the group’s recommendation in relation to furthering the right to buy for tenant farmers. This displays a lack of knowledge of the sector and does not reflect the views of the farming industry.

“We cannot see what the group is really trying to achieve with recommendations such as capping the amount of land anyone can own. The group is confusing the scale of ownership with appropriate land use. Someone owning 20 acres around a village can have much more of a monopoly of control over community land use in the local area than someone with thousands of acres of hill, rock and bog.

“We continue to work with government, local authorities and rural organisations to help deliver practical benefits to rural Scotland and it is a pity that the Land Reform Review Group has produced a report which fails to address these very real challenges.”