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Dear Ed,

Thank you for providing me with a copy of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's recent report, '*Review of Priorities for Crofting Law Reform*', published on 9 March 2017.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the Committee members and the wide number of contributors who gave up their time in the production of the report, and I welcome their willingness to engage so early in the legislative process.

The Scottish Government is committed to examining the modernisation of crofting law within this Parliamentary session in order to make it suitable for the aims and needs of crofting in the 21st century. The process of creating new legislation should always be an open one and I know from my personal experience in Government that the best solutions are always arrived at collaboratively, after a great deal of thought and discussion. It is this spirit that I wish to take in to the future of crofting law, and all the recommendations in the Committee's report will be keenly considered as we take this work forward.

The Committee may be interested to know that my officials in the Crofting Bill Team are currently carrying out a series of early stakeholder meetings across the Highlands and Islands to discuss issues that are important to crofting in those localities. Many of the points that the Committee's report raises have also been raised by people at these meetings, though so have many other views and opinions that offer different suggestions as to the approach that should be taken when developing new crofting legislation.

The Scottish Government currently has no firm opinion on what form the legislation will take. As such, and because the Bill work is at such an early stage of development, I hope you will understand that I will not seek to comment on each of the report's individual recommendations at this stage in order to avoid impacting on this early engagement work. However, please be assured that the Committee's report will form a key component of the development of crofting legislation and will be instrumental in shaping future law as this work progresses. In fact, I expect that the report's findings will be addressed as part of the Bill's natural development process.



I support the view that legislation is not required to resolve all of the priority issues in crofting. Accordingly, my officials are already undertaking work with the Crofting Commission to explore options for progressing the mapping of common grazings. Work is also underway to collate the views of stakeholders on where best 'Crofting Development' should sit in the future.

Whilst recognising the need for further debate on the role of elected crofting Commissioners, my officials, following discussions with the Public Bodies Unit, have prepared a detailed 'Roles and Responsibilities' and 'Standards and Conduct' document for elected Commissioners akin to the terms and conditions of those Commissioners that are appointed.

These actions, together with future planned work, will be considered in detail as the work on the National Development Plan for Crofting progresses (in liaison with key stakeholders).

Again, please pass on my thanks to your membership and other report contributors. I hope to be able to continue to work with the Committee as the review of crofting law develops over the remainder of this Parliament. I also look forward to the upcoming Parliamentary debate on the Committee's report to hear more of members' views, which will likewise be considered carefully as part of the Bill development process.

Yours sincerely



FERGUS EWING