

Submission to the Land Reform Review Group

Robbie Pennington

20 January 2013

First of all, thank you for extending the deadline for submissions.

I make this submission as a person who has no stake whatsoever in my own country's land, beyond the facts that I pay rent to the landed class to keep a roof over my head and I also subsidise the current iniquitous system of land ownership through my taxes.

My suggestions are as follows:

1. No democracy can or should tolerate the concentration of the nation's primary resource, its Land, in the hands of so few as the case in Scotland.
2. Access to land, influence over its use and the ability to benefit from the Land are should be fundamental rights for all citizens of Scotland and enshrined in our constitution.
3. It should not be permitted that Scottish Land be traded and held in tax havens, indeed Scottish Land should only be "owned" within Scotland by people resident in Scotland or businesses registered within the EU.
4. Inheritance law should be reformed to include all children, so as to aid the break-up of large holding into smaller parcels. The Scottish Law Commission has published recommendations on this.
5. Land Value Tax should be introduced.
6. Introduce measures to allow cooperatives and individuals to build affordable housing in the countryside.
7. Introduce measures specifically to discourage and break up large land-holdings and "sporting estates".
8. Introduce measures to ensure that ownership of land is transparent and that details of ownership are accessible to the ordinary citizen e.g. via an online database.
9. Reform planning laws to allow, and indeed encourage, 'hutting'.
10. Taxpayer subsidy to landowners should be discontinued, except where communities decide to do so for the benefit of the inhabitants of that community.
11. Rather than landowners enriching themselves from renewable energy such as windfarms, any financial benefits should go directly to local communities and be placed under democratic control at local level (by "local" I do not mean our current system of local government, but something more along the lines of Scandinavian municipalities).
12. Land and democracy are inseparable, it is therefore necessary to reform local government to bring the use of land and resources under local control by introducing empowered, tax-gathering kommuns (of the Scandinavian model) with populations of 10 – 15000 max.
13. Introduce measures to support community ownership and management of forestry

14. Measures should be introduced to enable former common land to be restored to local communities.
15. The law of prescription, which legitimises land theft, should be scrapped.
16. Access rights are very weakly supported by the present Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 – there is no redress for the ordinary citizen where a local authority fails in its duty to uphold access rights.
17. I would urge that the Land Reform Review Group perceives Scottish Land & Estates and NFUS for what they are, well-funded, well-connected, self-interested, special interest groups representing a tiny and already vastly over-represented proportion of Scotland's people.
18. Finally, please remember that the Land is an issue all over Scotland, not just in Highland and Crofting communities. The Scottish Borders for example has a surfeit of large, economically suffocating land-holdings.

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