

## Introduction

Thank you David (Johnstone) for your warm introduction and for inviting me to talk to your spring Conference on managing land in the public interest.

I'm delighted to be able to take part - this is an important topic, and a timely event.

Scotland's land is iconic and is recognised across the globe. It provides the backdrop to our livelihoods and communities, and contributes significantly to our economy and our sense of identity. And this land is a finite and precious resource.

Land owners are the custodians and guardians of the land. How land is governed – how it is owned, used and managed - influences the benefits that flow from land.

In the next twenty minutes I want to talk about the benefits we get from land, and then outline how reform of land governance will help secure these benefits.

## **Public goods and benefits from land**

Land is one of Scotland's greatest assets. It provides a wealth of goods in the form of food, biodiversity, clean water and beautiful landscapes.

These goods provide countless public benefits, including places for recreation, education and inspiration. They underpin many of Scotland's key economic sectors including tourism, food and drink, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and renewables.

## Natural Capital

Natural capital is the term used to describe the natural assets from which we derive these vital benefits.

But despite their importance to us all, natural capital is often taken for granted. As many natural assets and the goods that they provide don't have a monetary value, there is often no financial incentive for individuals to provide these public goods and services.

Nonetheless, it is clear that healthy natural resources are essential to a strong, sustainable Scotland. That is why enhancing our stock of natural capital is a key element of *Scotland's Economic Strategy*. A healthy natural environment, and increasing natural capital, is a keystone of a fair, equitable and stable economy.

The natural capital agenda is of vital importance to Scotland, and is why we are supporting the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital. With representation from all sectors - public, private and voluntary – it provides an opportunity for Scotland to lead the way in recognising the value of natural capital in decision-making and engaging with and supporting business.

Importantly, it will offer leadership for action in Scotland and beyond.

And there is an international context to this too - the inaugural World Forum on Natural Capital, organised by The Scottish Wildlife Trust, was held here in Edinburgh in 2013. Around 500 delegates from over 30 countries came together to discuss how to sustain and protect global natural capital.

The event was a huge success and I'm delighted that Scotland is hosting the second World Forum in Edinburgh in November. I would urge you to be part of this event. It will be a great opportunity to demonstrate Scotland's work in this innovative field to a global audience.

## **Delivering Public benefit**

On a practical level, we need to prioritise investment to ensure that Scotland protects and enhances its natural resources and captures the opportunities offered by the transition to a more resource efficient, lower carbon economy.

Our new Scottish Rural Development Programme will provide specific and targeted support to areas where it is needed to provide the biggest impact on our natural resources. But public money is limited and has to be used wisely so that it achieves enduring public benefits for all.

Land managers across Scotland understand the need to target resources and already deliver enormous public benefits from their land and are keen to do more. They recognise that managing land for multiple benefits is a more sustainable, long-term approach.

Delivering multiple benefits from land-use is at the core of Scotland's Land Use Strategy. It's the driving force behind this new approach with a long term focus on making better use of Scotland's land resource and ensuring that land continues to produce the key public goods and services that we all rely on.

The Strategy aims to help land managers deliver public goods and address multiple objectives, and has led to trials of a new approach. In the Scottish Borders and Aberdeenshire, two local authority-led pilot projects have developed regional land use frameworks to guide land use decisions in these areas.

These frameworks, which are mostly map based, cover issues such as flood prevention, recreation, food production and tree planting, and have been developed in consultation with local people. These ground-breaking projects provide valuable information about different ways to consider local land use in a collective and integrated way.

## **Helping It Happen**

Of course, there are many players operating in this arena.

I would like to congratulate Scottish Land & Estates on their campaign “Helping It Happen”, which is designed to highlight the contribution of landowners and rural businesses to Scotland.

Land owners, of different kinds and sizes, are instrumental in securing the goods, services and benefits from land that we all depend on. The choices they make and the activities they prioritise influence what land provides to the rest of society.

The “Helping it Happen” case studies beautifully illustrate how parties can work together for wider benefit. I know we are going to hear from others involved in similar projects later in today’s programme.

## **Collaboration**

I think there is recognition now within the land ownership community that there are considerable benefits from working with their local communities and there are some really productive partnerships springing up around Scotland.

Scottish Land and Estates' own programme to encourage and support land owners to collaborate and engage with communities for mutual benefit is an excellent example.

