

SPEAKING NOTES – NFUS – A Shared Vision for Land Tenure 2020
28 May 2013

Introduction

1. Thank you for inviting me, pleased to be here.
2. Sorry I can't stay long, because of Parliamentary business.
3. Even if I can't stay long, I was very keen to come – because the subject you're discussing today is such an important one.
4. The future of land tenure is one of the biggest issues facing the future development of rural Scotland.
5. I think it's also fair to say that it's perhaps one of the most challenges issues on any Ministerial desk.
6. If you believe what you read on Twitter, you might think there are easy answers out there.
7. In fact, I've been wrestling with many of the issues you are discussing today throughout my time as Cabinet Secretary – and while we, you!, have made progress we still have a long way to go.
8. But there are some very positive examples out there.

9. Last week, I visited the East Neuk Estates Community initiative and saw an excellent model for future relationships between rural communities, landlords, tenant farmers and new entrants. If only that were the case throughout Scotland!
10. And today's event is also a very positive contribution to the debate.

The review landscape

11. This event is very timely, because we are at an important stage of the government's work in this area.
12. That work includes two separate reviews, as set out in our election manifesto back in 2011.
13. The first review is the one being run by the Land Reform Review Group, who recently published their interim report.
14. That report set out a range of areas to be investigated more fully during the next phase. The group's intention is to collect more evidence, by speaking to those involved at the heart of those issues, before presenting recommendations to the Scottish Government.
15. Meanwhile, the government has also been committed to a separate review of farm tenancy legislation.

16. That review is on a slower timescale, for good reasons.

17. You'll remember that in both 2011 and 2012, after constructive working with stakeholders and in the TFF, we made a set of eight improvements to the farm tenancy legislation. We always said that the farm tenancy review should provide enough time for us to see some initial results from those improvements; but early enough for us to act before the end of this Parliamentary term.

18. Having said that, the preparatory work for the farm tenancies review has begun already.

19. You heard this morning from Phil Thomas, about the work programme of the TFF. They will be reporting to the Government this autumn on a range of issues.

20. That work will be a vital contribution to the tenancies review when it happens.

21. Over this summer, we will map out how precisely to carry out the farm tenancies review, which I'll announce after the summer break.

22. However there's one thing I can make clear even today.
23. We were always committed to two separate reviews, and now the Land Reform Review Group has decided to focus on other issues for the remainder of their work.
24. So I want to confirm today that all the issues on farm tenancies raised during the Land Reform Review Group's work will not be lost. They will be carried forward and looked at very carefully in the farm tenancies review.

Importance of improving farm tenancy situation

25. And I'm determined for that review to make a real difference to land tenure in Scotland.
26. Our future success depends on how we handle these issues.
27. We must continually strive to ensure there is a flow of tenant farms available, and enough opportunities for new entrants to get into the industry.
28. We need opportunities for those reaching retirement to exit the industry - with dignity and with financial security.

29. And we need all landlords to follow the example of the best - working with each other and with their communities to deliver the best outcomes for all.

30. I look forward to engaging positively with all stakeholders on all these issues, as the tenancies review takes shape.

Individual situations

31. Of course that doesn't mean a government review can solve every individual problem.

32. We know that there are many cases where tenancies run perfectly smoothly – thanks to constructive, business-like relationships between the parties involved.

33. But we also know that in some cases the relationships can be very difficult – and that this can be very distressing for those concerned.

34. Even in cases like these, government can make a positive contribution - by putting in place arrangements for the difficult issues to be resolved as smoothly and as fairly as possible.

The TFF

35. You heard from TFF chairman Phil Thomas earlier today. I'd like to thank the TFF members for the work they're doing given the complexities and tensions often involved.

36. To take just one example – we all knew that rent reviews was a key area needing to be looked at.
37. That's why the Rent Review Working Group was set up.
38. I'm delighted that the TFF has acted so quickly on that Working Group's recommendations.
39. They have already produced a leaflet setting out a brief guide to good practice.
40. And by this November's rent reviews, hopefully they will have produced further, detailed guidance.
41. Guidance both for where negotiations are carried out by professionals, and for the cases where the parties choose to do it themselves.
42. This is real progress, which takes a huge amount of time and effort in building consensus on all sides.
43. We should congratulate the TFF for it.
44. But while patting the TFF on the back for their work so far, I'd call on them to come up with really constructive and far-sighted recommendations this autumn from the rest of their work programme.

45. This is crucial work, and we must all rise to the challenges.
46. Because the future depends on it – at both ends of the farming life cycle.

New entrants

47. As we all know, tenancies can provide new entrants with the first step on the farming ladder.
48. We need to make sure there are opportunities for all those who want to farm - not just those born into farming families.
49. I know a full tenancy is not the only option – other options like share farming or contract farming are good ways forward for some – and I am particularly keen to hear what comes out of today on these concepts.
50. But the formal tenancy route is a vital part of the landscape for new entrants, so we have to get it right.

Enough exit opportunities for those reaching retirement

51. And at the other end of the ladder, another key issue for a sustainable sector is how people move out at the end of their career.
52. This too is a difficult and sensitive area.

53. I know there are farmers out there, among the older generation, who want to step down from their current role.
54. But they want to continue living on the farm, and they want their family members to be able to take on the farmhouse.
55. We need to find ways of dealing with these issues, in a positive way that generates the right opportunities for those about to retire and young alike.
56. Government can help. For example, through the SRDP we've funded workshops to help individual farmers or families to address these issues, and work out the best way forward for their individual case.
57. But we need everyone to be thinking about this.
58. So I hope that as part of today's event, you will come up with ideas in this sensitive area. Ideas which can change the inevitable turnover of the generations into something constructive and positive for all concerned.

Enough landlords working together with each other and their community

59. And sometimes the best ideas come from simply looking at the examples of where things are being done well already.

60. My visit to East Neuk convinced me that the answer doesn't have to be rocket science.

61. In fact the East Neuk example shows that it's relatively simple to make things work positively – if all concerned have the right attitude, particularly landlords.

62. We need landlords:

- Who have a presence in their community.
- Who use local tradesmen.
- Who listen to the needs of their community.
- Who work in partnership with neighbouring landlords and farmers.
- Who are prepared to take calculated risks.
- And who encourage achievement in the local area.

63. I know this is a challenge! But we can achieve it by working together.

Conclusion

64. So I very much welcome NFUS' initiative in organising this event.
65. We have made progress in the last few years, which has put in place the foundations on which we can now build.
66. But important work lies ahead.
67. We must move forward and tackle the difficult issues.
68. Today's event is a chance to work on those issues, and come up with ideas that we can take forward together in the next stages.
69. Ideas for how we can exploit new opportunities, and create new systems and new relationships, for the benefit of all those who care about rural Scotland.
70. The stakes are high, and the issues are complex and tricky. But now is the right time to address them.
71. So I wish you the very best for the remainder of this event today, and look forward to working with you all in this vital area in the very near future.

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