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to Land Reform Review Group

I have lived and worked most of my life in rural Scotland, bringing up three children to enjoy and respect the land and its wildlife. Two of my children now work as ecologists, with one working not only in Scotland but helping to create a National Park in the Ebo Forest of Cameroon. Their love of nature came from the Scottish landscape and our ability to walk freely throughout much of Perthshire.

Having worked for 25 years as a farm secretary/agricultural consultant, contracted to many farms and large estates across Scotland, I saw the early introduction of agricultural grants and EEC legislation and the impact this had on farming and ownership. Although there are individuals within the farming & estate owning community who make wise decisions based on their knowledge and understanding of the countryside, most respond to economic pressure when making decisions that affect the landscape and wildlife.

In my early years as a farm secretary, I met a farmer from Rosshire who believed that land should be nationalised. He said that if his sons wanted to continue in the family tradition of farming, it would be difficult for them as they didn't have the money to buy their own farms and finding suitable tenanted properties was almost impossible. This thought stayed with me when I came across farms being poorly run because they were inherited by children that had no interest or lacked ability.

I still hold with the belief that nationalising our land which is irreplaceable and finite is the best way to secure and protect it for and (from) future generations, although I accept the chance of it happening is almost nil.

There are advantages in the heritable system, where land which has been owned by generations of families and kept private, remains untouched and managed in a natural form...this can be the best kind of conservation. Some of these landowners understand that they are 'guardians' of the land and it is not owned entirely for their whims and benefit, but these are not in the majority.

There should definitely be some form of Land Tax which recognises the privilege of owning large swathes of a vital and finite resource. When rates

were abolished for poll tax, many of my clients had rates bills of thousands of pounds changed overnight to a few hundred pounds, yet none of them had had any difficulty paying their rates and the money saved was of no benefit to anyone but the individuals, this long-standing lack in the tax system has to be addressed.

Another possible tax could be a tax on sale, and one that would discourage sales to foreign companies and owners.

The recent sorry situation which developed on the sale of the Menie Estate to Donald Trump should be a salutary lesson that we cannot depend on owners, buyers or government officials to act in the best interest of the land or future generations. Even with hard-won and long-standing legislation within our planning and environmental laws, great damage and irreversible destruction was caused for the sake of spurious economic benefits.

Although I like the idea of communities having a greater say, unfortunately, this generally involves people with self-interest at heart rather than the interest of the land and our future generations, and often the people who are willing to become involved are acting not for other members of the community but for their own power and aggrandisement.

Community buy-outs are probably more successful, because when people have a vested financial interest, they are likely to think further ahead and about the effect any decisions will have on future generations. If the whole community is involved this is in effect a local form of nationalisation.

Whatever is decided, it should be remembered that the land-owning community have a huge lobbying advantage with the financial and historical networking skills to influence legislation to their own advantage. The ordinary person, like the single mother, bringing up her children to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the rural landscape, by being able to walk with them unhindered and unthreatened, has none of this, yet the effect of not being able to do so, could have many untold detrimental effects not just on the future of Scotland but beyond.

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