In order for land owners to take communities' needs into account, it will be important for communities to be clear on what their needs are. Communities are all different and have their own needs and priorities. Many communities are well on the way to defining their needs for their own sustainable development and working to secure the assets that will help address these needs.

But there is a key principle here – land owners have to recognise that they have a responsibility to the community that lives and works in and around their land. And there is a strong argument that the larger a land holding, the greater that responsibility.

It is important to raise expectations on land owners to work with communities. I would like to see us move to a position where collaboration between land owners and communities was seen as normal business.

## **Land reform**

### **Community land ownership**

And that brings me to an important issue I want to touch on today - community land ownership. It is a land ownership model that has been going from strength to strength.

I'm the first to concede that community ownership may not be appropriate for all land: it's not a panacea. But it does have a central role to play as we take forward our policy on land reform. Since coming into this Ministerial role, I've been privileged to meet many of those involved in community land ownership, and I have been struck by how energetic, positive, creative and passionate these communities are.

While some are still finding their feet, and learning as they go, many are proving very successful.

That is why as a Government we intend to bring much more land, from both public and private ownership, into community ownership, with a target of 1 million acres by 2020. With this will come challenges, but also huge benefits to communities across Scotland as people are given the opportunity to define their own destiny in ways they are only just beginning to imagine.

The key is to ensure that different ownership models work together, and work with communities, to bring their various strengths to bear in order to ensure that land in Scotland works for all of us.

## **Why Land reform?**

All of this sets the context for land reform, and let me now say a few words on why I believe it is crucial that we push ahead with reform of land governance.

The First Minister announced the Government's intention to bring forward a land reform bill this parliamentary session. That Bill will be introduced before summer recess – so in the next few weeks. Many of you will have responded to the consultation and I am grateful for your consideration of this important issue.

We published the results of the consultation analysis last week. These showed that there is strong public support for the principle of a land reform bill. And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank people right across Scotland who took the time to provide detailed comments on specific aspects of the proposals.

Prospective legislation seldom pleases everyone. And the land reform proposals are no different. I know that many land owners and those earning their livelihood directly from the land presently have concerns about certain elements of our proposals.

I hope that, as the discussion unfolds, we will be able to respond to these concerns by demonstrating the broader benefits that will flow from the proposed reforms – benefits that I believe ultimately will strike the right balance between the interests of all those for whom land ownership and management matters.

As a Government we cannot be blind to the broader picture, or ignore the interests of communities – in towns and villages as well as in the countryside – across Scotland. I want to be clear that our intention is to ensure that Scotland's land delivers the greatest benefit to all people of Scotland and that includes all those dependent on the land for their livelihoods.

It is our ambition to ensure that, over time, the full benefit of Scotland's land is recognised and the needs of people and communities are supported by those who own land in Scotland. The aim of land reform is to ensure that the situation of those who depend on the land is made better, not worse.

I want to leave aside the specifics of the Bill, and set out why I think land reform is so important, why I am committed to it, and how it links to other priorities in government.

Land reform isn't just about land ownership. In fact far from it. Land reform is about modernising the legal framework of rights and responsibilities around land – and how these impact on land governance – land use, access, development, and yes, ownership – to ensure that land delivers benefits across society.

Land reform is about much more than land ownership. Modernising the legal framework of rights and responsibilities around land reflects the values of this Government including promoting fairness and social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.

Land in Scotland must continue to contribute to our economy; but it must also play a role in addressing the big challenges our communities face – including tackling poverty, addressing housing shortages, securing employment, as well as climate change, energy and food security, and biodiversity loss.

The way we think about land reform needs to correspond to the values we hold - those of sustainability, social justice and equality - and reflect human rights and public interest.

Social justice is about fairness, and that includes ensuring that people can access the resources they need to provide their families with secure places to live, to engage in meaningful work and to contribute to society.

Land underpins all of these objectives – land is a key resource for employment in Scotland. It provides many jobs; and we believe could support many more. It provides the places people live – land for housing. And it's where people meet, recreate and develop their communities.

The distribution of household wealth in Scotland, and land assets as a significant part of that wealth, is of great concern for a country seeking to address inequality.

