

Our Ref: PP/NM/C20

August 2008

Dear

Shucksmith Report

Last month, as you will be aware, I wrote to Grazings Clerks across the Highlands and Islands regarding the Shucksmith Report. We are very grateful to those Grazings Clerks and crofters who returned the questionnaire and gave views on the report. The returns we have received are helping us gauge the reaction of crofters, right across the Highlands and Islands. We continue to listen to crofters' views as the issues develop so that we can react in the most effective way to the government's response to the Shucksmith Report, when it is published, probably in late September. We are still receiving occasional questionnaire returns from across the Highlands and Islands but we thought you would be interested in the results of the survey to date.

A questionnaire was sent to every Grazings Clerk on the data base provided by the Crofters Commission and we have now received well over a hundred responses (121). Many of the responses follow consultation or meetings with the Grazings Committee itself, and therefore represent a wider set of views than 121 individuals. A very clear pattern has been emerging from the wide range of comments that have been made.

As well as helping us make an informed response to the government when they give their response to the report and set out what they want to do, the findings allow us, now, to make sure the government is aware of the emerging views from this survey, before they decide their response. We have written to Mike Russell, the Minister with responsibility for crofting, informing him of the results of our questionnaire and making certain points to him. We enclose a copy of that letter for your information.

Peter Peacock
Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands & Islands
Please reply to:

□Parliamentary Office
The Scottish Parliament, Room M1.04
Holyrood, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
Tel. (0131) 348 5766
Fax. (0131) 348 5767

Regional Office□
PO Box 5717
Inverness, IV1 1YT
Tel. (01463) 716299
Fax. (01463) 716572

e-mail: Peter.Peacock.msp@scottish.parliament.uk
www.peterpeacock.org.uk

One matter which has become apparent from comments we have received on the returns we have had, and in some accompanying letters, is that many believe that the Shucksmith package has to be accepted as a whole, or not at all.

We want to make it clear that we do not feel under any obligation in Parliament to accept that. A good number of respondents have indicated that while they find the particular recommendations about the governance arrangements and the issue of 'real burdens' in particular unacceptable to them and to their community, there are other aspects of the Shucksmith report they feel have potential. We share the view that there are obvious matters which are of little controversy and which Shucksmith recommends that would bring improvements for crofting. Among these is the reform of agriculture payments and housing grants and the development of the rural development programme to be more crofter friendly. Also there seems no contention about the recommendation on the register of crofts, or on the registration of leases, for example.

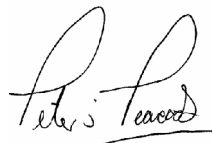
We will be working to have the voice of crofters heard in this whole debate, within Parliament and more widely and we will seek to ensure that the recommendations in Shucksmith that seem to us workable and appropriate should be accepted and where particular recommendations that Shucksmith has made appear unworkable, but are designed to meet real challenges, that better alternatives are developed.

Thank you again for returning the questionnaire and should you have any further thoughts on the Shucksmith Report, feel free to get in touch at any time. We will try to keep you updated on how this issue progresses.

A copy of the original questionnaire and the full results have been posted on our website at www.handimsp.org.uk

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely



PETER PEACOCK MSP

On behalf of RHODA GRANT MSP and DAVID STEWART MSP

Peter Peacock
Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands & Islands
Please reply to:

□Parliamentary Office
The Scottish Parliament, Room M1.04
Holyrood, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
Tel. (0131) 348 5766
Fax. (0131) 348 5767

Regional Office□
PO Box 5717
Inverness, IV1 1YT
Tel. (01463) 716299
Fax. (01463) 716572

e-mail: Peter.Peacock.msp@scottish.parliament.uk
www.peterpeacock.org.uk