Figures published recently by the Scottish Government show that the wealthiest 10 per cent of households owned 44 per cent of all wealth in 2010/12. In contrast, the least wealthy half of households in Scotland owned 9 per cent of total wealth in 2010/12.

Is this right in a modern Scotland? Will it serve our communities into the future? Will it entrench the sense of shared interest and common purpose on which all successful and prosperous societies rest?

In my view, it doesn't reflect the kind of society to which we in Scotland collectively aspire.

So land reform is not an ideologically-driven attack on large land ownerships, as has been the tone of some recent remarks in the press. Instead I see the Scottish Government's approach to land reform as one mechanism among others for tackling the causes and consequences of inequality that blights our society and limits our potential as a country.

So my approach to land reform isn't about arbitrarily taking land away from land owners, or about growing the public sector.

It is about working towards the kind of society we want to be in the next 50 years – one that is fairer, more productive, healthier and more self-determined. One in which better opportunities are available to all our citizens rather than the few.

While I am on this theme, I want also to mention human rights. Those of you who have been privileged to hear Professor Alan Miller speak on the subject of land reform may have been struck by the tone and the balance he has consistently struck.

Discussion on the human rights dimensions of land reform are growing in intensity across the world. In those discussions the

legislative work we are doing in Scotland is seen as progressive, and making important steps forward in modernising our approach to how land is owned, governed and used.

While the European Convention on Human Rights is fundamental to our legal framework in Scotland, other international approaches, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights places a duty on Ministers to use the maximum available resources to ensure the progressive realisation of rights like the right to housing, food and employment.

This means that while an individual's rights to enjoyment of their property are enshrined in law, this right must be balanced by responsibilities to ensure that other members of society have access to the resources they need to meet their own needs.

## **The Bill**

Let me draw my remarks to a close by returning to the forthcoming Bill for a moment -

The Land Reform Bill, which we are bringing forward in this Parliamentary term, is the next step in a wider programme of land reform that has been on-going in legislative terms since our first Scottish Parliament and we expect will carry on well into the next term of government.

The package of proposals we will bring forward in the proposed legislation will seek to ensure land reform addresses particular issues around the balance of rights and responsibilities over land.

Land use and land ownership are intimately linked. This is because land owners make choices and decisions over how land is used, within the framework of policies, funding and the market.

Evidence gathered by the Land Reform Review Group suggests that decisions made in the public interest might be quite different to those made for private benefit.

That is hardly surprising, and the task of government – and the core of my approach to land reform – is to improve the balance between private and public interest in favour of the latter.

That is why we want to remove barriers to communities' sustainable development – allowing them greater influence over the delivery of outcomes associated with land.

We fully recognise the expertise and role of land owners in managing land. But we want to see greater collaboration between communities and land owners, with agreement over how priorities and benefits should be delivered from land. We want to see, over time, greater diversity of land ownership.

We believe that the proposals we intend to bring forward in the Bill will be good for the people and environment in Scotland by encouraging greater public interest and participation in land use, and helping communities overcome barriers to their sustainable development.

Fundamentally, we want to see better engagement between land owners and communities, alongside more diverse landownership. Landowners must contribute more to their local communities. Communities must ultimately have more influence over decisions about land that affect them, and a greater ability to promote their own sustainable development.

Ultimately I firmly believe the reforms we will propose in the Bill will be to the long-term benefit of all with a stake in the future of land ownership and land management in Scotland.

As the debate evolves following the publication of the Bill, I want to work constructively with all stakeholders – not least Scottish Land and Estates – to ensure we achieve the maximum possible consensus around our proposals.

## Conclusion

As we go further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century we will continue to face increasing challenges of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Alongside this will be continuing demands on our land for food, clean water and energy, along with the softer benefits of recreation and spiritual well-being.

The goods, services and benefits that flow from land, are not necessarily determined by land ownership; but they are influenced by the choices, decisions and priorities of those who own land.

We will need flexibility and creativity to address future challenges, and a willingness to try new models, to work in new ways and with new partners.

I would like to see greater collaboration between all land owners and communities, recognising each other's needs and priorities. I believe this will be the best way to ensure we deliver public benefits from land.

## **Closing remarks**

Unfortunately I can't stay for the whole conference, but I am happy to take a few questions before I leave.

I'd like to wish you the best for the rest of the event – it promises to be an excellent and thought-provoking day.